

Rosa Luxemburg

VOLUME II



Rosa Luxemburg, about 1907

Rosa Luxemburg

by

J. P. NETTL

In Two Volumes

VOLUME II

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CONTENTS OF VOLUME II

XI	IN OPPOSITION, 1911-1914	451
	APPENDIX TO CHAPTER XI: ROSA LUXEMBURG'S ADDRESS TO HER JUDGES	488
XII	RETURN TO THE OFFENSIVE—THE TRANSITION TO A NEW THEORY	493
XIII	POLES AND RUSSIANS, 1907-1914	548
XIV	THE WAR	601
XV	PRISON IN GERMANY, REVOLUTION IN RUSSIA	653
XVI	1918—THE GERMAN REVOLUTION BEGINS	706
XVII	IRRESISTIBLE FORCE AND IMMOVABLE OBJECT	737
XVIII	LUXEMBURGISM—WEAPON AND MYTH	787
	APPENDIX 1: ROSA LUXEMBURG AS AN ECONOMIST	828
	APPENDIX 2: THE NATIONAL QUESTION	842
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	863
	INDEX	935

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ILLUSTRATIONS

VOLUME II

	Rosa Luxemburg, about 1907	<i>frontispiece</i>
13	The Staff of the SPD Party School, 1910	<i>facing page 538</i>
14	A Prison Letter from Rosa Luxemburg written in invisible ink	539
15	Rosa Luxemburg's Self-Portrait, about 1911	554
16	Facsimile of first page of a letter from Rosa Luxemburg to Alfred Henke, 1912.	555
17	SDKPiL Leaders: Józef Unszlicht, Jakub Hanecki (Firstenberg), Zdzisław Leder (Władysław Feinstein), Adolf Warszawski (Warski)	650
18	Rosa Luxemburg's Cell at Wronke	651
19	Military Service in the First World War: Wilhelm Pieck and Hans Diefenbach	666
20	SDKPiL Leaders: Julian Marchlewski (Karski) and Feliks Dzierżyński	667
21	Rosa Luxemburg's murderers drink to her death, January 1919	762

(*Note.* This photograph appeared in *Rote Fahne* in the course of its campaign to bring the murderers to justice. The following extract from the court proceedings appeared as a caption: "Trooper Krause replies to the question of the presiding judge and confirms that the day following the incident, a photographer took a picture of the company in the Eden Hotel, seated round a table. A waitress was also present, and a bottle of wine stood on the table. Presiding judge: "The whole thing appears to make the impression of a feast." Witness Krause: "Not at all." Accused Runge laughs. Presiding judge: "Accused Runge, you must behave properly. This is no laughing matter."')

22	Karl and Sonia Liebknecht	763
23	Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht	778
24	Rosa Luxemburg's Corpse, March 1919	779

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Social History, Amsterdam; Zakład Historii Partii, KC
PZPR, Warsaw; SPD Archives, Bonn.

XI

IN OPPOSITION, 1911-1914

IN between the resounding phrases at the Jena congress about the forthcoming victory of Social Democracy, there were tucked away the executive's tactical proposals for the *Reichstag* elections. They were put forward mutedly, with some hesitation, seeing that they called for electoral co-operation with other parties. Even Bebel had expressed his doubts whether the party would accept them, particularly as it would mean putting a temporary damper on the class aspect of agitation, which was always popular locally.¹ But the congress had been so absorbed by the spectacle of the party executive getting into trouble over Morocco that the election proposals had passed by virtually without challenge. Bebel's worries had proved unjustified—another incidental bonus for the executive.

Internal debate in the party was always put aside for the duration of the campaign. Radicals and revisionists alike swarmed forth to agitate and canvass. Fears expressed by Rosa's friends, that the acrimony of recent disputes might affect her willingness to speak, were scornfully dismissed.² Her field of battle was to be Saxony and in the second half of December she made her progress through the kingdom, with only a brief interruption for the Christmas holidays. 'Since 1/12 to the 12/1 every single evening has been booked firm for six months.'³ Though the atmosphere at the actual meetings was again 'grandiose', this time the whole paraphernalia of the election left her cold. She could not even bring herself to register any pleasure at the party's victory, though it was substantial. The Socialist vote increased from 3,250,000 to 4,250,000 as compared with 1907, and their deputies from 43 to 110. This made the SPD by far the largest political party in Germany. It received more than twice as many votes as the Catholic Centre, its nearest rival, who obtained 91 seats. Everyone

¹ Philipp Scheidemann, *Memoiren eines Sozialdemokraten*, Dresden 1928, Vol. I, p. 109.

² *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 28, to Konrad Haenisch, dated December 1911.

³ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 28.

was jubilant—revisionists, executive, Kautsky and his friends. The prognostications of *The Road to Power* and the policy of peaceful attrition were triumphantly justified. Or so it seemed at the end of January 1912.

But the elections produced a curious aftermath. In accordance with the decision taken at the congress the year before, the SPD had in fact formed an electoral alliance with the Progressive party for the run-off elections.¹ As usual in a system of single-member constituencies, the first poll had penalized the smaller parties. The National Liberals won only four seats, while the Progressives, who had received a total of 1,500,000 votes, held none at all. The executive saw an excellent chance of strengthening still further the anti-reactionary coalition. The alliance between SPD and Progressives in the second and last poll would ensure a strong anti-blue-black (Conservative-Catholic) alliance by getting the most promising candidate elected, whether Liberal, Progressive, or Socialist.²

In the event, however, the Progressive voters did not obey the guidance of their leadership. While the Social Democrats and their disciplined organization delivered to the Progressives all the constituencies they had undertaken to deliver, they received very little help from their allies. 'The Progressives in fact owed their continuation as a political party to the electoral policy of Social Democracy and to the discipline of its voters.'³ The recriminations in the SPD naturally began at once, with Rosa Luxemburg among the earliest and most outspoken critics.

Already the year before she had warned against the illusion that the two middle-class parties would prove genuine allies against the Right. 'Both of these parties hit out against the Left, and fall over towards the Right, and the few party leaders who retain a little of their Liberal conscience make hopeless attempts . . . to pull back the chariot of Liberalism from the bog of reaction.'⁴ Now at the end of February 1912 she examined the policy and its

¹ According to the German electoral system, a second poll was taken in those *Reichstag* constituencies where the first poll did not produce a clear majority for the candidate of any one party. Imperial Germany had single-member constituencies, i.e. similar to the English system rather than to any system of party lists.

² *Protokoll . . . 1912*, pp. 27–28; see also Paul Hirsch and Bruno Borchardt, *Die Sozialdemokratie und die Wahlen zum deutschen Reichstag*, Berlin 1912, pp. 24–25.

³ Schorske, *German Social Democracy*, p. 231.

⁴ *LV*, 16 June 1911.

results in detail. Before going on to the question of principle, she compared the expectations with the actual achievements, and so blatant was the failure that she, who had always affected to despise 'practical' politics, was able to write sharply: 'A practical arrangement demands in the first instance to be judged on its practical results.'¹ It did not require a sophisticated electoral analysis to show that the Socialists had given what they promised and had received in return less than a quarter of what they were entitled to expect. 'It is hard to read the details of the arrangement without blushing from shame and rage at the Progressive attitude.'² Her conclusion was pithy:

The Liberals had no [formal] arrangement with [right-wing] reaction on this occasion and [yet these two] supported each other faithfully. The Progressives did have an arrangement with us, and betrayed us almost exactly as in 1907. What follows?

A very simple conclusion. The old lesson of Marxist historical materialism, to the effect that *real class interests are stronger* than any 'arrangements'.³

It was far better, she declared, to act *on* Progressives, and possibly even Liberals, than to act *with* them, to fight them rather than to appease them, to defend one's own class interests solely and exclusively instead of compromising them for non-existent benefits. 'A little less effort in parliamentary scene-shifting, less naïve belief in any "new era" on all and every occasion that the policy seems to drift to left or right; instead more quiet steadfastness and a long view in our policy, more calculation of distance for the great and decisive factors of class struggle—this is what we need in the great times in which we live.'⁴

It was an easy victory for Rosa and her allies, for the results were too obvious to be denied. When Kautsky in *Vorwärts* attempted an official justification of the arrangement, he merely provided Rosa Luxemburg with a further opportunity to cut it trenchantly to ribbons.⁵ To this vengeful Diana, Kautsky was now permanently in open season.

Since the year before he had identified himself completely with the executive's policy—at least in public. Now, with the latter's full support, he turned attention away from the mess of the run-

¹ 'Unsere Stichwahltaktik', *LV*, 29 February 1912.

² *LV*, 1 March 1912.

³ *LV*, 2 March 1912.

⁴ *LV*, 4 March 1912.

⁵ *Vorwärts*, 5, 6, and 7 March 1912; Rosa Luxemburg's articles, 'Eine Verteidigung oder eine Anklage?' in *LV*, 15-16 March.

off elections to the exploitation of the party's new position of power in the *Reichstag* itself. At least the new legislature still contained all the elements for a successful coalition against the Right. Kautsky could never resist elaborating any tactical suggestion into a formulation of general validity; he now began to speak of a new liberalism and even a new middle class; what counted in the *Reichstag* was the leadership of the Progressives which had at least shown goodwill even though its voters had proved reluctant.¹ The right wing of the party, unaccustomed to basking in the sunshine of agreement with Kautsky, mocked the crazy abstentionism of the radicals—they had long memories and were pleased to pay Rosa Luxemburg out for some of the things she had said during the revisionist debate.²

Rosa Luxemburg parodied all these optimistic prognoses: 'We Social Democrats . . . like Apollo, steer the chariot of German policy towards the rosy dawn, while our snorting steeds, Wiemer and Kopsch [Progressive leaders] draw the chariots and Basser-mann and Schönaich-Carolath [National Liberal leaders] weave around it like the fairest muses.'³ And in due course the political alliances in the *Reichstag* proved as ephemeral as the electoral one. An attempt to give institutional significance to the SPD's primacy in the legislature by making Scheidemann vice-president of the *Reichstag* was undone after a few weeks by National Liberal defection. The party executive certainly did its best to appease its potential partners. On military questions, so dear to the National Liberals, the SPD introduced resolutions designed to improve pre-military training in the schools, and incidentally to procure for the SPD's co-operatives a chance to compete in the tenders for army supplies.⁴

In her running battle against the combinations in the new *Reichstag*, Rosa Luxemburg received the unexpected support of Franz Mehring, who had originally approved of the electoral alliance, but now turned strongly against it.⁵ As we shall see, this unexpected alliance between Rosa Luxemburg and Franz Mehring was to provide the kernel of the new Left, leading first to the

¹ *Vorwärts*, 25 February 1912.

² Max Schippel, 'Die neuesten Vorstösse unserer Impossibilisten', *SM*, XVI, No. 1, p. 283. Rosa's contemptuous epithet for Schippel—the Possibilist—was thus returned fourteen years later with the equally contemptuous name of Impossibilist. (See above, p. 216, note 2.)

³ *LV*, 15 March 1912.

⁴ *Protokoll . . . 1912*, pp. 141–2.

⁵ *NZ*, 1912/1913, Vol. I, p. 628.

foundation of the *Sozialdemokratische Korrespondenz* and later providing a base around which *Spartakus* was able to rally.

The internal history of the party from 1911 to 1914 is confused and contradictory—and not nearly as schematic as recent historians have attempted to show. For one thing, membership of different groups within the party was far more variable and erratic than might be supposed. The realignment after the earthquake of 1914 undoubtedly had its roots in pre-war events, but the shock of the war was so great that for many people it brought about a complete change of attitude. The deep division which the war did bring to the surface, and at the same time helped to obscure for a while, was not the threefold one between revisionists, centre, and left, but the deeper antithesis between theoretical and practical revolutionaries.¹

Two events require emphasis. In the spring of 1911 Paul Singer, co-chairman of the party and fairly consistent friend and supporter of the left wing, suddenly died. The election of a replacement caused a lengthy discussion about the composition and policy of the executive. The following year, with the added impetus of the Morocco affair, an attempt was made to reorganize the executive. Those who had opposed it in 1911 now hoped to make that body more radical, more sympathetic to its own policy. But the cohesion of the Left proved ephemeral, and this time the attackers were quietly routed. The executive was not enlarged, as they had proposed; the number of paid officials remained as it was—an increase in full-time bureaucrats was still seen as a radical measure at that time; on the other hand the party Control Commission, on which there was a sympathetic majority (Clara Zetkin was one of its moving spirits), had its functions reduced as a punishment for failing to support the executive over the Morocco question. The only bright spot was that the new co-chairman was another left-winger, Hugo Haase, but as he continued his law practice he was never able to devote the same amount of time to the work of the executive as full-time officials like Ebert and Scheidemann.

All the same, everyone was well satisfied with Haase's election.

¹ For a carefully documented discussion of internal party affairs in these years, see Schorske, pp. 197-285. I must emphasize again that this treatment is too schematic and suggests group cohesions within the party which the evidence of private letters and documents generally contradicts—as opposed to the public writings and speeches on which the author excessively relies.

For Kautsky, soaring in his balloon of optimism, one of the last obstacles to whole-hearted collaboration with the executive was now removed. He was an honest man whose support of the executive against Rosa had not been due to unqualified admiration for that body.

In the last years it [the executive] had become the laughing stock of the whole world. But it is not, however, everyone's province to delight in its decrepitude in public like Rosa. Few people will not be encouraged by your election. . . . The only proper remedy is not to drive it into something of which it is not capable, but to get people on to it who can make a competent body out of an incompetent one.¹

Rosa Luxemburg did not participate in the debates on party reorganization—not a subject of fascination for her nor one which she really understood. Personalities touched her more closely; throughout the wrangles in the Control Commission Clara Zetkin stayed at Rosa Luxemburg's flat and they discussed things far into every night. The older woman took her defeat very much to heart and had time and again to be hauled out of her despair; Rosa's judgement wavered between political and private considerations when Clara began to talk of resigning her seat. But Rosa shared the general optimism about Haase's success. On 17 June 1911 she wrote to Dittmann on this subject, pointing out the great need of secrecy, vis-à-vis right-wing personalities like Wels; to the Left Haase's election began to seem like the outcome of their own plot.²

While Kautsky thus became reconciled to the executive after 1912, Rosa Luxemburg was pushed into total disillusion by the elections. In her private correspondence she described the resultant activities and attitudes as 'scandalous', 'hopeless', 'incredible'; she wrote the whole thing off as an event of no consequence. Even during the *Reichstag* campaign she could not resist an occasional opportunity of scoring at the expense of the executive at election meetings. The executive naturally took its revenge. From 1912 onwards the radicals were increasingly cut off from effective participation in the life of the party, and confined to protests; the executive kept the machine and the power. In this method of

¹ Karl Kautsky to Hugo Haase, IISH, no date, C 436.

² Some illuminating correspondence relating to the manoeuvres on behalf of Haase, of which the latter was quite unaware, is in the Dittmann papers at the SPD Archives in Bonn.

neutralizing opponents, the SPD reflected the policy and moods of society, its unwilling host; in the last two years before the war organized Social Democracy became almost the image of imperial Germany.¹ The moods of the country permeated the party. A wave of *Reichsverdrossenheit* (imperial disillusion), which the Chancellor of the time recalled in later years, was matched by *Parteiverdrossenheit*.²

The other development in the party which must be emphasized was the increasing importance and self-assertion of the SPD parliamentary group. This was a development most historians have missed altogether. Yet the crystallization of the parliamentary group of deputies as a factor in the party was natural enough. SPD *Reichstag* representation more than doubled in 1912. The new legislators, instead of being a small and lonely outpost of Social Democracy in the alien stronghold of society, had now become the largest group within it. Without realizing it they were corroded by institutional loyalty, by the atmosphere and tradition which all such bodies foster, particularly when entrance to the 'club' can only be achieved by the efforts and risks of public election. *Homme élu, homme foutu*. All important members of the executive had traditionally become *Reichstag* members, though there was nothing in the party statutes to that effect. It is interesting to speculate what would have happened if members of the executive had been automatically disbarred from sitting in the *Reichstag* or if, as in the RSDRP, the illegal nature of the party had forced the leaders to reside abroad. The dangers have not been lost on western Communist parties even today, who still make elaborate arrangements to subordinate their parliamentary delegates to the outside party leadership.

In any case the concentration of the party's political effort into elections made for inevitable improvement in the status of the successful candidates. To be a deputy became important—in other people's eyes and in his own. Rosa Luxemburg herself saw evidence of this in her immediate circle. About Würmchen (Emmanuel Wurm, deputy editor of *Neue Zeit*) she wrote: 'It is laughable how being [a member of the *Reichstag*] suddenly goes to all those good

¹ For a comparative analysis of this similarity, see Gerhard Ritter, *Die Arbeiterbewegung in Wilhelminischen Reich*, Berlin 1959, pp. 52 ff.

² Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, *Betrachtungen zum Weltkrieg*, Berlin 1919, Vol. I, p. 95.

people's heads.¹ The left-wing contempt for self-sufficient parliamentary activity could only be heightened after 1912. No one was yet aware that power was shifting from the executive to the parliamentary faction (or better, that the executive was making its power felt through the parliamentary faction and not through normal party channels)—this only hit the eye after 1914 when the parliamentary delegation openly took over the party. But the universal pride in the party's greatly increased representation was matched by the increasing scorn of the radicals for the whole parliamentary mystique. Once the last hopes of a progressive coalition had collapsed, Rosa Luxemburg openly derided the value of the electoral victory; even if every *Reichstag* seat were occupied by a Socialist it would still make not the slightest difference in practice.²

At the same time she began to cast about for a completely new tactic. Criticism of official mistakes alone was no longer good enough. Since 1906 reliance on a return to the correct tactic—'the good old days'—had smelt stale and artificial. Even the emphasis on a forward-looking tactic based on the masses, which was the essence of the mass-strike doctrine, no longer seemed sufficient; the mass strike was still an isolated phenomenon, which could only become meaningful during a revolutionary period. By 1912 Rosa Luxemburg recognized that a much more radical alteration of Socialist thinking in Germany was necessary. "The eternal posturing against opportunism which only relies on phrases about our "old and tried tactics" is out-of-date . . . quite the contrary; we have to make a mighty push forward . . . I am giving considerable thought to this whole problem and the formulation of a completely new tactic."³

With all official ears now firmly stopped, the development of any new tactic was necessarily confined to personal discussions and elaboration in the press—but circumspectly. There was no

¹ Some interesting points are made by Eberhard Pikart, 'Die Rolle der Parteien im Deutschen Konstitutionellen System vor 1914', in *Zeitschrift für Politik*, Vol. IX (1962), No. 1 (March), pp. 12-32. Among other things Pikart shows that the role of parties was more important in the constitutional life of imperial Germany than is often supposed and that there was a real feeling among deputies that they were close to the centre of power. Obviously this must have exercised a particularly strong pull on members of the SPD.

² 'Eine Verteidigung oder eine Anklage?', *LV*, 16 March 1912.

³ For the implications of this new tactic, with particular reference to imperialism, see below, Chapter XII.

question of organizing any opposition. A tentative attempt in this direction was made by Ledebour and some of those who had rallied against the executive in 1911. The party majority contemptuously labelled it the *Sonderbund* and unleashed a hailstorm of disapproval on the 'splitters'.¹ But the reaction of the executive was exaggerated; there was hardly any support in the SPD for an *organized* opposition. But there was evidence of a more subtle and unofficial co-operation between like-minded individuals and local organizations. Instead of duplicating resolutions to party congresses, which diffused the tactical impact, left-wing local organizations often collaborated—either submitting identical resolutions to create an impression of uniformity, or merging their separate resolutions in a joint one. These were necessary measures of self-defence. Like other extreme radicals, Rosa Luxemburg found it harder to obtain mandates for the party congress. Of the last five congresses before the war she attended only three; both in 1909 and in 1912 she failed to obtain a mandate and at Magdeburg in 1910 her mandate was actually challenged. This made it all the more necessary to nurse the districts which supported her and particularly the local leaders. In July 1911 she wrote to Dittmann: 'Even though I already have one from Hagen, I am reluctant to renounce the Remscheid mandate. I don't want to lose touch with that constituency and anyhow dislike the idea of appearing at every party congress with a different mandate.'² Though she moved heaven and many people, she failed to be elected to the Chemnitz congress of 1912, and in 1913 had to solicit a mandate from a suburb of Frankfurt, Bockenheim, on the grounds that her speech in that constituency, with its national repercussions, gave her a claim to the local mandate.³

Radical self-help was especially effective in the personal field. Rosa Luxemburg used her friendship with Clara Zetkin and Luise Kautsky to promote suitable friends and ex-students from the party school. She put herself out to get for Wilhelm Pieck, who

¹ *Sonderbund* was the name used in 1847 by a group of Swiss cantons, who set themselves up in opposition to the Federal Union. The SPD had a curious devotion to history, particularly when it came to terminology and epithets.

² Rosa Luxemburg to Wilhelm Dittmann, 28 July 1911, Dittmann papers, SPD Archives, Bonn. Remscheid was the capital of Dittmann's parish in the Ruhr. The Hagen mandate was probably the result of some speeches she made there in the autumn of 1910 on the mass-strike question.

³ See below, pp. 481 ff. For her efforts to get a mandate in 1912, see Dittmann papers, SPD Archives.

wanted to leave his post as party secretary in Bremen, the job of assistant business manager of the party's cultural committee.¹ She recommended Thalheimer first to Haenisch at Dortmund and then to Lensch at Leipzig.² She tried hard to get Konstantin Zetkin a post at the party school in Berlin or some job in which his radical right-mindedness and ability—seen through eyes of affection—could be of use to the party; more use than as factotum on his mother's *Gleichheit*. It was this same self-help organization which caused the temporary and disastrous move of Radek first from Berlin to Bremen and then to Göppingen in Württemberg, to help out on the local *Freie Volkszeitung* while the regular editor was on holiday.

The importance of these activities must not be exaggerated. Not even later Communist historians, looking hard for traces of an emerging left-wing organization before the war, were able to make any case for the existence of an organized radical group. By temperament as much as by necessity, Rosa Luxemburg acted as an individual and on her own behalf. Previous disappointments with political friends made her very chary of entering into alliances. During 1911 she formed a working partnership with Lensch, the editor of *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, who seems to have admired her greatly and who visited her to discuss party affairs whenever he came to Berlin. He placed Rosa under contract to write regular articles, a commission which she accepted only after some hesitation—and largely for the sake of the fee. During 1911 and 1912, therefore, the bulk of her political comments appeared in the Leipzig paper, with the exception of two articles which her friend Clara Zetkin got for *Gleichheit*. But even this collaboration with Lensch was sometimes stormy. And when he went on holiday in 1912 his deputy Hans Block, to whom Rosa Luxemburg referred as 'that animal' (*das Vieh*), proved far less co-operative.³ She threatened to give up her work for *Leipziger Volkszeitung* altogether but withdrew her resignation when Lensch returned and apologized profusely. But he continued to try and cut out the most polemical passages from her articles, and was roundly abused for his caution. As she herself put it: 'Lensch is a good chap . . . but

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 166, 9 January 1913.

² *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 25, to Konrad Haenisch, 24 March 1910.

³ Block had taken her place at *Vorwärts* in December 1905 when she went to Warsaw and at the time she thought highly of his 'fresh and revolutionary outlook' (see above, pp. 312-13).

can still do with a dose of political education, which I am attempting to instil into him.¹ This collaboration with *Leipziger Volkszeitung* continued until Block finally took over from Lensch altogether in 1913 and the board of editors soon became locked in irreconcilable conflict with Rosa Luxemburg.

As ever, Rosa's most intimate political colleague was Clara Zetkin. Theirs was a relationship in which political alliance and personal affection were inseparably compounded. Rosa had clearly emerged as the stronger personality of the two. Although her friend was much older she felt a strong sense of responsibility towards her. Clara Zetkin's health was worse than Rosa's. She was easily prostrated by political or personal worries, and it required patient insistence to get her to rest and not to take everything too much to heart. At the same time Rosa was not blind to Clara Zetkin's intellectual weaknesses; there was an emotional, often maudlin, quality in her political judgement which offended Rosa and often spoilt *Gleichheit* for her. She confessed to young Zetkin that she wrote her contributions with very qualified enthusiasm.

To many of her political supporters Rosa's uncommunicativeness and passion for privacy were largely incomprehensible. In September 1911 Konrad Haenisch complained that 'no one has seen anything of Rosa; though she sent a very kind sympathetic letter to Mehring, with whom she had broken completely . . . which confirms again . . . that she is in the last resort not at all a bad person in spite of everything.'² But only a few days later he too threw up the sponge. 'Rosa has become utterly irresponsible', he wrote sadly to his correspondent.³

Konrad Haenisch was not perhaps a very good judge of people or situations. He was much agitated and distressed by an incident which in many ways was typical of Rosa Luxemburg. He tried to publish a defence of her at the Jena congress, pleading that any present misdeeds must be excused in view of all the loyal and

¹ This 'good chap', like Haenisch, turned out to be one of those radicals whom the war converted into convinced nationalists. He later became a member of the coterie round Parvus, and edited his paper, *Die Glocke*. Again like Haenisch, he remained an admirer of revolutionary personalities long after he ceased to support revolutionary policies—and Parvus filled just the right dashing, unconventional role.

² 'Aus den Briefen Konrad Haenischs', in Carl Grünberg, *Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und der Arbeiterbewegung*, Vol. XIV (1929), p. 470.

³ Loc. cit., 18 September 1911.

devoted service she had always given to the party.¹ Moreover he had hinted—fatally—that she was entitled to special consideration as a woman. At once the full load of Rosa's fury was discharged on his head. First she sent a telegram to Henke, the editor of the Bremen paper: 'Suppress cretinous [*lämmelhaft*] article Haenisch.' When the red-headed knight errant wrote to inquire hesitantly what had caused this outburst he got the following reply:

Of course I was livid with you, because you simply would get it into your head to *defend* me, though in fact with your absurd strategy you succeeded in attacking me from behind. You wanted to defend my *morality* but instead conceded my *political* position. One could not have acted more wrongly. My morality needs no defence. You will have noticed that since 1898 . . . I have been continually and vulgarly abused especially in the south, and have *never* answered with so much as a line or a word. Silent contempt is all I have for this sort of thing. [Why?] Because—apart from personal pride—of the simple political belief that these personal denigrations are merely a manœuvre to avoid the political issue. It was clear before Jena that the party executive, who were in a mess, had no choice but to carry the dispute over into the area of personal morality. It was equally clear that all those who thought the matter important should have countered this manœuvre by not letting themselves be dragged into the area of personality. You however did just this, in so far as you concentrated on my person and gave away my position in substance . . . you may not even be aware of the impression that your article has made: a noble fearful plea for extenuating circumstances for someone condemned to death—enough to make anyone burst when one is in as important and favourable a tactical position as I was in Jena. . . . So much for the matter in hand. My 'anger' has long been forgotten and I really have other worries than to carry around all this rubbish in my head. So let that be the end of it!²

¹ *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, 7 September 1911.

² *Briefe an Freunde*, December 1911. In spite of these explanations, Konrad Haenisch was quite unable to grasp her point of view. He was a highly romantic and sentimental person, much of whose radicalism was personal reaction against neglect and contempt—not least from his own well-to-do family, who had once tried to have him certified. Haenisch was a natural hero-worshipper, who transferred his affections at various times to Mehring, to Rosa Luxemburg—she probably sensed this and it sharpened her revulsion—and finally after 1915 to Parvus. His comment was that of a spurned suitor: 'I have fallen out with all the radicals here on her account (especially with the people on *Vorwärts*), I have had the bitterest arguments with Mehring, I am on bad terms with Kautsky and Eckstein, all because I always stuck up for her—and now I get a kick in the pants from her as well.' (Grünberg, op. cit., p. 481.)

Henke, too, got a taste of Rosa's touchiness. At the end of 1912 he asked her to start writing for the *Bremer Bürgerzeitung* again after a two-year silence, only to discover that she would have nothing to do with him because he had stuck up for Radek.¹ Rosa was carrying out with a vengeance her determination never again to compromise with anyone.

But this intransigence had its compensations. Her attack on the party's policy in the run-off elections of 1912 brought her one entirely unexpected ally—Franz Mehring. That relationship had been going through a period of jealousy and indifference for the last five years, and had not been improved by Mehring's support of Kautsky in 1910. When the cantankerous old man fell dangerously ill in 1911 Rosa wrote him two warm letters which he admitted had given him much pleasure; he began talking about her to Konrad Haenisch and to other visitors.² With some hesitation Rosa Luxemburg began to visit the old man once more. Then at the end of 1911 Mehring himself had trouble with the executive. He had attacked the party's electoral policy even before the elections, and after the victory earned a resultant snub—a fact that was an open secret in the party.³

After the run-off elections Mehring, recovered from his illness and once more full of spleen, moved strongly to the attack. This immediately brought him into open conflict with the executive and with Kautsky as well. In April, after various manœuvres, the latter succeeded in edging him out as leader writer of *Neue Zeit*. He banked on Mehring's well-known capacity for taking offence; and indeed on 19 April Mehring sent one of his hurt and dignified epistles offering to withdraw. In future the leading articles, with the well-known diagonal arrow, were to appear no more; Mehring confined himself to reviews and other less politically sensitive work in the *Neue Zeit* supplement.⁴

One of the immediate causes of friction between the editors and Mehring—with Bebel wire-pulling in the background—had been

¹ Rosa Luxemburg to Alfred Henke, 15 November 1912, Henke Papers, SPD Archives (see facsimile, facing p. 555).

² See Grünberg, *op. cit.*

³ Rosa wrote: 'Mehring has got a slap from the executive [*einen Rüffel erhalten*] over his article in *Neue Zeit* criticizing our parliamentary cretins. That is what our new "radical" executive looks like! Pity that this is not more widely known. People in the country need to know what goes on behind the scenes.' (9 December 1911.) Dittmann papers, SPD Archives. See also Schleifstein, *Mehring*, p. 57.

⁴ See Schleifstein, *Mehring*, pp. 57-60.

the question of how to reply to Rosa Luxemburg's articles in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*. It was still part of the undertow of the Kautsky-Luxemburg polemics; the combatants were particularly sensitive to each other. Kautsky took special exception to Mehring's 'moralizing disapproval' of his own attacks on Rosa, to which Mehring replied on 1 April that he did not consider her demagogic at all; the only evidence of demagoguery came from the executive.¹

Shortly afterwards Mehring made formal political overtures to Rosa Luxemburg. Having found himself a Rosenkavalier to carry the suggestion to the lady of his choice, he waved the magic wand of a 'new Left' under his and 'Röschen's' leadership. A meeting was arranged. But Rosa was repelled by the suggestion and by Mehring's elephantine courtesy. '[After the meeting] I have had enough of him again for a long time. His attitude [to politics] is lamentably personal.'

It is symptomatic of Rosa and of the 'new Left' that she sharply distinguished between alliance and collaboration, between personal friendship and political support. As soon as she heard that Mehring had decided to throw up all collaboration with *Neue Zeit* she pleaded with him urgently.

Every decent person in the party who is not simply the slave of the executive will take your side. But how *could* you have let all this induce you to chuck such an extremely important position? Please do keep in mind the general party situation. You too will surely feel that we are increasingly approaching times when the masses in the party will need energetic, ruthless and generous leadership, and that our powers-that-be—executive, central organ, Reichstag caucus, and the 'scientific paper' without *you*—will become continually more miserable, small-minded and cowardly. Clearly we shall have to face up to this attractive future, and we must occupy and hold all those positions which make it possible to spite the official 'leadership' by exercising the right to criticize. How few such positions there are, and how few people understand the situation you know better than I. The fact that the masses are none the less behind us and want different leaders has been shown from the last general meeting in Berlin, indeed from the attitude of almost all the party associations in the country. This makes it our duty to stick it out and not to do the official party bosses the favour of packing up. We have to accept continual struggles and friction, particularly when anyone attacks that holy of holies, parliamentary cretinism, as

¹ Karl Kautsky to Franz Mehring, 1 April 1912, Fund 201, IML (M); also Kautsky papers, IISH Amsterdam.

strongly as you have done. But in spite of all—not to cede an inch seems to be the right slogan. *Neue Zeit* must not be handed over entirely to senility and officialdom. Laugh at these pathetic insults, and continue writing in it so that we can all take joy from what you write.¹

He ignored the advice. 'One can only wish that he would not always take things so personally . . .', she sighed to her friends. They were very different people—both sensitive, but one personally and the other politically. Rosa had toughened enormously in this respect. Twelve years earlier, in Dresden and Leipzig, she had resigned over a very similar issue—and could still be tempted to threaten resignation by some of her present disagreements with Lensch. But Rosa Luxemburg was now rapidly developing the thesis of continuous battle, without retreat and at whatever personal cost and humiliation. This was to lead directly to the wartime principle of 'sticking to the masses at all costs' and once more explains why an organizational break was entirely unthinkable.²

As a result of this *rapprochement* with Mehring, Rosa Luxemburg went to some trouble with both Henke in Bremen—the Radek case was still only on the horizon—and with Lensch in Leipzig to secure Mehring's collaboration for both papers. To Lensch she suggested that Mehring be asked to write regularly, if necessary alternating with her. By June 1912 the last traces of Mehring's presence had been exorcized from *Neue Zeit*. But the Leipzig collaboration lasted hardly a year. In the summer of 1913 Lensch left *Leipziger Volkszeitung* and was replaced by Block. At once both Mehring and Rosa began to have difficulty in getting their stuff published as freely as hitherto. A number of articles were refused altogether and others had their sharpest stings drawn—a practice that always roused Rosa to fury.³

The final impetus for the creation of the first independent left-wing paper, *Sozialdemokratische Korrespondenz*, was, as so often in

¹ Rosa Luxemburg to Franz Mehring, 19 March 1912, IML (M).

² It is interesting to note that Communist historians have not picked up the implications of this attitude. Schleifstein adds his share of criticism of Mehring's personal attitude and withdrawal. At the same time official historiography in East Germany continually laments the unwillingness of the German Left to organize itself outside the SPD before and during the war. The Leninist point of separate organization was, indeed must be, based on withdrawal from the mother party for a start.

³ Rosa Luxemburg's articles on the prospects of the 1913 party congress at Jena appeared only on 11 and 18 September ('Die Massenstreikdebatte', 'Die Massenstreikresolution des Parteivorstandes,' *LV*, 11, 18 September 1913). Her comment on the congress itself, written immediately afterwards, never appeared at all and was published only in 1927 (*Die Internationale*, 1 March 1927, Vol. X, No. 5, pp. 147-53).

the history of radical self-assertion in the SPD, as much a personal as a political reaction. Hans Block, now editor of *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, was on holiday. Marchlewski, living in Germany on the edge of illegality, and therefore unable to risk any public controversy, was temporarily in charge of the paper at the beginning of September 1913. It was a curious arrangement, for Marchlewski was an unwavering left-wing radical, who yet managed to retain the confidence of the SPD leaders and partly took Rosa's place as adviser on Polish affairs. Kautsky particularly had a soft spot for the bearded, academic-looking figure. He considered him 'above faction'—though why is not entirely clear.¹

To Marchlewski's surprise his colleagues at *Leipziger Volkszeitung* suddenly refused to print any more articles by Rosa Luxemburg though they had previously been commissioned and Marchlewski himself had already accepted them. The press commission of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* tried to resolve the conflict amicably and suggested that if Marchlewski was willing to issue a declaration that the attitude of the paper would be continued in the same 'radical direction as in the last twenty years'—and not a new radical direction—the other editors should let articles by Rosa Luxemburg, Franz Mehring, and himself appear without any further discussion. *Autres temps, mêmes mœurs*. This proposal proved acceptable to no one. When Block returned from holiday he refused to let Ledebour undertake a further attempt at compromise; he considered the matter settled—with relief. Once again Mehring was in favour of dignified and hurt withdrawal. 'We cannot very well refuse Ledebour's proposal, but it seems quite unnecessary to me, and I hope that Block will turn it down. With this bag of dough nothing can be done; the only hope of saving *Leipziger Volkszeitung* is its own bankruptcy, and in this I certainly believe for the distant, though unfortunately not for the near, future.'²

¹ Kautsky and Marchlewski were in friendly correspondence up to 1912. The first rupture between them came when Kautsky refused to accept an article by Marchlewski in *Neue Zeit* on the Jagiełło mandate in Warsaw, a question agitating the Poles as well as the Russians at the time (see below, p. 592, note 2). Kautsky's unwillingness to publish was simply due to his exhaustion with Russian and Polish affairs. He turned down Warszawski on the same question for the same reason. Indeed, one of the advantages of his rupture with Rosa Luxemburg was that the pages of *Neue Zeit* were free of these everlasting disputations. The correspondence is in Kautsky Archives, IISH.

² Ernst Meyer, 'Zur Loslösung der Linksradikalen vom Zentrum in der Vorkriegszeit' in *Die Internationale*, 1927, Vol. X, No. 5, pp. 153–8. The details of the dispute are taken from this article.

Rosa Luxemburg took a different view on the advisability of breaking off relations. A series of meetings between Mehring and Marchlewski took place in her flat, and finally both men, whose temperaments were so similar, convinced her that pre-censorship by the editorial board must really kill any effective expression of views. After some discussion between them, Marchlewski wrote formally to Block on behalf of himself and his two colleagues:

What is at stake here is this: we three, and particularly I—which I want to emphasize—are of the opinion that the party is undergoing an internal crisis much much greater than at the time when revisionism first appeared. These words may seem harsh, but it is my conviction that the party threatens to fall into complete stagnation [*marasmus*] if things continue like this. In such a situation there is only one slogan for a revolutionary party: the strongest and most ruthless self-criticism.¹

Within eleven days of this letter, on 27 December 1913, the first number of the *Sozialdemokratische Korrespondenz* appeared. The editorial offices were located in Marchlewski's flat, for money was short. In each weekly number there appeared as a rule a leading article each by Rosa Luxemburg and Franz Mehring, and an economic survey by Marchlewski. The idea was not so much to achieve broad circulation, but to syndicate the short and pithy essays to other papers. It had little success in this regard; no more than four local papers ever reprinted any of the articles at any one time, and often whole issues appeared without any echo. The paper survived until after the beginning of the war, but from November 1914 onwards the leading articles were given up and only the economic survey continued to appear.²

The year 1913 was one of general disillusion: with the Empire among its supporters, and with the achievements of Social Democracy within the SPD. It was clear that the magnificent expectations following the victory at the polls were an illusion. Since the SPD could not 'play' at politics there was nothing obvious to be done with the large number of seats. They could neither be used destructively as the radicals wanted nor constructively as the revisionists hoped—for all intents and purposes they were worthless.

That year Bebel died, and with him an era—for this cold,

¹ Ibid., Julian Karski (Marchlewski) to Hans Block, 16 December 1913.

² See below, pp. 609, 617.

shrewd man had generated such an aura of achievement that the fortunes of the SPD were largely associated with him. It is an aura which has clung obstinately to his memory even to the present day. Communist historians have torn the old SPD apart, shred by revisionist shred, but the value of Bebel's role was little denigrated—and is again on the rise. He was buried in Switzerland, where he died, and many genuine tears flowed in the long procession. Rosa spoke, among others, and she too seemed affected by the undeniable stature of the man; henceforward she never spoke of him with disapproval.¹ His successor, Ebert, was a much greyer man, but one who was to play a role which Bebel never dreamt of, Chancellor of Germany and inheritor of much of the imperial power.

Meantime the party trooped back to its perennial preoccupations. At the 1913 congress the mass strike was up for discussion yet again, not as fearful or joyful a weapon as before; 'not with any sense of victory, but out of sheer embarrassment'.² Something was needed to combat the sense of malaise. There was silent but widespread agreement when Rosa Luxemburg said that 'there is no doubt about the now considerable and deep dissatisfaction in the ranks of our party members'.³ She too had nothing new to contribute, and her previous recommendations met with the usual lack of support. She spoke of the need for 'fresh air in our party life', the dissatisfaction with 'nothing-but-parliamentarianism as the sole panacea'. Perhaps for the first time since she attended SPD congresses, Rosa laid this directly at the door of the executive in general and Scheidemann—who spoke for the executive at the congress—in particular. But against the faulty tactic, against the manifold symptoms of rampant imperialism—economic crisis, higher defence budgets, opposition to suffrage reform—she could only offer her own 'clear, sharp and revolutionary tactics to stiffen the courage of the masses'.⁴ To the delegates this was nothing but painful rhetoric.

Instead of being able to advance from a discussion of the mass strike to a general debate on imperialism, she had to defend her ideas yet again from the old misrepresentations and abuse. Whether she liked it or not she was forced once more into a

¹ The only report of her speech is in a long quotation by Dittmann in *Die Freiheit*, 22 February 1920.

² *NZ*, 1912/1913, Vol. II, p. 559. ³ *Protokoll . . . 1913*, p. 289.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

discussion of the Jena resolution of 1905, a retrospective legal quibble. She quoted Bebel—and could not contain her irritation: ‘Of course when it comes to Bebel’s words you all have to shout approval.’¹ At once a storm broke out at such a clear case of sacrilege! Rosa Luxemburg pleaded bitterly that ‘the congress should pass at least one resolution of mine for a change’.² But her resolution (Number 100), which was a sharpening amendment to the executive’s own resolution (Number 94) on the mass strike, was lost by 333 votes to 142, while the executive’s resolution was passed with an enormous majority against only two votes.³ But even the sheep were tired. An anodyne expression of disapproval of the suffrage situation triumphed over a more specific condemnation of the ‘shameful’ election system, and balked at any call for a ‘suffrage storm’ arising out of the ‘awakening interest . . . in the political mass strike’. The whole tenor of the debate can be summed up by ‘nothing new’. The right words and the right atmosphere which could create new things were noticeably lacking in Germany, in the Reich as much as in the SPD. Even Kautsky had to admit frankly that ‘there is general discomfort here, an uncertain search for new ways, something must happen . . . [but] even Rosa’s supporters cannot answer the question what. . .’⁴

With Bebel gone, the gloss faded from the executive’s tactics, leaving just the power nakedly exposed. Radek’s case was a typical example of the new harshness on the part of the executive and of the political confusion on the Left. It was a complicated and obscure case which did not even begin in the SPD but was handed to the executive by the leaders of the SDKPiL.⁵ As far as the German executive was concerned, however, the accusations against Radek did not meet with neutral justice, much less with sympathy. The executive was dealing with a nuisance, someone who had annoyed them greatly by exploiting the built-in friction between grass-roots, province, and centre. Like Stalin, Ebert and Scheidemann disdainfully passed beyond Bebel’s merely verbal annihilations; they spoke less but acted more.

¹ *Protokoll . . . 1913*, p. 292.

² *Ibid.*, p. 544.

³ For the voting see *Protokoll . . . 1913*, p. 338. The resolutions—No. 94, p. 192; No. 100, p. 194.

⁴ Karl Kautsky to Victor Adler, 8 October 1913, in Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel*, p. 582.

⁵ For a fuller explanation of the Polish aspects of the Radek case and its effects on German attitudes, see below, pp. 586-8.

Radek had taken over the temporary editorship of a small and struggling left-wing paper in Württemberg, the *Freie Volkszeitung* at Göppingen. Short of money, and a thorn in the flesh of Keil's right-wing provincial political machine, the editors of the paper had appealed in their financial plight to the central executive of the SPD. By so doing they hoped to avoid the provincial organization's price for continued existence—a change of editor and a change of tune. Into this situation Karl Radek moved from Bremen on temporary assignment and immediately beat the drums of left-wing righteousness against what he maintained was a hidden alliance between the provincial and the central leadership. It took Radek little time—with his sharp pen and characteristic blend of secrecy and revelation, always containing the hints of further mysteries to be unveiled—to create a scandal of national proportions. Radical papers everywhere took up the case of the misunderstood and maltreated *Volkszeitung*. Unjustifiably accused—on this occasion—of collusion with the revisionist provincial organization, the executive decided to deal with the troublesome Radek. According to established bureaucratic practice they first called for the files to have a closer look at this unknown individual, and they soon discovered that there was some doubt as to his status in the German party. In addition to which there was a serious Polish complaint against him.

At the 1912 congress the question of Radek's status in the German party had already been inconclusively discussed; whether he had ever qualified as a dues-paying member and whether his apparent failure to pay dues had disqualified him from membership. His able work for the radical cause earned him the personal support of the Bremen radicals Knief and Pannekoek; even Henke, the local party boss, was inclined to back him but did so wholeheartedly only after a meeting of the members in the constituency had come out decisively for Radek. Meantime, at the end of 1912 and in the first few months of 1913, the Central Committee of the SDKPiL were pressing the Germans for a decision on his case; Rosa Luxemburg was their go-between. The German executive now decided that it could bypass the question of Radek's status in the German party altogether. At the Jena congress in 1913 it presented a report on his Polish situation. The executive asked the congress to pass two resolutions: first, that any Socialist who had been formally evicted from another party for valid reasons could

not be a member of the SPD; and secondly, that this general rule should be specifically and retroactively applied to Karl Radek.

The congress passed both resolutions, though a wave of bad conscience swept through the party afterwards. Neither the votes at the congress nor the later reaction followed the 'normal' divisions; as in 1911, the usual political alignments disappeared almost entirely once a moral issue was at stake. There had recently been a right-wing case of expulsion, and grave doubts were expressed equally from left and right about the moral state of a party that could deal with its members in such a summary fashion.¹ There was still a vocal body of members who considered that the *raison d'être* of the SPD was as much moral as political; on moral issues Liebknecht and Eisner, Mehring and Heine, tended to vote together against the executive—however different the particular remedies proposed. Morality is always more cohesive as reaction than as an instigator of policies.

Certainly most of the radicals failed completely to use the Radek incident for their political purposes. The discussion at the 1913 congress was largely concerned with abstract justice. Radek's personality and his immediate policy found no defenders at all; on this point even Henke's support was lukewarm. Rosa Luxemburg's position was difficult. As a member of the Polish executive which had condemned and evicted Radek from the SDKPiL, she could hardly do other than use her influence in the German party for pursuing the demand for expulsion which she had formally requested in the name of the Polish party. At the same time she was not the person who would ever let a party decision overcome deeply felt personal convictions to the contrary. She disliked Radek intensely. In April 1912, before the Polish party court had even been convened, she was advising her German friends to keep clear of him. 'Radek belongs in the whore category. Anything can happen with him around, and it is therefore much better to keep him at a safe distance', she warned the Zetkins.

¹ See Ernst Heilmann, 'Parteijustiz', *SM*, XIX, No. 3, pp. 1267-72. This was only one of several articles on the subject which appeared in the party press at the time. The expulsion of a right-wing personality, Gerhard Hildebrand, by a provincial organization that happened to be radical, had been criticized by left-wingers like Mehring and Laufenberg; similarly Heilmann and Heine, who were well-known for their right-wing views, criticized the eviction of Radek.

Equally she did not approve of the manner in which the Radek case was handled by Jogiches. In her private correspondence she made no reference to her official approaches to the German party—these were official party tasks; her dislike of Radek was ‘German’ and had nothing to do with his Polish sins. When Radek was in Göppingen at the end of May, she wrote to Konstantin Zetkin: ‘Radek’s part in the Göppingen affair is quite incomprehensible to me. The lout has to put his nose into everything.’ She saw no profit for the radical cause in an artificial attempt to keep the local paper alive: ‘If the organization cannot keep it going then let it die.’ When Radek and her friend Thalheimer (the official editor of the Göppingen paper, whom Radek had replaced while he was on holiday) made a desperate visit to Berlin in June in order to solicit at least the moral support of well-known radicals, Rosa Luxemburg received them coldly. After the meeting she referred contemptuously to the delegation as a ‘pathetic collection of people’ (*traurige Gesellschaft*). She claimed that Radek ruined whatever he touched; if it had not been for him the radicals would have done better at the party congresses in 1912 and 1913.

It is difficult for us to disentangle the attitude of Rosa Luxemburg as a prominent member of the SDKPiL from her ‘German’ view. She was clearly unfair to Radek. The fact that his views on imperialism as they appeared in *Neue Zeit* and the Bremen paper were closer to her own than anyone else’s in Germany was entirely lost on her. Far from welcoming a vigorous recruit for the radical cause, she saw only scandal and ill-repute. There is no evidence that she even read his work. The opportunity to bait the executive was wholly ignored. On occasions Rosa had her completely blind spots, and Radek was perhaps the most important. They followed no pattern; the courtly and highly intelligent Kurt Eisner, the sad poet son of Bruno Schönlank—she pursued them relentlessly in the face of all political sense and personal restraint. Yet, ironically, her condemnation of Radek for putting his nose into things that did not concern him was precisely what Kautsky, Adler, Bebel, and so many others in the SPD resented in her.

At the 1913 Jena congress Rosa Luxemburg spoke about the Radek case only in terms of general principles. One of the solutions proposed by Liebknecht and many others was for the German party at least to review the evidence on which the Polish condemnation was based, so as to avoid a blind and retroactive expulsion

Though at first the SDKPiL executive had refused to let the SPD reopen their case, Rosa persuaded her Polish associates that this intransigence could only harm the Poles, who more than ever needed good relations with the SPD at this moment when they had a domestic party revolt on their hands. Almost at the end of the proceedings she offered, on behalf of the Polish executive, to hand over the entire documentation to enable the Germans to review the case if they wished.

We can no longer get rid of the dispute, which has drawn its weary way across the pages of the German press, with a purely formal solution . . . our decision in Radek's case should not have retroactive force. The case must be examined in all its aspects. Liebknecht's proposal of turning to the International Bureau is quite unacceptable . . . the German party must itself be in the position to settle its relationship with one of its members. . . . I can state that the Polish executive will be glad if you decide to examine the Radek case within the framework of German party organizations. . . .¹

However, one wonders whether the refusal of the congress to accept Rosa's suggestion really caused her much distress.

During the long spell of unsatisfactory political weather, Rosa concentrated once more on her intellectual interests. Still at work on her political economy treatise, she suddenly became fascinated by one particular problem towards the end of 1911—the nature of capitalist accumulation. It all began with the difficulty of reconciling Marx's unfinished mathematical analysis of compound accumulation with her own observations. Trying to resolve this problem, she was swept away into what she modestly claimed was a 'wholly new and strictly scientific analysis of imperialism and its contradictions'. The problem fascinated her so much that in the following year she gave up a projected holiday in Spain and abandoned everything but the most immediate political duties—the elections of 1912 and the contracted articles for *Leipziger Volkszeitung*. By the middle of 1912 the work was finished and in the hands of the publishers. Although not completed in 'a four-months continuous session', as she later claimed, it was none the

¹ *Protokoll . . . 1913*, pp. 543-4.

less a remarkable achievement, an intellectual eruption which stands as a monument to Rosa Luxemburg's tremendous powers of concentration.¹ In the long run the influence of *The Accumulation of Capital* sprang from its theoretical model of accumulation and imperialism, but at the time the book made only an adverse impact on the political scene. With few exceptions the reviewers were less interested in her theory than in evidence of Rosa Luxemburg's unorthodox political attitudes. She felt that much of what she wrote had not been understood, so that she later used her war-time prison leisure to answer her critics by going over the same ground again in simpler terms and with easier illustrations.²

Politically, the book merely enhanced her reputation as a brilliant *enfant terrible*. Within the SPD, close association with her became the political kiss of death. Her threatened visit to the south in the summer of 1913 was enough to put several local organizations in a state of frenzy. Yet in another sense Rosa's isolation in the SPD was an arbitrary act of her own contrivance. The SPD in the last few years before the war was much more than a political vehicle whose only motor was policies; it was a world, a state of mind, an ideological protest against society—and from this Rosa never for a moment contracted out. Important as they were to her, the 'politics' which she pursued were of marginal importance to the party as a whole, an annoying factor which—whenever she chose not to emphasize it—could be and was overlooked, or better still abstracted. When she became caught up in the treadmill of the imperial courts, she was hailed as a party martyr; no one could have guessed from the tone of the Socialist press that Rosa Luxemburg was anything but the party's darling. And this applied just as much to the executive, so long the focus of her criticisms. However difficult her relationship with the SPD leadership about current policies, she still had easy access to them on Polish matters and never ceased throughout this time to deal with them both formally and informally on behalf of the SDKPiL. No one in

¹ 'Do you know that I wrote the entire 30 galleys in one go in four months—incredible performance—and sent it off to the printer without so much as a further glance through. . . .' (*Briefe an Freunde*, p. 105, to Hans Diefenbach, 12 May 1917.)

² See a very critical review by Eckstein, another disappointed ex-disciple, in *Vorwärts*, 16 February 1913 (literary supplement); also Marchlewski in *Münchener Post*, Nos. 24–25, January 1913, and Marchlewski and Mehring in *LV*, 21 February 1913. The economics and philosophy of *The Accumulation of Capital* and the arguments with the reviewers and critics will be examined in greater detail below, pp. 530–6 and 830–41.

Germany knew much about the Poles, and many intrepid explorers like Ledebour had burnt their fingers. Kautsky's efforts to promote Marchlewski never succeeded. 'If you want anything sensible about Polish history', Ryazanov, himself no friend of Rosa's, informed Kautsky, 'you either have to go to Rosa or else to a bourgeois historian.'¹ Rosa in turn was careful not to abuse this position and warned her Polish friends on several occasions that it would not do to abuse the confidence of the German executive.

Since 1910 Rosa had been trying to move out of the flat in Cranachstrasse. It reminded her too much of Jogiches, who still came and went with his own keys, never surrendered. Rosa was no longer so young; the house was noisy, there were too many children now, and she was far too accessible to visitors. With the school work on the one hand and the concentration required for her economic writing, she did not want her flat to be the centre of constant informal meetings. It was not easy to find what she wanted and for nearly a year she searched the newer suburbs of Berlin, until in the second half of 1911 she finally moved to Südende, 2 Lindenstrasse. Here there were green fields and only the more determined of her visitors would troop all that way to see her. The hope of solitude proved an illusion; most of her friends still came and so did a flood of Poles, refugees from the lost battle against Lenin in Paris. The entire Warszawski family billeted themselves on her for several long spells. Finally there was the little group of homeless, dissident intellectuals; the decision to found the SDK was taken at her flat. Marchlewski anyhow lived near by.

There are many glimpses of high human comedy from this period, quite at variance with all the political complaints; Rosa's first visit to a cinema, in the company of her enthusiastic house-keeper, and a visit by a Socialist worker from Denver, Colorado, who had raked together enough funds to make a personal tour in Europe.

I had a visit from Miss Twining . . . all these old girls [*schachteln*] from England and America really are straight out of the zoo. This one asked me if I did not think Germany was *a very small country* and whether it would not be better for the movement if Germany were bigger! She also asked me whether Bebel was *a great man* and whether Lafargue was *also a great man*.²

¹ Kautsky Archives, IISH.

² The phrases in italics were written in English by Rosa. Lafargue was Marx's son-in-law, a tourist attraction for Socialist visitors from overseas.

Middle age had eroded her enthusiasm though not her passion. Rosa was instinctively conscious of her age. She had no use for young-old personalities who, like Karl Liebknecht, unbecomingly bounced into and out of causes like a shuttlecock. Increasingly she valued privacy and self-restraint. But she still despised the humdrum, the colourless, the impersonal. Rosa Luxemburg was proud of her own strong temperament—it was the essential component of any satisfactory political personality—but she channelled its evanescent aspects into more disciplined and permanent attitudes. The impressionistic mirror which she had at one time held up to all the personalities in the German party was replaced by more reasoned judgements; inevitably she also accepted the existence of institutions and continuity in German party life with their own particular ideology. With a few significant exceptions like Kautsky, she was now less concerned with peculiarities of this or that personality, but thought about the ‘executive’ or the ‘congress’ or even the ‘party as a whole’. Even her dislike of Germany became conceptualized; she felt increasingly out of touch with what she contemptuously described as the ‘German mentality’. Is not this replacement of personalities with institutions, this judgement of the general rather than the particular, itself evidence of the extent to which the critic had become an outsider?

Yet the personal side naturally cannot be isolated from the political. For Rosa Luxemburg political criticism was intimately connected with the development of the new philosophy of politics. We have already noted the tentative search for a new tactic. But this was merely part of a broader process of change, a compound of personal and political, subjective and objective factors. We are here concerned with the political effects of this change during these years; the broader philosophical implications will be examined later (Chapter XII).

The most immediate inspiration of Rosa Luxemburg’s political thinking and behaviour between 1912 and 1914 was her disgust with the internal affairs of the party. The very tendency to concentrate exclusively on internal affairs was already a dangerous diversion of revolutionary energy, a bad substitute for an effective Socialist policy. Rosa consistently refused to participate in internal debates—like party reorganization—except as a means of creating a more outward-looking policy. She took the unsatisfactory internal

state of the party for granted; in correspondence with her political allies there was no need for her to elaborate on this mutually agreed dissatisfaction. The only cure was a wider horizon.

The activities and policies of the party had to be more closely related to society which, as it were, encompassed it. She believed that the internal differences were a minor symptom of stagnation and would be swept away once and for all by an aggressive external tactic. Since there was no persuading the leaders, it was necessary to activate the interest of the masses—against the leaders: a doctrine which resembles the policy of all those governments who try to cure internal dissensions or weaknesses with an aggressive foreign policy. However, a warning is needed against the usual facile interpretation of this appeal to the masses as evidence of ‘democratic’ inclinations. We shall show that ‘masses’ was an arbitrary concept which had quite a different meaning from that usually ascribed to it. ‘Democracy’ in the SPD was the preserve of the leadership; we with our modern, sophisticated, sociological analysis may see it as arbitrary and oligarchical, but contemporaries followed the duly constituted leadership with satisfaction and pride. After all, democracy is not a normative historical judgement but an ideological view of present reality, whether ‘justified’ or not.

Besides, the intellectual revolt of Mehring and Luxemburg was neither wholly objective nor altruistic; it was also in part a remedy for their own personality conflicts. This would be a dangerous statement if the evidence were not so overwhelming. For both of them, the recovery from a period of excessive alienation from society was something of a relief; alienation which could be cured as much by fiercer opposition as by any revisionist attempt at integration. Rosa’s articles on social matters during this period reached a bitterness and disgust which, with her journalistic talents, remind one vividly of the writings of Marx and Engels. Rosa commented on a quite minor scandal in one of the poor houses of the city of Berlin with this blast:

Normal class relationships cause thousands of proletarian existences to sink into the darkness of utter misery every year. They sink silently like the deposit of used-up, useless elements at the bottom of society, from which Capital can no longer press out any useful juice . . . and at the end of it all middle-class society hands the cup of poison to those it has evicted. . . . Lucian Szczyptierowski, who died in the street poisoned

by rotten fish, belongs just as much to the realities of the proletariat as every qualified, highly paid worker who can afford printed New Year cards and a golden watch chain. The asylum for the homeless and the police jails are just as much pillars of this society as the palace of the Chancellor and the banks, and the poisoned fish made into gruel in the city's asylums is the basis for the caviare and the champagne on the millionaire's table. The doctors can trace the fatal infection in the intestines of the poisoned victims as long as they look through their microscopes; but the real germ which caused the death of the people in the asylum is called—capitalist society, in its purest culture. . . .

We must carry the bodies of the poisoned victims in Berlin who are flesh of our flesh and blood of our blood into the new year on the arms of millions of proletarians with the cry 'down with the infamous society which gives rise to such horrors'.¹

Commenting on the increase in unemployment, Rosa Luxemburg wrote:

Against this depressing tendency we have only one effective weapon; the Socialist radicalization of [public] opinion . . . we would be stupid as well as callous quacks [from anti-revisionist diagnosis to revolutionary prophylactic!] if we seriously tried to persuade the hungry workers that all our plans and projects for ameliorating the lot of the unemployed were capable of producing the slightest reaction on the part of the ruling classes . . . other than a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders.²

International affairs, too, were funnelled into the same fierce vortex. An incident in Alsace-Lorraine, where German soldiers had maltreated the civil population, caused Rosa to point out that it was no use damning such incidents in isolation; only the total destruction of the system could end manifestations so typical of society.³ The examples are legion.

And suddenly hers was no longer a voice crying in the wilderness. The first six months of 1914 saw a distinct revival of industrial as well as political unrest in Germany, and in Russia too. Disillusion was swept away like cobwebs. Rosa Luxemburg anxiously tried to broaden the discussion as much as possible, to take the mass strike not in isolation—as at the 1913 congress—but as part of the general confrontation with imperialism. She

¹ *Gleichheit*, 1 January 1912.

² *SDK*, 27 December 1913.

³ 'Die Bilanz von Zabern', *SDK*, 6 January 1914; 'Die zukünftige Revanche', *SDK* 24 January 1914.

had warned then against a repetition of the 'deliberate liquidation of the 1910 mass action . . . the congress must seriously examine all the unattractive symptoms in our party life . . . the unsatisfactory state of the organizations at the centre . . . [there must be] a shaking and awakening slogan on the Prussian suffrage struggle as well. That is the task of the next party congress.'¹ The economic struggles, too, must be brought into the general movement. 'Will the strike succeed? A useless question. The struggle itself is a victory for the workers' cause.'²

In 1914, sensing the change of air, she spoke and wrote on this subject as often as she could. The Belgian Socialist Party had once more been involved in a campaign to achieve adult suffrage and this time, tactical criticisms apart, she compared the Belgian efforts with German immobility.

We can criticize and condemn the action of our Belgian comrades as much as we want to, but it remains a shaming lesson and example especially for us in Germany. The Belgian party experiments with the mass strike, but at least it tries all means of mass action and devotes all its energies to it. In Germany on the other hand . . . we stagger from provincial elections to Reichstag elections and from Reichstag elections to new provincial elections. Let the Belgian example serve, not for uncritical admiration but to provide us with a practical push.³

The mass strike had once more become a practical proposition. Even *Vorwärts* sounded belligerent: 'the second stage of the suffrage campaign begins', it trumpeted.⁴ Rosa was still sceptical of the official attitude; she had been bitten by just this dog in 1910. 'Clearly we would make ourselves ridiculous with friend and foe . . . if we allow the masses to get the suspicion that behind our battle slogan there are no serious intentions of acting. . . .' If resolution was lacking at the centre, then the initiative 'in a truly democratic party like ours must come from below, from the periphery'.⁵

In a speech to the Members' Meeting of the Social-Democratic Federation of Berlin Constituencies on 14 June 1914, she warned that the issue of fierce-sounding proclamations was worse than useless if not followed by a real desire for action.

¹ 'Zur Tagesordnung des Parteitages', *LV*, 21 June 1913.

² 'Märzensstürme', *Gleichheit*, 18 March 1912.

³ 'Das Belgische Experiment', *LV*, 18 May 1913.

⁴ *Vorwärts*, 24 May 1914.

⁵ *SDK*, 6 June 1914.

Indeed the central organ of the party has written that the second stage of the suffrage campaign has struck . . . it is extremely dangerous to blow such imposing battle fanfares if they are not meant seriously. Ebert closed the party congress with the words: 'Either we get universal suffrage or there will be a mass strike.' The entire International looks expectantly towards Germany. People everywhere believe that the activity of 1910 will indeed be revived. But the disappointment [at that time] was very great. Such tactics are discouraging. . . . [I realize that] Comrade Ernst has stated . . . that the executive will certainly go along if the masses take the initiative. But even this promise must be taken with the usual pinch of salt.¹

This time Rosa Luxemburg's own resolution was accepted. It stated that 'only the highest pressure of the will of the masses, only the mass strike, can open the way to equal suffrage in Prussia. . . . The Members' Meeting invites all comrades of Greater Berlin to . . . work with all their might in factories, party meetings and all other assemblies to turn the desire and readiness of the masses into practical reality.'²

It was no longer a case of persuading or even forcing the leadership with resolutions. Scepticism of the executive's intentions expressed in leading articles was one thing; when it came to addressing the masses such caution was pointless. For all practical purposes Rosa Luxemburg now ignored the leadership. The only way to achieve results, to ensure that the failure of 1910 would not be repeated, was to get the masses moving and to hope that they would truly sweep the leadership along. Two days after her resolution had been acclaimed, she emphasized again the need for mass pressure on the leadership.

Whether the trade-union leaders want to or not, the unions *must* get into battle sooner or later [in defending the right of economic association]. This is a much greater menace to the unions than it is to the party organizations . . . but if we really form our columns for the Prussian suffrage campaign, we can undoubtedly count on enthusiastic support on the part of every trade-union member. For they too are involved. '*Tua res agitur*—it is your cause that is at stake.'³

Not only pressure on the political leadership, but interaction of all related efforts into one—that was the struggle against imperialism.

¹ Speech at the Members' Meeting of the Social-Democratic Federation of Berlin Constituencies, 14 June 1914, in *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, p. 690.

² *Ibid.*, p. 691.

³ *SDK*, 16 June 1914.

It was not platform theory alone. Rosa Luxemburg had become involved with the problem of imperialism directly and personally. On 16 September 1913 'there was a large and magnificent meeting at Bockenheim [near Frankfurt] in which Comrade Dr. Luxemburg made a speech', which lasted for nearly two hours.¹ Nor was this an exceptionally long time; the members came to be inspired with all the receptive discipline of seventeenth-century Presbyterians—and the comparison is not fanciful. 'Step by step she described the form of the capitalist class state with all its barbarism and the hopeless prospects for the working population. . . . Accompanied by strong applause, the speaker paid tribute to Comrade Bebel for his systematic and critical emphasis on the maltreatment of soldiers and then came to speak about the mass strike.'² In the course of developing her argument, Rosa Luxemburg 'touched on the question whether we would permit ourselves to be dragged helplessly into a war. After shouts of "Never" in the body of the hall, she is supposed to have said, "If they think we are going to lift the weapons of murder against our French and other brethren, then we shall shout: 'We will not do it'.'" ³ This phrase formed the basis of the Public Prosecutor's charge against Rosa Luxemburg under paragraphs 110 and 111 of the Criminal Code, in that she called for public disobedience of the laws.

The trial took place in Frankfurt on 20 February 1914. Conviction was certain, but at the end of the trial Rosa made one of the greatest speeches of her life. It was neither self-defence nor any plea for mitigation of sentence; in accordance with Socialist practice in the courts, the accused's opportunity to speak on his or her own behalf was used to make a political assault on the prosecution, the law, and the whole of society.⁴

She was sentenced to a year in prison. As usual the appeal procedure took many months. Predictably, the superior Reich court dismissed her appeal on 20 October 1914, after the outbreak of the war.⁵ Execution of sentence under war-time conditions was due at any moment and without warning. Notice to serve the

¹ *Volksstimme*, Frankfurt (Main), No. 227, 27 September 1913.

² *Ibid.*

³ *LV*, 21 February 1914.

⁴ *Vorwärts*, 22 February 1914. In view of its importance both as a political and personal document, a shortened translation of the speech is given as an appendix to this chapter.

⁵ *LV*, 23 October 1914.

sentence was in the discretion of the authorities. As we shall see, Rosa Luxemburg tried to put it off as long as possible, partly for health reasons, but in the end she was seized and taken off to prison without any warning at the beginning of 1915.

The nature of the charge and the spirited quality of her defence were widely reported and brought her much sympathy and support.¹ The case was remembered for many years and Rosa Luxemburg's speech became a minor classic in SPD history, even at a time when she had long and unequivocally renounced her allegiance to the party—just as the unconverted citizens of Tarsus, who had no interest in the ambulant disciple, long remembered Saul.

Military questions were much to the fore in the first half of 1914. The SPD had always fought against the harsh disciplinary tradition of the Prussian army, an issue which, like other causes, rose and fell in intensity in mysterious cycles; 1914 was a peak year. Rosa Luxemburg had blundered into the controversy only by accident and by courtesy of the authorities; militarism as a *special* problem had never caught her interest. Now it brought her into closer contact with Karl Liebknecht whose special preoccupation it had been since 1906. The official party line—better conditions for recruits, the idea of a militia—had not been entirely to her liking, since the suggestion, openly put forward by Bebel and Noske at the 1907 congress, that better treatment for recruits would improve the quality of the imperial army, did not seem designed to hasten revolution. In the present head-on collision such nuances were lost—it was precisely the sort of general confrontation Rosa Luxemburg had always prescribed as the only medicine for revolutionary atrophy. She was fully aware of the repercussions of the proceedings in Frankfurt; every further push could only sharpen the dialectic.

Immediately after the trial in February 1914 Rosa wanted to embark on a whistle-stop tour of west Germany—as in 1910. This again was established practice; convicted party members, like martyrs on display, were always treated to mass demonstrations of solidarity. An immediate mass protest was organized in Frankfurt itself on the day sentence was pronounced. Similar protest meetings took place in Berlin the following Sunday. Reading the reports, it is difficult to remember that both the *Leipziger*

¹ See *LV*, 21 and 28 February 1914; also Clara Zetkin in *Die Gleichheit*, 4 March 1914. The 'official' commentary was in *Vorwärts*, 23 February 1914.

Volkszeitung and *Vorwärts* had barred Rosa Luxemburg as a contributor and condemned her more than once as a disruptive element in the party. *Vorwärts*, which would not accept a sentence in Rosa Luxemburg's hand, reproduced at length both her speeches in court and her address to the protest meeting outside. As with Lenin, polemics must not be taken too literally as evidence of irreconcilable hostility.

Rosa was in excellent form and delighted her audience from the first word.

A severe criminal stands before you, one condemned by the state, a woman whom the prosecution has described as rootless. Comrades, when I look at this assembly my joy to find here so many men and women of the same opinion is only dimmed by the regret that a few men are missing—the prosecution and the judges of the court in Frankfurt. . . . I clearly have better and more solid roots than any Prussian prosecutor.¹

Flanked by her friends and defence counsel Paul Levi and Kurt Rosenfeld, Rosa Luxemburg made a triumphal procession through south-west Germany. On her return to Berlin she addressed several well-attended meetings—still on the subject of militarism. Once a subject was revolutionarily in vogue, it was good sense to keep on with it. Here too the words of Rosa Luxemburg now met with full approval. Nothing shows the extent of public interest better than the lengthy reports of the case and of the subsequent meetings, not only in the Socialist but also in the Liberal and Conservative press.² In the areas where Rosa Luxemburg spoke, meetings called by the National Liberals and right-wing parties strongly condemned the 'inactivity' of the authorities in the face of the 'scandalous behaviour of Rosa Luxemburg . . . the German people in so far as they do not paddle in the wake of the Socialists, are unable to understand why an end is not put to the impertinent behaviour of this female'.³

Such reactions did not pass unnoticed by the authorities. After the Frankfurt trial, the Prussian Minister of the Interior instructed

¹ Speech at Freiburg, 7 March 1914, reported in *Volksmacht*, Freiburg, 9 March 1914.

² See for instance *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 21 February 1914. For summary of right-wing press see *Vorwärts*, 22 February 1914.

³ *Vorwärts*, 2 April 1914, reporting a resolution of a National Liberal meeting in Württemberg.

local authorities to take greater care in ensuring that official stenographic reports of Socialist meetings were available, particularly in the case where 'the agitator Luxemburg' was speaking.¹ Her subsequent speeches were all carefully analysed by the Public Prosecutor's office and finally they found what they wanted. This time it was the Minister of War who asked for an indictment 'in the name of the entire corps of officers and non-commissioned officers of the German army'.² Honour had been besmirched by Rosa Luxemburg's allegation that maltreatment of soldiers was routine in the German army. There was some doubt as to whether this prosecution could be made to stick, but the Minister of the Interior fully supported the proceedings requested by his colleague at the War Ministry. In his appreciation of the situation, the Minister of the Interior stated that it was necessary to ventilate yet again the whole problem in law of the right to call publicly for strikes and demonstrations.³ As a test case, the proceedings were to take place in Berlin rather than in Freiburg where the offending speech had been made.

Rosa Luxemburg was delighted; such a charge could only lead to the widest publicity—worth months of agitation. 'I can't tell you what pleasure the thing gives me . . . not a *lapsus linguae*, a bit of stupidity or clumsiness on the speaker's part which is on trial, but fundamental truths, essential component of our political enlightenment.'⁴

Her defence counsel now enlisted the entire organizational resources of the SPD. An appeal was published for defence witnesses to come forward and testify; anyone who could give evidence of maltreatment of recruits. It was hoped that the many instances brought to light by the Socialist press would make it possible to flood the court with witnesses.⁵

The trial took place in Berlin from 29 June to 3 July 1914.⁶ The

¹ *Rosa Luxemburg im Kampf gegen den deutschen Militarismus*, Berlin (East) 1960, pp. 60–61, extract from Deutsches Zentralarchiv, Merseburg.

² *Vorwärts*, 14 May 1914. The offending sentence of the speech at Freiburg read: 'One thing is clear, the recent attempt at suicide by a recruit is surely just one of many innumerable tragedies which take place day in and day out in German barracks, and it is all too rare for the groans of the sufferers to reach our ears.' (See *Volkswacht*, Freiburg, 9 March 1914.)

³ *Rosa Luxemburg . . . gegen . . . Militarismus*, pp. 135–6.

⁴ Rosa Luxemburg to Franz Mehring, 22 May 1914, IML (M), Fund 201; photocopy IML (B), NL2 III-A/18, p. 74.

⁵ See the appeal in *Vorwärts*, 25 June 1914.

⁶ Details of the speeches and testimonies are in *Rosa Luxemburg im Kampf gegen den deutschen Militarismus*, pp. 142–206.

defence blanketed the court with requests for witnesses and even offered to extend the scope of the investigation from the Prussian army into the German armed services as a whole. Throughout the trial the Socialist press, realizing the effect of the testimonies, was celebrating the rout of the prosecution. On 3 July the prosecution requested that the case be adjourned, hoping to have it transferred to a military court. This was strenuously resisted by defence counsel and by Rosa Luxemburg herself, who had polished another assault for delivery after the verdict. It was never made. The judge granted the adjournment, against the wishes of the defence; but no provisions were made for transfer to a military court. The Socialist press, with *Vorwärts* most fiercely in the van, was able to announce a complete victory, while the right-wing papers lampooned the government for its incompetence.¹ Nothing more was heard of this indictment.

By July 1914 Rosa Luxemburg could justifiably feel that her policy, so painfully evolved in opposition for the last four years, was at last coming into its own with a vengeance. The mass-strike discussion was once more under way. Instead of having to commune with unsympathetic party leaders, her point of view was making its impact directly on the masses. The meetings in the capital applauded her and, what was more important, voted for her resolutions. A particularly sharp resolution had been adopted in Berlin on 14 June 1914, against executive warnings. This agitational effort in Berlin in 1913 and 1914 brought its full rewards during the war; Niederbarnim was to be the base of *Spartakus* activities and the information bulletin issued by the leadership of that constituency became the foundation of the famous *Spartakus* letters. The efforts of Rosa Luxemburg and her friends in the 4th Berlin Constituency made it the Berlin headquarters of the *Spartakusbund* and even provided a secure nucleus for the KPD after the war. At the same time her preoccupation with militarism and the two trials rallied masses of comrades all over the country. Her name was more widely known in the summer of 1914 than at any time since 1910, or than ever before. After her trial at Frankfurt she had given notice that 'we look upon it as our duty to use the coming weeks as far as possible in order to hasten the next step of

¹ *Vorwärts*, 5 July 1914.

historical development which will lead us to victory'.¹ This intention seemed entirely capable of fulfilment.

'Fist to fist, and eye to eye.' At last the boring preoccupations of internal party affairs were left behind; a general sharpening of conflict appeared inevitable. Even physically she felt better. A group of like-thinking radicals had crystallized out of the pressure of events: Liebknecht, Mehring, Marchlewski, Pannekoek—and friends like Stadthagen, Levi, and Rosenfeld. In no sense was this a new party, but a comradeship—that mixture of personal and political relations so congenial to Rosa Luxemburg, which she had brought with her from the early days of Polish Social Democracy.

A few days after the triumphant end of the Berlin trial Rosa took the train for Brussels, where the long-planned meeting of the International Socialist Bureau on the Russian question was to take place. She left Berlin in high spirits; a possibility at last of an SPD congress which might support a tonic assault on the executive, and set the seal of approval on large-scale actions. The International was to meet at Vienna in the autumn, not only to register the recent Socialist successes against militarism but to crown the efforts to unite the Russian party in which Rosa Luxemburg had played so prominent a part. Brussels would be hot and full of talk, but Rosa was looking forward to it; fresh from her successes in Germany, she felt certain that her policy would prevail, even against the obstinacies of Lenin and his Bolsheviks.²

But all these hopes and plans were washed away, with those of millions of other people. While she was in Brussels the murder took place at Sarajevo. Europe was once more in the clutch of an international crisis. The weakness of the Socialist International in the face of threatened war had already been exposed, at least to the participants at the hastily assembled meeting in the last week of July, if not yet to the world at large. By the time Rosa Luxemburg returned to Berlin, war had become almost certain; all the hopeful signs of a confrontation with imperialism disappeared as though they had never been. The world that ended in August 1914 was essentially Rosa's world as much as Bebel's, Victor Adler's, and the Emperor's. Protest, even negation, had always been based on understanding of the essential processes of that world, had been a part—if an extreme part—of it. The

¹ *Volkswacht*, Freiburg, 9 March 1914.

² See below, pp. 594–6.

Lenins, the Hitlers, with their tight ideological blinkers, had been in it but not of it—but they inherited the future, together with that blindly durable anonymity, the capitalist middle classes. For a brief moment the flame of revolutionary potential from the Second International flickered on, in post-war Berlin, to be for ever extinguished by bourgeois reaction and Communist efficiency.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER XI

*Rosa Luxemburg's own Address to the judges at the Second Criminal Court, Frankfurt (Main), 20 February 1914.*¹

My defence counsel have amply demonstrated the nullity of the prosecution from a legal point of view. I therefore want to deal with another aspect of the prosecution. In the prosecutor's speech as well as in the written indictment, my own words are alleged to have played a large part and particularly the interpretation and purpose which has been placed on these words. The prosecution laid repeated stress on my alleged intentions while I was speaking at the meetings concerned. Well, presumably no one is more competent than I myself to discuss the psychological content of my speeches and my frame of mind, and to provide a full and complete explanation.

Let me emphasize right away that I am very willing to give a full account of my purposes both to the prosecution and to you, the judge. Most important of all, I would like to state that the prosecution's version, based on the statement of its witnesses, is nothing but a flat, gutless caricature, not only of my own speeches, but of the entire concept of Social-Democratic agitation. As I listened to the words of the prosecution I had to laugh and I thought to myself: once more a classic example of how little help one gets from a formal education in understanding the Social-Democratic way of thinking, our whole world of ideas in all its complicated scientific refinement and historical depth—as long as class differences continue to stand in the way. If you gentlemen had taken any one of thousands of simple and uneducated workers from among those who were present at my meetings, he would have given you quite a different picture of my words. Those simple men and women of the working classes are perfectly capable of absorbing our ideas, those same ideas which in the mind of a Prussian prosecutor become so completely distorted. I will now illustrate this point in some detail. The prosecution has several times emphasized that even before the incriminating words were spoken, I 'had greatly incited' my listeners. My answer to this is that we Social Democrats never incite! For what does 'inciting' mean? Did I attempt to work on the meeting in the sense that if war breaks out and they find themselves in occupied territory, say China, they should behave in such a manner that not a single Chinese will dare even a hundred years later to give any German

¹ From *Vorwärts*, 22 February 1914.

a hostile look?¹ If I had spoken like this, that would truly have been an incitement. Or did I perhaps try to raise in my listeners a sense of chauvinism, of contempt and hatred for other races and peoples? That too would have been incitement.

But I said nothing of the kind and nor would any trained Social Democrat. What I did try to do at those meetings at Frankfurt, and what we Social Democrats always try to do in all our written and spoken words, is to spread enlightenment, to make clear to the working mass their class interests and their historical duty. What we do is to lay open for them the main tendencies of history, of the economic, political, and social upheavals to which our present society gives birth and which with iron necessity lead to the fact that at a certain stage of development any existing social order must be removed and replaced by the higher Socialist order of society. . . . From this same point of view stems all our agitation against war and militarism—simply because we Social Democrats aim for a harmonious, complete, and scientifically based vision of the world. For the prosecution and its miserable witnesses to see all this as mere incitement shows a coarse and unrefined conception, and above all demonstrates their inability even to conceive of the nature of our way of thinking. . . .

And now to the main point of the indictment. The prosecutor bases his case on an interpretation of my alleged call to soldiers not to fire at the enemy in case of war, in defiance of their orders. This interpretation seems to him to carry great weight and to be undeniably logical. His reasoning goes like this: if I was agitating against militarism, if I wanted to prevent war, the only possible way for me was to propose directly to the soldiers: 'When they order you to shoot, don't shoot!' Now isn't that a simple convincing accusation, an absolutely logical conclusion? But you will permit me to state that such logic follows only from the conception of the prosecution, but not from mine or from that of Social Democracy as a whole. I ask now for your particular attention. The conclusion that the only effective means of preventing war consists in turning directly to the soldiers and inviting them not to shoot—this conclusion is only the direct consequence of a conception which assumes that, as long as soldiers follow the orders of their superiors, everything in society must be all right; which assumes that—to be brief—the whole basis of power and of militarism rests on the blind obedience of the soldier. That such is the prosecution's reasoning follows for example from official statements by the Supreme Commander. On 6 November last year the Emperor claimed that the success of the Greek

¹ This refers to the speech by the Emperor William II in Bremen in 1900 when the famous exhortation to the German troops to behave like Huns was made—a saying not only treasured by German Socialists but also immortalized in common English usage.

armies [in the Balkan war] proves that 'the principles adopted by our general staff and by our troops always guarantee victory'. The general staff with its 'principles' and the soldier with his blind obedience—those are the bases of strategy and the guarantee of victory. It just happens that we Social Democrats do not share this notion. We are of the opinion that the great mass of working people does and must decide about the question of war and peace—that this is not a matter of commands from above and blind obedience below. We think that wars can only come about so long as the working class either supports them enthusiastically because it considers them justified and necessary, or at least accepts them passively. But once the majority of working people come to the conclusion—and it is precisely the task of Social Democracy to arouse this consciousness and to bring them to this conclusion—when, as I say, the majority of people come to the conclusion that wars are nothing but a barbaric, unsocial, reactionary phenomenon, entirely against the interests of the people, then wars will have become impossible even if the soldiers obey their commanders. According to the concept of the prosecution it is the army who makes war; according to us it is the entire population. The latter have to decide whether wars happen or do not happen. The decision whether we shall or shall not have militarism rests with the working people, old and young, men and women—not with that small section of the population temporarily immured in the so-called uniform of the King.

And in saying this I am at the same time in possession of a classic example of how correct this point of view is.

. . . On 17 April 1910 I spoke in front of about 6,000 people in Berlin about suffrage agitation—as you know we were then at the height of this campaign—and I find in the stenographic report of that speech the following words:

. . . We have to rely in the present suffrage struggle as in all political effort to achieve progress in Germany on ourselves alone. But who are 'we'? 'We' are simply the millions of proletarians, men and women, of Prussia and of Germany. But we are more than a mere number. We are the millions of those whose work makes society possible. And it suffices for this simple fact to take root in the consciousness of the broad masses of the working classes for the moment to come when we can show our reactionary rulers once and for all that the world can go on without Junkers and Earls, without councillors and at a pinch even without police; but that it cannot exist for 24 hours if one day the workers withdraw their labour.

You will note that this is a clear expression of our idea of where the real centre of political life lies: in the consciousness, the clearly expressed

will and determination of the working masses. And we see the question of militarism in precisely the same way. Once the working classes determine not to let any more wars take place, then wars will indeed have become impossible . . . I must say I am surprised by the diligence of the prosecution in inferring and constructing out of my own words my supposed idea of how to proceed against war. And yet plenty of better evidence is to hand. We do not carry on our anti-militaristic agitation in secret, in the dark; but with the full glare of publicity. For many decades the struggle against militarism has been the main purpose of our agitation. . . . [Rosa Luxemburg then quoted at length from various resolutions of International Socialist Congresses.]

So now I must ask: do you find, gentlemen, in all these resolutions so much as a single invitation to appear in front of the soldiers and shout: 'Don't shoot'—not because we are afraid of the criminal code; we would be poor creatures if we failed to do something from fear of the consequences, if we left undone something that we considered necessary and useful! The reason we do not say this is because we know that those incarcerated in the so-called King's uniform are only a small part of the working population and once the latter realizes the horrors and uselessness of wars then the soldiers will know automatically what they have to do—without any specific instructions from us.

You see, gentlemen, our agitation against militarism is not as simple and naïve as the prosecution supposes. We have so many means of influence: education of youth—and we carry this on successfully in spite of the difficulties placed in our way—propagation of a militia, mass meetings, street demonstrations . . . look please at Italy. How did the class-conscious workers react to the [colonial] adventure in Tripoli? With a demonstration strike which was highly successful. And German Social Democracy? On 12 November 1911 the workers of Berlin passed a resolution in twelve meetings in which they thanked their Italian comrades for their mass strike.

Ah, the mass strike, says the prosecution. It thinks that it has caught me once more at my dangerous and seditious purposes. The prosecution today made great play with my mass-strike agitation in which it purports to see the grimmest evidence of my blood-thirstiness—the sort of fantasy that can only exist in the mind of a Prussian prosecutor. Sir, if you had the slightest capacity to absorb the Social-Democratic way of thought and its noble purpose in history, I would explain to you as I explained at that meeting that a mass strike can no more be 'made' than a revolution can be made. Mass strikes are a stage in the class war, albeit an essential stage in present developments. Our role, that of Social Democracy, consists entirely in clarifying to the working classes these tendencies of social development, to enable the working

class to be worthy of its tasks as a disciplined, adult, determined, and active mass of people.

You will note that in bringing the menace of the mass strike into its indictment, the prosecution wants to punish me for what are really its own notions and not mine.

Now one more point before I close. The prosecution paid much attention to my small person. In its indictment I have been described as a great danger to the safety of the state. The prosecution could not even resist sinking to the level of gossip and characterized me as 'red Rosa'. They went as far as to call in question my personal honour by suggesting that I would take flight if the court found me guilty. Sir, as regards myself I consider it beneath my dignity to answer these attacks. All I will say is this: you know nothing of Social Democracy. . . . In the course of 1913 many of your colleagues have sweated and laboured to load a total of 60 months in prison on to our journalists alone. Did you hear of a single case in which any one of these sinners fled from fear of punishment? Do you think that this flood of sentences caused a single Social Democrat to have any doubts or to deflect him from his duty? Oh, no, our work mocks at the spider's web of your criminal code, it grows and flowers in spite of all prosecutions.

In closing, one small word with regard to the undeserved attack on me which merely rebounds on the head of its originator.

The prosecutor said—and I have noted his precise words: he asks for my immediate arrest since 'it would be incomprehensible if the accused did not take to flight'. In other words if I, the prosecutor, had to sit a year in prison, then I would take to flight. Sir, I believe you, *you* would run away; a Social Democrat does not. He stands by his deeds and laughs at your judgements.

And now sentence me.

XII

RETURN TO THE OFFENSIVE – THE TRANSITION TO A NEW THEORY

THIS chapter begins with doubts and ends with certainties. It is the story of an oppositional process in the making, during which Rosa Luxemburg moved from doubts about party policy to certainty in her formulation of alternatives. The crystallization of her political position has already been examined; now it is the turn of her ideas and their development. The two cannot of course be separated. Rosa Luxemburg was—or considered herself to be—closely involved in the political process of the day. For the first three years after her return from the east she was more than usually dissociated from the routine politics of the SPD—in part a deliberate withdrawal, but much more the product of a bad attack of political alienation. It was difficult for her to get a grip on the rather featureless surface of events in the period of the Bülow bloc. Only in 1910 did the Prussian suffrage question provide a foothold from which she was able to clamber back to the summit and survey totality once more—so necessary for a Marxist.

Rosa Luxemburg neither was nor pretended to be a profound political thinker. Her efforts to develop a 'system' were—it will be argued—accidental. The underlying harmony, if any, of her political ideas has therefore to be deduced from her comments on the limited political questions of the day. Even when she did set out to undertake a systematic examination of any aspect of politics which interested her, her object always had an immediate rather than a scientific purpose, tactical more than analytical. In all her writings there are only two exceptions: the party-school lecture notes on economics turned into a book; and a curious, almost visionary, inspiration about imperialism. Rosa Luxemburg was a skilful prospector probing for oil—someone who always knew what she was looking for, behind layers of irrelevant matter—rather than

a scientific geologist examining the world's social and political crust without preconceived ideas.

She was a journalist *par excellence*. Much of her writing was commissioned, including some of her most ferocious expressions of dissent. All the same, she often complained to friends that she had no idea what to write in order to fulfil her contracts (and occasionally did fail to fulfil them). But on reading the articles it would be difficult to guess that they did not come straight from the heart. This is particularly noticeable during the period 1907 to 1912, when she was engaged in her research on economics; her willingness to break off for the sake of satisfying newspapers was due to personal friendship (*Gleichheit*) and also to the need to earn her living (*Leipziger Volkszeitung*). From the student's point of view this is a great advantage; there is nothing artificial about any consistency that he can construe from her words. Rosa Luxemburg was only occasionally guilty of the stretching and pulling into which all systematic political theorists are at one time or another tempted.¹ Even Marx had occasionally to try to make things fit, and Lenin frequently; after 1906 Rosa Luxemburg was looking for emphasis rather than consistency and therefore the consistency of her ideas is mostly genuine.

One of the distinguishing features of the Second International—often forgotten today—was its remarkable freedom of conscience. The whole ideology of the Second International was based on it, even though there was frequent grumbling at the long ritual processions of tender consciences. Within broad limits all the Socialist leaders felt free to develop their particular brand of Socialism—for past, present, and future—and to speculate on the nature of society. Although there were violent disagreements these were always brought to open confrontation either in the press or at party or international congresses; however wrong-headed Bernstein and his followers might be considered, no one challenged their right to give public expression to their views—though many challenged their discernment. Dozens of highly individual interpretations of Socialism flourished in this period of speculation and permissive optimism. In modern Marxist terms this meant that the self-consciously subjective element in pre-war Social Democracy was very strong. Today, when any overpowering desire for individual

¹ As with her analysis of French and English conditions during the revisionist debate; see above, pp. 238 ff.

expression normally leads to departure from the orthodox Marxist camp—or liquidation—it is difficult to recreate the atmosphere of the highly Girondin Second International.

Such an atmosphere—and only such—provided a viable habitat for Rosa Luxemburg. Most of the leaders of the Second International, however freely they expressed their views, made some kind of division between ideas and action, theory and practice—indeed, the history of the Second International might well be written in terms of the conflict between freedom of expression and the minimal demands of organization. You could take your pick. Thus Rosa had little sympathy for the exigencies of large-scale organization. The particular discipline of the Polish party differed both from the tight conspiratorial loyalty of the Bolsheviks and the democratically masked oligarchy which existed in the SPD.¹ Her temperament was at odds with the slow formalities of democratic control and with the processes of administrative organization and method. Instead Rosa considered temperament to be the most essential ingredient for successful politics. Her search for a policy with which to confront the executive of the German party was therefore highly ‘temperamental’. Any strategy advocated by her would necessarily contain a strong element of temperament—would be voluntaristic, self-orientated, active. After her death Communist analysts accused her of advocating a theory of spontaneity—and at the same time of passionate reliance on the *objective* element; we shall have to examine whether this apparent contradiction between two such opposing elements can be resolved (and if her detractors resolved it) and whether the accusation is justified in the first place. And especially will we have to get to grips with the odd paradox of a theory of mass spontaneity based on a strongly articulated subjective element.

Thus the development of her political ideas between 1906 and 1914 can only be understood if three factors are borne in mind: Rosa Luxemburg’s personality—as a positive element in her activities and not merely as a restraining dead weight; her interest in political activity rather than theoretical speculation; and finally the fact that she was politically isolated during this period and in search of a thoroughly different policy with which to confront the SPD authorities. We must distinguish between cause and effect. Her isolation did not stem from the confrontation of one set of

¹ The classical analysis of the latter is in Robert Michels, *Political Parties*.

ideas with another, but rather from an increasing lack of sympathy for a whole outlook which created the *conditions* for her oppositional *ideas* to evolve. The unsatisfactory outlook of her opponents had thus to be systematized before it could be attacked. In the process much of the argument on both sides came to be based on explicit assumptions about the other's point of view, the correctness of which was strenuously denied by both parties.¹

As soon as Rosa Luxemburg left Warsaw for the comparative quiet of Finland in the summer of 1906, she became anxious to interpret the Russian revolution for the SPD. She had long been the main channel of understanding between Russian events and Germany, and in the relationship between the SPD and the RSDRP; though since January 1905 the balance had tilted against Germany. Throughout 1905 she had tried to interpret Russian events to German audiences, both in the press and at public meetings, as something enviable.² The fact that the Hamburg provincial organization of the SPD had commissioned a pamphlet from her provided an ideal opportunity. She outlined her task quite clearly at the beginning. 'Practically all existing writings and views on the question of the mass strike in the international Socialist movement date from the time before the Russian revolution, the first historical experiment on a bigger scale with this weapon. This explains why they are mostly out of date.'³

The first thing was to wrest the mass strike from its more or less exclusive possession by the anarchists—at least in the eyes of its opponents. Rosa Luxemburg was well aware of the strong reservations in the German party on this account. Her rescue bid was based on two main propositions: (1) The development in the organization of the working classes which made them powerful enough to undertake mass strikes. The notion of the mass strike thus ceased to be a chimera of 'revolutionary romanticism', a compound of 'thin air and the mere goodwill and courage to save humanity', and

¹ A detailed examination of the extent to which the interpretation by one group did justice to the other's policy is outside the scope of this book. Schorske is illuminating on this point. But misunderstandings were a chronic feature of the Second International as a whole and of the SPD in particular; between advocates and opponents, no agreement could ever be reached as to the meaning of any policy, or the intentions of those proposing it.

² See above, pp. 295–8.

³ 'Massenstreik, Partei und Gewerkschaften', Hamburg 1906. See *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, p. 410. References to this work will be made as 'Massenstreik' and are all taken from Vol. IV of *Collected Works*.

became a *practical* proposition.¹ (2) The increasing means of political as opposed to mere economic activity in Socialist parties. This was based on the confluence of the two trends, with the political aspect being definitely the higher form of struggle; wage strikes were no longer 'the only possible direct action of the masses and the only possible revolutionary struggle arising out of trade-union activities'.²

None the less, the mass strike was just one weapon—albeit a very important one—in the arsenal of Social Democracy, and definitely not the final act in the overturn of society. It was a political weapon, rather than a purely economic one with incidental or miraculous political consequences. Finally, since it was not an end in itself, it could not be 'planned' like an apocalyptic upheaval.

The difference between Rosa Luxemburg's Socialist mass strike and the anarchosyndicalist conception seemed very obvious to her; she did not think it necessary in her pamphlet to devote much argument to distinguishing between them. Denouncing the anarchists had anyhow become a formal but meaningless ritual. She merely dismissed the anarchists as 'the ideological placard for the counter-revolutionary *Lumpenproletariat*' whose 'historical role is now finished beyond any doubt'.³ But she had later to revert again and again to the substantial differences between her conception and that of the anarchists, especially when addressing trade-union audiences; what was obvious to her was not in the least obvious to others.⁴ At the 1910 party congress at Magdeburg she was still inveighing against the notion that 'one has only to speak of the mass strike at meetings or in the press for it to break out overnight, whether convenient or not . . . corresponding as it does to the anarchist conception of the mass strike which has long been buried'.⁵ Even at the 1913 party congress Rosa Luxemburg was still preoccupied with the defence of her mass-strike concept against the attempts of her opponents to call her an anarchist. What Comrade Scheidemann has spoken against as the alleged conception of those who defend the mass strike is in fact nothing but a caricature of the real opinions which we represent.'⁶

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 414.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 413.

⁴ See her speech to the congress of the Socialist Trade Unions at Hagen, 1 October 1910, in *Der Propagandist*, 1930, Nos. 10 and 11, reprinted in *Selected Works*, Vol. II, pp. 358–76. Unfortunately the section of her speech dealing with the anarchist conception of the mass strike has been omitted in the reprint.

⁵ *Protokoll . . . 1910*, p. 429.

⁶ *Protokoll . . . 1913*, p. 291.

It does not matter whether Rosa Luxemburg's description of anarchist ideas about the mass strike was correct. She was not 'defending' the mass strike against the anarchists but against the party authorities; 'anarchism' for present purposes was simply tar with which one opposing side bespattered the other. Anarchists were universally condemned by all shades of opinion in the SPD and any examination of the extent to which they did justice to anarchist ideas in the process becomes pointless. This of course pushes aside without answering the valid and wider question of a possible connection between Rosa Luxemburg's mass strike and that of the anarchists—irrespective of her fervent denials. Such a connection may be wholly unconscious and objective—right outside the personality of the contestants, and capable of discovery only at an advanced level of abstraction.¹ For the moment we will grant Rosa Luxemburg's postulate—that the mass strike could and should be integrated into the chain of development of Marxist class conflict. The proper conception of the mass strike—her own—was essentially the product of a recent historical experience, the events in Russia between 1905 and 1907. The best way to understand Rosa Luxemburg's views is to consider them from two aspects, the particular and the general.

In the particular aspect, the mass strike began as a large-scale withdrawal of labour, which upset the stability of the economy and the society which depended on it. But the purpose of the strike was not the negotiation of better conditions; in fact it had nothing to do with conditions of work at all. Rather it was a pre-condition for further action. The negative act of ceasing to work drew into the pool of revolutionary reserves vast armies of people, whose energies were

¹ In spite of my repeated self-denying ordinance against any objective confrontation of the ideas of Rosa Luxemburg with those of the relevant anarchists, her preoccupation with the mass strike must necessarily evoke Georges Sorel. He too was primarily concerned with the moral panacea of action, and with the general strike as its symbol. But for him the general strike was the specific apex of a general concept of action, while Rosa Luxemburg saw it as an epiphenomenon; limited in *time* to a stage of class conflict, limited in *scope* to what it could achieve on its own—merely the tactic objectively demanded by the present. It is in a negative sense that Rosa Luxemburg was probably much closer to Sorel and his contemptuous lampooning of the optimistic latterday Marxist *epigoni*.

In a wider, more abstract, context it may safely be admitted that there is an intellectual and psychological connection between the West-European Marxist Left and the more sophisticated anarchists: in their identification of morality with action, their resistance to theories of specific organization. Both reflect the general tremor of action doctrines pulsing through Europe at the time. But the teleological differences between them remain almost unbridgeable.

now available for a more direct revolutionary purpose. Rosa Luxemburg was not concerned with the technique of organizing or starting a mass strike—the how, when, how much, how long. These problems would settle themselves. It was sufficient to point to the mounting wave of industrial strikes in Russia from the turn of the century as generating the subsequent revolutionary period with its higher form of political mass strikes. As we have seen, Rosa Luxemburg was particularly concerned that the energies and thoughts of Social Democracy should not be expended on technical problems. She repeatedly emphasized that a mass strike was both a symptom and a typical product of a revolutionary period. Consequently mass strikes could never be ‘made’. Neither the determination of the most powerful executive nor the greatest goodwill on the part of the masses could ‘make’ a mass strike—unless objective circumstances demanded it. With this assertion the anarchists’ miraculous act of will was left far behind. So was the notion of the mass strike as a lucky ‘find’ for the armoury of Social Democracy just at the moment when—according to Rosa Luxemburg’s friend Henriette Roland-Holst—Socialist technology had been at a loss for new weapons. ‘If the mass strike signifies not just a single act but a whole period of class struggle, and if such a period is the same as a revolutionary period, it will become clear that a mass strike cannot be conjured as an act of will even if the decision came from the highest level of the strongest Social-Democratic party.’¹

It will be seen that Rosa Luxemburg’s analysis of the mass strike as a particular event is largely negative. She was much more concerned with correcting other people’s notions than establishing a technique or classification of her own. Consequently her idea of what the mass strike was ‘like’ has to be deduced from the historical examples she cited and not from any detailed description of the event itself.

She was much more interested in the general aspect. The first problem was to integrate the mass strike into the wider process of revolution. Its inception and use marked a higher stage of action than the individual and unconnected strikes and actions that preceded it. The mass strike was essentially a collective noun for a whole series of activities—collective not only in terminology, but because the various processes and actions which the term covered

¹ ‘Massenstreik’, p. 443.

were genuinely linked by intricate causalities. For the first time, hitherto separate forms of struggle were welded into one compact and unified whole.

The mass strike as we see it in the Russian revolution . . . reflects all phases of the political and economic struggle and all stages and periods of the revolution. Its use, its effects, its reasons for coming about are in a constant state of flux . . . political and economic strikes, united and partial strikes, defensive strikes and combat strikes, general strikes of individual sections of industry and general strikes in entire cities, peaceful wage strikes and street battles, uprisings with barricades—all run together and run alongside each other, get in each other's way, overlap each other; a perpetually moving and changing sea of phenomena. And the case of these manifestations becomes clear; they do not arise out of the mass strike itself, but from the political and social power factors in the revolution. The mass strike is only a form of revolutionary struggle.¹

Rosa Luxemburg particularly stressed that this compound was greater than the sum of its components because the confluence took place at a stage of history higher than that in which the phenomena existed discretely. She called it 'a collective concept covering a period of years, even decades, in the class struggle'. But at the same time she did not merely move the arena of struggle from the economic to the political field. The mass strike was essentially a process of interaction between political and economic activity, with one fertilizing the other. 'Every political class action . . . tears hitherto untouched sections of the proletariat out of their immobility, and this awakening *naturally* finds expression in *stormy* economic struggles . . . since these are closest to hand.'² The emphasis, however, had to be on 'stormy'—that is, of equal weight with the new intensity of political action. There had to be a causal link between one and the other—not merely coincidence. Rosa Luxemburg thus neatly (and probably unconsciously) pre-empted the discussions between Plekhanov and Lenin on the one hand and the so-called 'economists' on the other. Instead of opposing pre-occupation with economic activity by emphasis on political struggle, she combined the two. The only criterion was causality and heightened intensity.³

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 437–8.

² *Ibid.*, p. 442—my italics.

³ This did not mean that she regarded party and trade unions as being equally important. There was no fiercer opponent of trade-union parity than Rosa Luxemburg—indeed she opposed the creation of independent legal trade unions in Poland after 1907 (see below, pp. 575–6). But where Lenin equated

So much for the 'input' into mass strikes. At the other end, 'output', their integration into the historical process of proletarian class struggle was made even more emphatic. The connection between mass strike and revolution was not left to inference but earnestly analysed and described. Nothing was, or remotely could be, achieved by any mass strike on its own. In marshalling her Russian evidence, Rosa Luxemburg clearly indicated the presence of the next stage in embryo. Thus in December 1905 the third general mass strike had broken out in the Russian empire. 'This time the course of the action was quite different from the two previous occasions. The political action no longer gave way to an economic one as in January 1905 but equally it failed to achieve a quick victory as in October. . . . As a result of the logical and internal development of events, the mass strike this time gave way to an open uprising, to armed street fights and barricades in Moscow.'¹ The conclusion she drew from this was that the mass strike, even at its most pervasive and diverse, could achieve nothing if it were not hooked on to the next stage of the revolutionary process. Revolution had at least to be in the air even if it was not actually imminent. Once again, however, Rosa Luxemburg chose to illustrate this with a negative example as well as a positive one.

Only in the stormy atmosphere of a revolutionary period can every partial little clash between labour and capital build up to a general explosion. In Germany the most violent and brutal encounters took place year in year out between workers and entrepreneurs without the struggle passing beyond the limits of the town or industry concerned. . . . None of these cases turn into any general class action and even if they were to lead to any individual mass strikes with some undoubted political colouring, they still would not cause any general thunderstorm. The general strike of the Dutch railwaymen—which bled to death in spite of much public sympathy because the rest of the Dutch proletariat remained immobile—is a significant example.²

It is obvious that all this was based on a particular view of Socialist revolution (to be examined later) which differed sharply trade unions with the economic struggle—who else was there to lead it?—and relegated both to the world of primitive politics, Rosa Luxemburg's experience of the essentially conservative German trade unions made her separate economic struggle from trade-union control. This important distinction was never made explicit.

¹ 'Massenstreik', p. 436. Rosa Luxemburg identified three different results from the three waves of mass strikes. In January 1905 the strikes following on the massacre of 22 January petered out into individual local and largely economic strikes. In October their renewed outbreak succeeded politically in the Tsar's manifesto. In December they led to the armed uprising in Moscow.

² 'Massenstreik', p. 442.

from the ideas put forward by almost everyone else at the time, not only in Germany but throughout the Second International, the Russians included.¹ What was more immediately relevant was the role prescribed in all this to Social Democracy, the advance guard of the proletariat. It was this which was to be developed in the course of her battle with the leadership of the SPD during the next few years.

The leadership of a mass strike rests with Social Democracy and its responsible leaders in quite a different sense. Instead of racking their brains about the technical problems, the mechanics of a mass strike, it is Social Democracy that must take over the *political* leadership even in the midst of a revolutionary period. The slogans, the direction of the battle, the tactics of the political struggle have to be organized in such a way that every phase and every moment in the struggle is related to the existing and already realized achievements of the proletariat and that this is always taken into account when the plan of campaign is made so that the tactics of Social Democracy . . . must never fall *below* the level of the genuinely existing power possibilities, but must always be in advance of them—this is the most important task of the ‘leadership’ during any period of mass strikes. And it is such leadership which automatically settles technical problems as well. . . .²

This statement was almost a complete preview of Rosa Luxemburg’s later elaboration of the function of Socialist leaders, both in her criticism of the Bolshevik revolution and when she tried to apply her views in practice during the German revolution. But here again we should not look too far forward. Her definition of the tasks of Social Democracy was incidental; there still appeared every prospect that it might come to express the common consensus in the SPD and not merely the views of an isolated and increasingly disaffected outsider. We shall examine Rosa Luxemburg’s ideas on the role of the leadership more closely as they developed in opposition to the practices of her German and Russian opponents.

The emphasis on the concept of the mass strike and the historical analysis of the events in Russia led to a distinct mass-strike ‘doctrine’—a collection of ideas sufficiently important and systematic to take their rightful place in the pyramid of Socialist thought. The fact that we must induce many of her ideas from negative assertions—what the mass strike was not—fails to deprive her doctrine of validity or vigour. Nothing makes a set of ideas so syste-

¹ See below, Chapter XVI, pp. 701–5, 728–36.

² ‘Massenstreik’, p. 445.

matic as its defence against detractors; many ideas have grown into doctrines only because they were systematically attacked and therefore systematically defended. This applies to Rosa Luxemburg's mass-strike doctrine too, as it later developed under attack. Yet all the important elements of the doctrine were already contained in the original mass-strike pamphlet; there was little changed, let alone new, in later elaborations. It was an undisciplined pamphlet, 'spontaneous' as so much of Rosa Luxemburg's writing, and covering much more ground than the terms of reference set by those who originally commissioned the work, or for that matter by the author herself. This excess of thought, always bursting out of its allotted limits, is a typical feature of Rosa Luxemburg's writing, and makes the analysis of her work more interesting but also more difficult. Rosa herself never considered her writings on the mass strike as any separate or systematic doctrine and would probably have resented any such suggestion. She analysed what she saw—and she always saw in it only part of a larger process. Her emphasis was not scientific, but shaped politically to convince others—to get them to act, not to create concepts for historians.

This, then, was the mass-strike doctrine as it stood at the end of 1906, the 'pure' doctrine, still unadulterated by the special emphases of later polemics. Half way through the pamphlet, tucked away among a lot of explanation, came the crux—the purpose of the whole exercise.

The question arises how far all these lessons which can be drawn from the Russian mass strikes can be applied to Germany. The social and political circumstances, the entire history and nature of the working-class movement in Germany and Russia, are wholly different. At first sight the inner laws of the Russian mass strikes which we have elaborated often appear to be the product of specific Russian conditions which can have no bearing on the German proletariat.¹

The rest of the work was precisely concerned with applying the lessons of Russia to Germany, in the form of general propositions about the nature of class war. Briefly, what were these lessons?

1. The indivisibility of the proletarian class struggle—which meant that by definition Russian lessons became applicable to Germany or anywhere else.

Clearly from any point of view it would be totally mistaken to regard the Russian revolution as a beautiful spectacle, as something specifically

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 446.

Russian. . . . It is vital that the German workers should regard the Russian revolution as *their own affair*, not only in the sense of any international class solidarity with the Russian proletariat, but as a chapter of their own social and political history.¹

2. The 'leapfrog' effect by which the demands and the achievements of the Russian proletariat caught up with, and even overtook, those of better organized working classes like the German. It should be noted that apart from postulating this leapfrog effect, Rosa Luxemburg also specifically queried some of the assumptions of German 'superiority'.

The contrast [between Russia and Germany] becomes even smaller when we examine more closely the actual standard of living of the German working classes. . . . Are there not in Germany very dark corners in working-class existence, where the warming light of trade-union activity hardly penetrates; large segments which have not yet been able to raise themselves out of the most elementary slavery through the simplest forms of economic struggle?²

3. The inversion of the accepted relationship between organization and action. Rosa Luxemburg postulated the important idea that good organization does not precede action but is the product of it; organization grows much more satisfactorily out of struggle than in periods of peaceful disinterest.

A rigid mechanical bureaucratic conception will only recognize struggle as the product of a certain level of organization. On the contrary, dialectical developments in real life create organization as a product of struggle.³

¹ Ibid., p. 460. This was clearly a necessary step in any doctrine of permanent revolution. Rosa Luxemburg went at least part of the way with Trotsky. But Trotsky's internal causality—his scientific 'must'—remained for Rosa Luxemburg a strongly urged 'should' and 'ought'. She never passed from political analogy to scientific (and therefore obligatory) causation. As will be seen below (p. 567), she and most of her friends had strong reservations about the validity of the full doctrine of permanent revolution. I cannot agree with the assertion—stated but never analysed—of Trotsky's most recent biographer that 'Rosa Luxemburg, representing the Polish Social-Democratic party, endorsed the theory of permanent revolution' (Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, London 1954, p. 178)—even though Trotsky himself made the same claim, albeit long after the actual events (L. Trotsky, *My Life*, London 1930, p. 176). See also above, p. 8. The affinities between them were implicit; publicly both Rosa Luxemburg—and Leo Jogiches—emphasized that they did not accept the validity of Trotsky's theory.

² 'Massenstreik', p. 448. This critical examination of the validity of the claims of German working-class superiority will be examined in more detail later.

³ Ibid., p. 453. This of course is the crux of the organization-as-process and spontaneity accusation against her. For discussion see above, pp. 286–94, and below, pp. 506 ff.; also Chapter XVIII.

Rosa Luxemburg in each case cited evidence from both the Russian and German working-class movements in support of her conclusions. The strategy was still 'in the making'. All three of her general conclusions—as opposed to the mass-strike doctrine and its place in the development of Socialist strategy—were not only based on her recently acquired experiences in Russia, but on well-known and—as far as she was concerned—lamentable features of German Socialism. Even so, she over-estimated the momentary amount of revolutionary energy in Germany. The atmosphere had already been damped down in the first six months of 1906, while she was in Warsaw and Finland. There was thus no means of generating pressure against those she castigated as obstacles to a sound revolutionary policy—the trade-union leaders, especially those who had attacked her at the Jena congress of 1905. This was the only specifically polemical part of her pamphlet. She accused the union leaders of indiscipline towards the authority of the SPD, of blocking the policy of the party; in the process she emphasized once more the unchallengeable sovereignty of the political party over the trade unions. Her historical analysis of their relationship was designed to show that the trade unions were not only the product of Social Democracy, that their rapid growth could only be the result of the party's creation of a suitable political atmosphere, but that they could not exist independently. But this analysis was out of date, an exercise in constitutional law which bore little relation to reality—an exercise none the less to which Rosa Luxemburg was at times curiously prone.¹ The disagreement between the leadership of the trade unions and the SPD had been part of the revisionist controversy and had long been quietly buried; the secret agreement in early 1906 merely confirmed an existing power relationship which became obvious when next the mass strike became an actual political problem.

If the pamphlet was aimed against the trade-union leaders, whom was it intended to persuade? Almost all Rosa Luxemburg's political writings were like a compass, turning freely on the springs of argument with one end of the axis accusing and the other persuad-

¹ This occasional lapse into the argumentative style of a small-town Jewish lawyer stands out noticeably in her work. The best and most frequent example is her treatment of the 1905 mass-strike resolution at the Jena congress ('but it clearly says in the text . . .'). Another example is the strange passage in her speech to the founding congress of the KPD at the end of 1918, where she hit upon the extraordinary idea of indicting the SPD government of Ebert for breach of the German criminal code!

ing. In this case the object of her persuasion was the 1906 party congress. By emphasizing the dominance of party over trade unions, Rosa Luxemburg hoped to make effective what she believed might be commonly held ground in the party about the mass strike. If the trade-union leaders could be publicly out-voted she believed that their membership might become more receptive to the party's mass-strike agitation—with or without the support of the leadership. Again she assumed a willingness on the party's side to agitate which did not in fact exist.

To the same political purpose must be ascribed the occasional contradictions, exaggerations, and distortions in her pamphlet. There was for instance the question of armed uprising which had necessarily been raised in her description of events in Russia. This she presented as a possible next stage in the historical process of social conflict. 'The internal logic of events transformed the mass strike into an open uprising on this occasion, an armed street fight with barricades. The Moscow December days are the high point of the gradient of political action and mass-strike movement, and thus concluded the first busy year of the revolution.'¹ But this was Russian euphoria. When it came to applying this experience to Germany, Rosa Luxemburg altered her interpretation—to quieten the party leaders' well-known fear of bloodshed.

In previous revolutions . . . a short battle at the barricades was the suitable form of revolutionary struggle. Today, as the working classes educate themselves from their own revolutionary efforts . . . the mass strike is a much more suitable instrument for recruiting the broadest sections of the proletariat for action. . . . The former features of the bourgeois revolutions, the battle at the barricades, the open conflict with the armed force of the State, is in today's revolution only a final and short phase, only the last resort in a whole process of proletarian mass struggle.²

For similar purposes of persuasion, she deliberately over-emphasized the element of the spontaneous. '[This] plays as we have seen a very large role in all the Russian mass strikes without any exception, both as a forward-moving and also as a restraining element.'³ This emphasis had a twofold purpose: to undermine the trade-union bureaucracy and at the same time allay the fears that the carefully built organizations might be destroyed in the course of action. Hence the reference to the spontaneous element as 'both

¹ 'Massenstreik', p. 436.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 458–9.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 444.

...a forward-moving and also... a restraining element'. Emphatically the party was still seen at this stage as synonymous with the masses; it was the party which had to provide the necessary spirit of movement to the static organization mania of the trade unions. Rosa Luxemburg went a long way to stress the difference of attitude between party and trade unions—which she condemned as 'German Social Democracy's worst fault'. In postulating the antithesis unions/party, she attempted no distinction *within* the SPD between leaders and masses. The word 'executive' appeared nowhere in the pamphlet, and all references to the party were simply made in terms of 'Social Democracy'. In 1906 spontaneity was thus shorthand for Social Democracy, while immobility meant the trade unions.

In view of later events, the terminology is important. This indiscriminate use of 'Social Democracy' and 'masses'—the former being no more than 'the most conscious advance guard' of the latter, but essentially part and parcel of it—contained the germs of future misunderstanding. Either Rosa Luxemburg's view could be taken literally—and must then lead to just that doctrine of confused spontaneity of which she was later accused by the heirs of Lenin's highly 'deliberate' Bolsheviki, for whom spontaneity really meant confusion—or a closer differentiation between leaders, party members, and masses would have at some stage to be made, distinctions which acknowledged, or empirically observed, differences and which could be underpinned with theoretical explanations. We shall see how the notion of spontaneity developed in Rosa Luxemburg's thinking; how the concept of party was broken down first into leaders and masses, and finally into leaders against masses; and how dissatisfaction with the leaders brought about a reliance on the masses which trapped Rosa Luxemburg in the terminological blind alley of spontaneity—a blind alley in which her later Communist detractors were only too willing to wall her up. But the trap was one of words, not meanings.¹

'Mass Strike, Party and Trade Unions' was also a good example of the methods and objects of Marxist political analysis as expounded by Rosa Luxemburg, and can be used briefly to illustrate these.

For Rosa, 'artificial' or 'construction' were among the dirtiest

¹ It might help if at this stage the difference between on the one hand the so-called doctrine of spontaneity as still attacked by the Soviet leadership and Rosa Luxemburg's formulation on the other, were made clear. The Communist notion of spontaneity implies that the 'spontaneous' appearance of wishes and ideas in the masses must prevail against and govern the rational policy of the

of words. During the revisionist debate she again and again accused her opponents of inflating convenient but isolated facts, of making arbitrary constructions out of causations 'conjured up out of the blue sky'. (They of course accused her of the same thing; philosophic flexibility versus practical arbitrariness was the common coin of political debate in the SPD.) Any valid analysis had to be based on real life, and real life was history, and only history could be total. Whenever Rosa Luxemburg wanted to illuminate any particular aspect of Socialist policy, she always began with an historical analysis of how it came to be there in the first place, and where it fitted into the total pattern. She believed that the process of history was absolute; enlightenment consisted in discovering its elements and emphasizing their relative importance and connection. This method was and of course still is common to all Marxists—though it has become an increasingly formal exercise in Russia since the early 1930s, at least as far as genuine historical analysis is concerned. Since the beginning of the nineteenth cen-

party. This of course runs counter to the whole concept of party control on which the government of the U.S.S.R. is based and is as much anathema to them as ever. In 1958 Khrushchev again declared roundly: 'Spontaneity, comrades, is the deadliest enemy of all' (speech to Central Committee of the CPSU, 19 December 1958; *Plenum Tsentralnogo Komiteta KPSU 15-19 dekabrya 1958 goda, stenograficheskii otchet*, Moscow 1958, p. 452).

But Rosa Luxemburg never propagated such a general doctrine of spontaneity. First she postulated mass action as an essential feature of Social-Democratic activity. Nobody would quarrel with that. Later, when it became clear that the party leadership would not encourage mass action, she came to examine the *limits of the powers* of the leadership if opposed to the willingness of the masses to act. Her case for mass control and supremacy was based on the existence of unsatisfactory leaders—unsatisfactory in specific and fully documented ways. Third, and most important, the spontaneous power of the masses was limited to a special case, that of action. The argument is primarily about action, and only incidentally about sovereignty.

It might be argued that in that case all that had to be done was democratic removal of the leadership by the masses and replacement by leaders more in tune with the political tasks of Social Democracy. As we shall see, the full elaboration of Rosa Luxemburg's doctrine *in the German party* (the whole argument only makes sense in this context) coincided with the outbreak of the war, when party democracy was suspended. Rosa's effort during the war was specifically aimed at removing the membership from the control of the SPD executive.

In short, the concept of Luxemburgist spontaneity is an elaboration and extension by others of certain notions expressed by her. To some extent it is a misrepresentation. As we shall see, her ideas developed slowly on this point; as she became more disaffected with the policy of the SPD leadership, so she stressed the concept of the masses against it. But this concept was indissolubly wedded to action. In her view supremacy of the masses over the leadership made sense only when the former favoured action and the latter immobility.

It will be helpful if this analysis is borne in mind during the examination of Rosa Luxemburg's developing ideas both before, during, and after the war.

tury—Burke as well as Chateaubriand—history on the whole has ceased to be on the side of the defenders of the social order—they have adopted philosophy instead—and has become the weapon *par excellence* of the forces of onslaught. Today the Russians, too, are in part defenders against the Chinese and their historical battering-ram. Rosa Luxemburg was, by temperament, above all an attacker; frequent reference to history was congenial to her. Whenever the need arose she would immediately rush down to the stream of history with her bucket and scoop up a good-sized sample to carry away. If this showed what she wanted then it could be assumed that her readers or listeners could not fail to be convinced. The mass-strike pamphlet demonstrated that the more elaborate the historical foundation, the greater the importance and present relevance of the subject.

Rosa Luxemburg did not of course invent or discover the mass strike in a Social-Democratic context—and originally the mass strike was anyhow not a Socialist notion at all. The honour of developing it first as a Socialist concept probably belongs to Parvus who had already juggled with it at the end of the nineteenth century and—as so often happened with him—had abandoned it after dazzling his audience with it for a while. In 1904, following on the recent events in Belgium and in sympathy with the heightening political and economic agitation in Germany, *Neue Zeit* under Kautsky's guidance had initiated a general discussion of the subject. Rosa's particular contribution was, as we have seen, the broadness and flexibility of her concept. She was the first to allot it a reasoned place in the arsenal of Socialist weapons, and to analyse its nature in a new and Hegelian manner: not as a limited technical feat, but as a focal point of confluence for previous techniques and simultaneously as a vent for stronger action in future. Her notion was that of a social funnel, or better still an acceleration chamber, in which different elements were fused and their speed of impact heightened. The technical discussion—how and under what circumstances to organize it, when to apply it and against whom—became secondary, if not irrelevant. Too much detailed discussion of ways and means generally killed the vital spontaneous and dialectic element. It was the negation of the procedural aspect which most immediately distinguished her analysis from that of almost all the other commentators.

One aspect of Rosa Luxemburg's historical argument was

especially important and provocative. Her historical reference was largely Russian. The mass-strike lesson to be learnt was above all a Russian lesson. This was no accident. But the idea of putting forward Russia as a revolutionary example to Germany happened to constitute a complete dismantling of the natural order of things. It also meant a reversal of the widely accepted direction in which Socialist advice had hitherto always flowed.

It has already been emphasized that the SPD, with much justification, considered itself the most progressive party in the Second International. With the duty of setting an example and providing a lot of money to other parties there went the usual privilege of giving good advice. In 1905, even after the revolution had broken out, the SPD leadership had made another effort to unite the warring factions in the RSDRP in order that they might do justice to the events in their own country. Although the advice was not taken—then or later—neither the Russians nor anyone else questioned the right of the Germans to give it. The German party leaders were very conscious of their international role. In this distribution service of privileged advice, Rosa Luxemburg was an enthusiastic participant. Her letters and articles on Russian questions before 1905 all preached the German example of unity to the divided and cantankerous Russians and gave them the benefit of her experience of six years in Germany.

Suddenly all this was changed. Russia had become the eye of the revolutionary storm, with Germany merely the periphery; the cyclone of cause and effect was blowing the other way about. Rosa Luxemburg now gave advice to the Germans based on her Russian experience. At first this was no more than a change on the revolutionary weather map, the centre of pressure moving from west to east. As yet no judgement on parties or policies was intended. But the 'leapfrog' concept of historical development implied that in some respects at least the Russian masses were in advance of their German brethren. Rosa Luxemburg did not suggest that this was due to the merits of Russian Social Democracy, or that the latter was in any way superior to the SPD, but equally she did not dissociate the Russian party from the revolutionary successes of the workers. In fact she deliberately avoided any reference to Russian party questions in her German writings at the time, probably to avoid causing embarrassment.¹ Nevertheless the very idea of learn-

¹ See below, pp. 558, 581.

ing Russian lessons was greatly resented by the Germans, not only by the party authorities but even by fellow radicals like Ledebour. It was not only a matter of comparing the SPD and all its achievements with the notoriously disorganized and ineffective Russian Social Democracy. According to history, buttressed with innumerable quotations from Marx and Engels, Russia was the mainspring of European reaction—with Germany and its growing Socialist party unquestionably the centre of future revolution. The German Socialists were well able to distinguish between imperial Germany—their deadly enemy—and the Germany of the SPD, two irreconcilables set on collision course. But this ability to distinguish two different and hostile worlds stopped at the ethnic border. The German view of Russia was confused and contradictory, but the stranglehold of Tsarist autocracy was proverbial and the notion of Russia as the epicentre of European revolution nothing less than laughable. When Rosa Luxemburg put forward precisely this interpretation in her mass-strike pamphlet the reaction of her readers varied from sceptical disbelief to nationalist outrage. However heterogeneous and divided one's own society may seem, that of other nations always appears simple and monolithic by comparison, except perhaps to the English—and this foreshortening of vision affects Socialists as much as anyone else; perhaps more so, since facile use of Marxist class analysis can lead to grotesque oversimplification of personally unknown and unstudied societies, and yet at the same time can destroy the inhibitions of inexperience and ignorance.¹

Thus the feeling of German superiority in the SPD was a compound of national arrogance and revolutionary pride. Consequently the left wing of the SPD came to be as strongly anti-Russian as the executive, even though with the former the emphasis was on the historical merits of German Socialism as against the lamentable dissensions and weakness in the Russian movement. The Russians themselves, with all their pre-war humility and deference towards the SPD, were by no means free from 'national' revolutionary pride, particularly after the success of the October revolution. In the plenum of the RSDRP Central Committee in January 1918, the question of war or peace with Germany was under discussion and Bukharin pleaded for revolutionary war to assist the German

¹ For an illuminating comment on the results of this attitude in 1914 see Robert Michels, *Political Parties*, p. 395.

and Austrian proletariat. He was answered by Sokolnikov in the following words: 'History proves without a doubt that the revolutionary salt of the earth is slowly moving eastwards; in the 18th century it was France, in the 19th Germany, now it is Russia.'¹ This proposition, which was later wrongly called 'revolutionary egoism', was supported by Stalin—and served as an early justification for the policy of Socialism in one country. In fact it was nothing of the kind. Like Rosa Luxemburg long before the war, a number of Bolsheviks now accepted the Russian revolutionary primacy, not as a result of their October revolution but of the process of historical shift eastwards of the revolutionary epicentre in different periods. It was, however, much easier for Sokolnikov and Stalin to express such views in January 1918 than it was for Rosa Luxemburg in 1906 and 1907, when German revolutionary predominance was still unchallenged.

The distorted yet strongly held German view of Russia had far-reaching consequences. As will be seen, it enabled the SPD to persuade itself that the First World War was in part a German crusade of progress against Russian reaction, and therefore a reason for Socialists to support the German government. Objectively, the Tsarist government was 'worse'. Later it helped to form the German Socialist view of the Bolsheviks as the typical product of Russian backwardness and savagery; the Kautsky theory that conditions in Russia were not ripe to support a mass Socialist movement, let alone Socialist rule. Rosa Luxemburg, too, reaped the harvest from her analysis of the 1905 revolution. She had always been accused by her enemies, within and without the party, of being an 'Easterner'; this view was now reinforced by her open espousal of the supremacy of revolutionary events in Russia. By 1914 a whole section of the SPD, many of them left-wingers, thought that she was nothing less than a Russian patriot.²

Such a view was not entirely without foundation. She was not of course in any sense a Russian patriot, nor were her political methods consciously pro-Russian. The fascination of Russia was largely a palliative for present discontents. For Rosa was going through a

¹ *Protokoly Tsentralnogo Komiteta RSDRP, avgust 1917-fevral' 1918*, Moscow 1929, p. 206.

² See below, p. 615, note 2. Cf. Kautsky's considered verdict on this problem, written as part of a tribute to his friend and enemy Rosa Luxemburg in 1919: 'I take my conception of theory from the French, German and Anglo-Saxon experience rather than the Russian; with Rosa Luxemburg it was the other way round.' (*Der Sozialist*, 24 January 1919, Vol. V, No. 4, p. 55.)

strong anti-German phase—an emotional revulsion against the German mentality and all things German. A growing sense of unease corroded her political outlook and her whole approach to German Socialism. Though she tried to discipline this feeling in public, and documented her criticisms of the SPD with strictly relevant German examples, there can be no doubt that the sense of personal disaffection lay only just below the surface of her personality and sharpened her onslaught on the SPD establishment after 1910. Nerve-ends frayed by the leadenness of official routine: this was Rosa's political culture; the all-pervading yet elusive context of evaluations in which political action takes place, and which alone makes it comprehensible.

The extent to which Rosa Luxemburg reversed her political thrust as a result of the Russian revolution is crucially important. Most of her writings before 1905 were in defence of the SPD as it was—in her view—established: emphasis on the correct traditional tactic against various attempts to amend it; emphasis on unity and cohesion of doctrine against fragmentation by individual theories and local preferences. The accepted dogma in the Second International was that only a united, well-organized mass party could be a progressive spearhead of Socialism. It behoved small, divided, and disputing parties like the Russian to take example from the SPD. Now all this was turned upside down. Organization had become a potential hindrance, cohesion a factor of immobility, tradition a dead weight. And beyond the horizon of these slowly crumbling bastions there rose the new life force of Social Democracy—the physical masses on the move. As yet the change in Rosa Luxemburg's thinking was one of emphasis rather than polarity, but shifts of emphasis are often sharpened by opposition and controversy into mutually exclusive choices. Where previously discipline and tradition had served to eradicate errors, now only mass action could sweep them away. Thus organization and mass action, discipline and enthusiasm, unexpectedly became alternatives. Moreover, the action of the masses not only brought objective revolutionary benefits, but provided a subjective cure for internal party disputes and differences. The new doctrine of action thus pre-empted all the old debates on tactics and strategy in the SPD, just as the revolution had pre-empted the divisions in the Russian party.

This was the new direction of Rosa Luxemburg's thought by

the time she entered the mass-strike debate in 1910. Her analysis of the situation was simple. The suffrage campaign in Prussia and its surrounding provinces had created expectations and unrest among the masses. A revolutionary period had begun—and into the vacuum of ideas on how it might be exploited Rosa now pumped her co-ordinating notion of the mass strike. Whether this vacuum was genuine or whether she merely disagreed with the ideas put forward by others need not concern us here.¹ The situation was analogous to that which induced Lenin to write *What is to be done?* before the second RSDRP congress in 1903—a subjective evaluation of a need to provide a coherent programme of action. And in fact Rosa's writings and speeches in the early months of 1910 were her German version of *What is to be done?*

The desire for action on the part of the masses could not remain at its present height unless they were given a clear explanation of their own possibilities in the immediate future. Rosa Luxemburg went in for watchwords—generally classical quotations—rather than propagandist slogans, but she made it plain that the duty of Social Democracy now was to show the masses the way, simply and clearly.

The [various] expressions of the will of the masses in their political struggle cannot artificially be maintained at one and the same level . . . they must be increased, sharpened, made to take on new and more effective forms. Any mass action once unleashed must move forward. And if the leading party lacks determination at the crucial moment . . . then inevitably there will come a certain disappointment, the *élan* will disappear and the whole action will collapse.²

Noticeably, the exhortation was addressed as much or more to the party executive than to the trade-union leaders as hitherto. One thing had become clear to Rosa Luxemburg since 1906: there were no substantial areas of disagreement between party and union leadership, and for her merely to assert the authority of party policy over the trade unions would not achieve the desired dynamic. SPD policy itself had now to be called in question, particularly the leaders' willingness to put the issue of the mass strike fairly before the masses. What had altered, therefore, was the *context* of Rosa Luxemburg's mass-strike doctrine, not the nature of the doctrine itself. Her analysis of the form and significance of the

¹ See above, pp. 427 ff.

² 'Was Weiter?' *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, p. 519.

mass strike was repeated more or less unchanged, especially the 'funnel' concept. The situation in Germany mirrored all the necessary elements of confluence—economic struggle as well as political agitation; now it only remained to show that with proper exploitation of the mass-strike possibilities a higher form of revolutionary struggle was imminent.

Obstinately but with curiously legalistic insistence Rosa returned again and again to the resolution adopted at the 1905 congress, in which the mass strike had been given legal recognition in party terms. She admitted that 'this resolution had naturally been based for the most part on an eventual need to protect the existing Reichstag suffrage [which was universal and thus more progressive than the Prussian suffrage], and was therefore considered as a purely defensive weapon.'¹ None the less, the item stood in the books. The question was how to transform this defensive into an offensive weapon. This was done by postulating that there could be no let-up in the struggle with the enemy—German society; that the latter, instead of being cautiously on the defensive at the present time, as Kautsky claimed, was really the aggressor. Defence and offence had become inseparable both for society and for Socialism at the present stage of class conflict. Thus Rosa Luxemburg—and here she showed her skill as a dialectician—emphasized the connection between the defence of existing privileges and an attack for the capture of new ones. 'The close interconnection between politics in Prussia and in the Reich, the most recent provocations and threats of arbitrary action by the Prussian Junkers in the Reichstag, in fact the whole situation makes it clear that the present struggle is *not only* connected with [gains in] the Prussian suffrage struggle, but in the last resort constitutes a defence of the Reich suffrage as well.'²

Here for the first time appears the notion of imperialism which was to be such an important feature of Rosa Luxemburg's political thought in the next few years. For imperialism above other things implied a totality, a unity of action on the part of capitalist society, a sharpening of its pressure on the Socialists, which necessitated a similarly sharp and total reply. 'Since reaction has replied to our mass protests with further provocation, by worsening the suffrage bill in committee, the masses under the command of Social Democracy must answer this provocation with a new move

¹ Ibid., p. 513.

² Ibid., p. 513—my italics.

forward on their part.¹ Though only discernible from a few scattered references, her propagation of the mass strike in this period was already swathed in the assumptions of imperialism, of sharpening class conflict. By calling for it as a *reply* to capitalist inroads on the *status quo* between the two worlds, rather than as a means of deliberate—and, as her opponents thought, pointless—aggravation of an anyhow favourable situation, Rosa Luxemburg still hoped to be able to make the mass strike palatable to those who were always ready to defend though not to launch forward into an attack. But this idea of thrust and riposte soon led her to tackle the whole notion of a strategy of attrition as promulgated by Kautsky in *The Road to Power*. She became increasingly pre-occupied with the over-all imperialist aspect, both in her political analysis of policy and in her personal revulsion from Kautsky's facile optimism over the 1912 elections. Beneath the arguments about strategy a deep divergence over the analysis of society opened up: on the one hand, an enemy closely engaged all along the line; on the other, a decaying and diseased fortress under siege, separated from the trenches of Socialism by a healthy insulation of no-man's-land.

When it came to the post-mortem on the suffrage campaign all the elements for successful recrimination were readily to hand. The party leadership, far from propagating or explaining the mass strike, had strangled the discussion. New and sharper definitions emerged on the relationship between leaders and led. What had previously been implied now became specific and the arrow pointed directly at the political leadership for the first time. Previously Rosa Luxemburg had spoken to the leaders in order to influence the masses; now she was to evolve the idea of making the masses *act on* the leaders. In her polemics with Kautsky the limits on the leadership's powers became sharply defined. 'Whether a mass strike is desirable, necessary, or possible at all can only be judged from the situation as a whole and from the attitude of the masses.'²

Thus the doubts and fears of the executive were really beyond its competence and were based on 'an exaggeration of the power of these leaders. . . . In reality the leaders are not in a position to annul a mass-strike movement once this comes into existence as a

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 511.

² 'Ermattung oder Kampf', *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, p. 533.

result of social conditions, of the sharpening of the class struggle, of the mood of the masses.¹ None the less, the failure of the agitation in the spring of 1910 was entirely the fault of the leadership. They had exceeded their authority, and in addition they had failed in their duty. 'It was not a matter of lack of enthusiasm or spirit on the part of the masses. . . . The street demonstrations [which were the immediate precursor of the desired mass-strike movement] were simply cancelled by the leading party organizations . . . with the slogan "enough, now enough".'²

These then were the twin pillars of accusation on which Rosa Luxemburg constructed her case against the executive.³ By implying that it was possible for the properly constituted party authorities to exceed their rights and powers, Rosa Luxemburg evolved a doctrine of constitutional recall with which the authority of the SPD leadership was challenged during the war. There were two aspects to this: first, the unconstitutionality of a policy directly opposed to the resolutions of an International Socialist congress—which did not apply at the time but was the line adopted by the Left opposition after 1914; secondly, the inability of the party authorities to act contrarily to the historical necessities of Socialism—a Socialist variant on the doctrine of natural law. This was the line briefly adumbrated by Rosa Luxemburg in 1910, but then curiously enough abandoned and not pursued again until the war. It was possibly too extreme a doctrine for 1910. Besides, the main focus of interest was still on policy and attitudes—criticism of sloth, immobility, and self-satisfaction, all sins of omission—rather than on any fundamental challenge to the legal foundations of authority. In addition, Rosa Luxemburg was not yet ready to question the whole basis of the relationship between masses and properly elected leaders. Only official SPD support for the war brought the opposition face to face with the reality of a self-perpetuating oligarchy behind all the democratic window-dressing, and produced an attempt to legitimate its challenge to that oligarchy.

It is always easier to build political theory on the exploded ruins of other people's work and not in a vacuum. This is especially true

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 531.

² 'Die Theorie und die Praxis', *ibid.*, p. 588.

³ The details of the polemics with Kautsky, which consisted largely of mutual recriminations about previously held views and much personal matter, do not concern us here. See above, pp. 427-31.

of Marxist arguments—the continuous dialectic of building and dismantling—so much so that Lenin and his successors often made a point of putting quite arbitrary policies in the mouths of their opponents in order to give added force to their own refutations. This demolition method of controversy is as old as politics itself. The most interesting question—and the one from which political scientists earn their living—is the extent to which such assumptions about opponents are justified. Having offered an analysis of the mass strike some years before, and having now proposed the mass strike as a weapon especially suitable in present circumstances, Rosa Luxemburg proceeded to attack the SPD executive for its opposition to her ideas. This meant constructing an official SPD ‘theory’. Luckily Kautsky came to the rescue with his strategy of attrition, to which she could reply with her strategy of assault. But these were only terms, verbal vessels for political small coin. In practice most of the difference resolved itself into two tactical alternatives: mass action on the one hand, and parliamentary action on the other. Soon Rosa Luxemburg’s attitude to parliamentary activity underwent a change. During the revisionist debate she had emphasized the necessity of mass action *together with* parliamentary action—two aspects of one struggle—and had merely defended the right of one to equality with the other. Now she began to denigrate the importance of parliamentary activity precisely in order to combat the party’s excessive reliance on elections and mandates—the siege artillery of Kautsky’s attrition strategy. In the course of the next few years the mass strike also became Rosa Luxemburg’s specific alternative to the parliamentary preoccupation of the party.

The break with Kautsky in 1910 marked the end of one stage in the development of Rosa Luxemburg’s political thinking. She had been preaching the significance of the mass strike in 1905 and—in a broader and more historical form—after her return from Russia in 1906. She had offered the German party an analysis which, if properly explained to the masses, could articulate their desire for action and the realization of their own power. In 1910 the ideal occasion for applying the doctrine had presented itself. But instead of the expected opposition of the trade-union leaders, the whole party leadership was ranged against her. Her concept of the mass strike was neither accepted nor understood. Mere defence of her idea, further explanations, were useless by themselves. It

had become necessary to oppose the party leadership, if not yet on constitutional or organizational grounds, at least on policy issues. In 1910 it was still possible to do this obliquely.

If one starts by organizing street demonstrations hesitatingly and reluctantly, if one uses every means . . . of avoiding conflict, if one fails to use one's own victories, finally if one packs up the demonstrations altogether and sends the masses home; in short if one does everything to inhibit mass action . . . then obviously no very active movement will emerge from among the masses, such as might find expression in the mass strike.¹

Kautsky served as a useful whipping-boy for the party executive—at least in public. But behind the personal polemics lurked more serious issues. The necessary seeds for more specific opposition had been sown. In the skirmishes between Rosa Luxemburg and official SPD policy, the mass-strike idea, which had begun as a 'pure' doctrine, a battering-ram for the proletariat in its class struggle, now also served as a gauntlet to fling in the face of the party leadership. Inevitably it was a form of degeneration. Though still frequently mentioned in her writings after 1910, it shrank to being merely one factor, albeit an important one, in the general confrontation between party and society conveniently called imperialism, to which Rosa Luxemburg now increasingly turned her attention.

Historically, the process by which Rosa Luxemburg came to the threshold of an analysis of imperialism is interesting and important, for, as I have tried to show, it was an outward-going process, a broadening of the discussion of party tactics rather than an attempt to find a defence against any genuine attack by society on Socialism. The preoccupation with imperialism and Rosa Luxemburg's developing ideas on this subject arose directly out of the mass-strike discussion, from the difficulties of making headway in the party. To get to grips with the problem of society at all it was necessary first to break the crust of self-absorption within which the SPD slept its leaden sleep. If the party could not be galvanized from inside then an outside stimulus had to be applied. Thus we have first a mass-strike doctrine, then a struggle for its application, next a dissatisfaction with party policy against a background of personal disenchantment, and finally the development of a

¹ *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, p. 592.

doctrine of imperialism in order to overcome the party's recalcitrance. Just as Canning had once spoken of bringing in the New World to redress the balance of the Old, so Rosa Luxemburg brought in imperialist society to redress the balance in the party.

Rosa Luxemburg was not the only Socialist to develop a doctrine of imperialism, but her manner of approach and the purpose it was intended to serve were highly individual. Both Hobson and Hilferding believed that the phenomenon they were analysing was in some way unique, and looked for the signs and causes of this uniqueness. Both provided a definition of imperialism which distinguished it from any other form of society. Hobson stressed the peculiarity of colonial development and said openly that certain restraints and alterations of policy on the part of 'imperialist' powers could conceivably undo the evils of imperialism. Hilferding, a Marxist, made no attempt to provide a cure for imperialism but he too searched for the particular effects which distinguished an imperialist state from a normal capitalist one.¹ At the opposite end of the line was Lenin's work.² It was first written in the spring of 1916 in Switzerland, long after the others and partly in reply to them. Instead of a frontal attack on the problem—what and why—Lenin grasped it by the scruff of the neck—from behind. He was primarily interested in explaining the causes of the war and more specifically the lamentable failure of Social Democracy to resist it. His analysis was therefore strictly in terms of certain past events—and the only valid theory was one which could explain those events in general rather than particular terms. As always, the conceptual tools mobilized were just sufficient for his purpose—no more, no less; as regards the economic complexion and build-up of imperialism, he largely followed Hilferding. But, like Rosa Luxemburg's, his purpose was mainly political; unlike her, theory had always to serve these ends and never venture beyond them. The treachery of the Social-Democratic leadership thus became a factor of imperialism, which by definition differed from capitalism precisely because it succeeded in suborning a labour aristocracy to

¹ See J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism*, London 1902; and Rudolf Hilferding, *Das Finanzkapital*, 1st ed. Vienna 1910.

² Lenin, 'Imperialism as the most recent stage of Capitalism', Petrograd, April 1917 (written in the course of 1916); later, 'Imperialism as the highest stage of Capitalism', *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXII, pp. 173–290. In 1920 this pamphlet was reproduced in German, French, and English editions.

serve *its* interests and not those of Social Democracy. Imperialism's colonial aspect helped to mobilize new non-proletarian revolutionary forces—like the peasantry, temporary allies of the revolutionary proletariat. It all led straight to a new strategy—or rather to a justification of the strategy already adopted: in the stage of imperialism as defined by Lenin, the proletariat must look for allies outside its own class; the peasantry at home, and subject colonial peoples abroad. But more important still was the concept of imperialism as a weapon in the perennial struggle against opportunists—and this now included both the leaders and the apologists of 'official' Social Democracy, which of course meant, in short, Kautsky. The whole exercise in fact boiled down to this: 'The most dangerous are those people who will not realize that the fight against imperialism can only be a hollow lying phrase if it is not combined with the fight against opportunism.'¹ Thus Lenin's study of imperialism, whatever scientific value later commentators may have placed on it, was intended to be no more than an important political tract in a particular political battle—like all his writings against Kautsky.²

With one luridly significant exception, Rosa Luxemburg did not theorize about imperialism. The problems Lenin examined in 1916 did not exist, or could not be seen to exist, before the war. Nevertheless, the political problem of imperialism already exercised Rosa considerably; indeed it became her central preoccupation after 1911. Her thoughts, concerned with the misty, somewhat featureless present of 1911–14 (and not, like Lenin's, with the immediate dramatic past of 1916), were tentative, scattered throughout her many political writings of the time, often on very different subjects. She never tried to draw them together; circumstances demanded a physiognomy of imperialism with manifold application, not a doctrine. None the less, when other people were still theorizing *only*—and Lenin not even doing that—Rosa Luxemburg was already postulating imperialism as a precise political problem of the times. Instead of concentrating on the errors of opponents, as Lenin was later to do with Kautsky, Rosa's concept of imperialism had a far more creative purpose. Consequently her image of capitalism in its imperialist stage was a far livelier one than Lenin's. The differences between them were in part the product of different temperaments and techniques.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

² Cf. below, pp. 707–8.

Autres mœurs, autre impérialisme. None the less, it is essential to understand that while Lenin's writing on imperialism benefited from later inflation to holy writ but was no more than one of a series of rather arid polemics against opportunism in general and rival theses of imperialism in particular—at a time moreover when there was already a wide gulf between Kautsky and the Left—Rosa Luxemburg's physiognomy of imperialism was the organic creature of a policy, being sweated out with all the difficulties of the apparently unorthodox and unfamiliar.¹ Instead of confronting her analysis with that of others, she was trying to confront imperialist society with Social Democracy. She needed a doctrine of imperialism for political purposes and had to construct it from whatever raw materials were to hand. Before 1914 a general Socialist concept of imperialism was still in the process of creation; only the outbreak of the war provided the necessary fillip towards completing and sharpening it into a widely recognized doctrine. To this extent Rosa Luxemburg was a pioneer.²

The earliest trace of Rosa Luxemburg's physiognomy of imperialism dates back to 1900, when she criticized the party's pusillanimous tolerance of German participation in the Chinese

¹ It is not intended to belittle the importance or validity of Lenin's doctrine of imperialism. Given his earlier and vital emphasis on the revolutionary potential of the peasants and his willingness to adopt them as allies, the additional implications (that is all they are) of using colonial peoples as allies contained in his 1916 work are merely a logical extension. The reason I have emphasized Rosa Luxemburg's pioneering work in recognizing imperialism as a specific political problem before the war (though differently from Lenin: she did not attempt his analysis of 'social imperialists' within the Socialist camp) is because Communist history insists (a) that Lenin's solution of 1916 is timeless and universal, and applies before the war just as much as after 1914; (b) that since these conditions existed she should have recognized them; and (c) that since she did not recognize them but chose to write on imperialism notwithstanding, she was wrong where Lenin was right. (See below, Chapter XVIII, on the development of this thesis.) This notion clearly leads to the absurdity that if Rosa Luxemburg had not written on imperialism at all she would not have been 'wrong' (= bad) but merely, like for instance all other Bolsheviks, less perceptive than Lenin. Moreover, as will be seen, her political writings on imperialism—as opposed to *The Accumulation of Capital*—were largely ignored in these later judgements.

² The difference is important, irrespective of whether imperialism is taken as a distinct and explicit form of capitalist society or merely as a postulate required in order to justify a more active Socialist party—to make the distinction extreme. It is much easier to discuss—and praise—an analysis which, however much it criticizes and alters existing ideas, still sets out to provide a complete theory, than something that has to be pasted together bit by bit out of the immediacies of political controversy. We shall see how most commentators on Rosa Luxemburg's theory of imperialism ignore the functional architecture of her ideas and concentrate solely on the one show building, *The Accumulation of Capital*.

war. Rosa Luxemburg was then mainly concerned to avoid the impression that the SPD was a purely parliamentary party, but this was nevertheless the first occasion on which a specific act of aggression by the German government was singled out as calling for a general mass response by Social Democracy.¹ Similar comments were made from time to time, for instance during the first Morocco crisis in 1905. Looking back, it is not difficult to see during the revisionist debate the emphasis on the dual nature of the SPD—revolutionary and parliamentary—as the springboard for Rosa Luxemburg's theory of imperialist confrontation. Similarly, the discussions at the International congress of 1907 and the fight for a sharper resolution on war and militarism, theoretical as it still was, at least provided a framework which could later be filled out with more specific content.

The special concept of imperialism received a strong fillip during the second Morocco crisis in 1911. Once more it was the internal crisis in the party that provided the initial stimulus. The need to enlarge on the evils and dangers of imperialist society was the obvious conclusion from the party's failure to act at the time. Skilfully, the executive had manœuvred the issue into a question of party discipline, and Rosa Luxemburg had little opportunity of raising the broader question of imperialism at the party congress of 1911. But it was no coincidence that during the following months she turned increasingly to a systematic examination and exposure of the society in which Social Democracy was encased. The bulk of her social reportage is significantly grouped round two main periods: the revisionist debate when it was necessary to prove that capitalism was not tamed, and the imperialist debate when society had actually to be shown on the offensive. The main difference between the two periods was in the conclusions which Rosa Luxemburg drew. From 1911 onwards every piece of evidence cited against society had to be 'lifted on to the shoulders of millions of proletarians and carried into battle'.²

The political manifestations of imperialism and their galvanizing effects on Social Democracy have already been analysed in detail in previous chapters. The compound of these various experiences became the totality of imperialism. But the generalization of experience, the creation of the totality, did not detract from the

¹ For Rosa Luxemburg's speech, see *Protokoll . . . 1900*, p. 116.

² *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, p. 165.

intensity of the evil. Imperialism was the primary, permanent, and overriding preoccupation of Social Democracy—at least Rosa Luxemburg intended to make it so. ‘The questions of militarism and imperialism are the central axis of today’s political life . . . we are witnessing, not a recession but an enormous boom of imperialism and with it a sharpening of class contradictions.’¹ More commonly she spoke of ‘the great times in which we live’—and everyone knew what she meant. Rosa Luxemburg did not consider imperialism as the product of a specific feature or features in society—either new or unique. She only *described* imperialism itself on rare occasions, and then usually without mentioning the word. ‘Militarism closely connected with colonialism, protectionism and power politics as a whole . . . a world armament race . . . colonial robbery and the policy of “spheres of influence” all over the world . . . in home and foreign affairs the very essence of a capitalist policy of national aggression.’² More often it was her anxious postulate of universality for any individual event or experience which related her analysis specifically to imperialism; that and the intensity of the fact or event described. It was the *effect* of these symptoms—themselves chronic and familiar—which constituted imperialism; the sharpening of class conflicts, the proximity of the two worlds, the need for a response. Thus imperialism differed from previous capitalism not by nature but by effect, not by what it was but by what it did—an almost utilitarian conception of imperialism. Indeed, politically imperialism could only be ‘proved’, not from the existence or exaggeration of given symptoms in society, but from their specific effect on Social Democracy. This analysis of imperialism as a set of two-way responses is central and peculiar to Rosa Luxemburg’s concept.

By identifying imperialism from its effects, Rosa Luxemburg opposed all those who saw it as a unique phenomenon. Possibly the most active political opponents of imperialism at the time were those who concentrated on the military aspect, people like Karl Liebknecht and all those others who, though not necessarily radicals within the SPD, shared his profound hatred for the military establishment and the Prussian attitudes that went with it. They all came to a view of imperialism because of their preoccupation with one special feature; to Karl Liebknecht, for

¹ *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 527.

² *LW*, 6 May 1911.

instance, imperialism was largely the theoretical extension of militarism. Rosa Luxemburg specifically opposed these ideas. Though she did not polemicize openly against Liebnicht's anti-militarist campaign, she privately expressed strong doubt and disapproval of his single-minded absorption—and did not hesitate to pour scorn on some of his anti-militarist allies, especially those who were revisionists as well. In 1913, following a scandal (maltreatment of the local population in Alsace by German police), she wrote: 'Compared to all the brutalities and misdeeds of imperialism as a whole, its efforts at Zabern are mere playfulness, as though the snarling beast was satisfied for once just to tickle the ear of the sleeping citizen with a long straw.' The SPD had to utilize these events as part of its general campaign against imperialism, not fritter its opportunities away on specific denunciations of militarism. 'It is the particular task of Social Democracy the more sharply to emphasize the question in all its aspects, as imperialism becomes its most immediate and deadly enemy with every day that passes.'¹ Military affairs happened to be much to the fore in Germany during the last two years before the war; while Rosa Luxemburg was only too willing to capitalize on such individual additions to the general indignation, she repeatedly warned against exclusive preoccupation with the symptom.

The fact that in the course of their confrontation with the working classes the present representatives of the absolutist military dictatorship have broken through the restraints of the bourgeois constitution and therefore have accelerated the course of things . . . proves that they are *no more than a part* of those powers who want evil but create good.²

By equating every feature of imperialism—from the poisoning of an old-age pensioner to the pretensions of Prussian officers, from unemployment to taxation—Rosa Luxemburg was making the response to imperialism democratic and universal; one case of misery or resentment, one vote for revolution. Far from being selective, imperialism was universal and the response to it had to be universal too.

¹ 'Die Bilanz von Zabern', *Sozialdemokratische Korrespondenz*, 6 January 1914, quoted in *Rosa Luxemburg im Kampf gegen den deutschen Militarismus*, Berlin (East) 1960, p. 31.

² 'Die zukünftige Revanche', *Sozialdemokratische Korrespondenz*, 24 January 1914, quoted loc. cit., p. 36. My italics.

Thus Rosa Luxemburg's imperialism was essentially a general state of affairs—a state of acute conflict, moreover, not merely a general name for unconnected symptoms. Here was the conceptual method of the mass strike all over again. Moreover, her definition of imperialism was an equation of which both society and Social Democracy were essential functions; the social location of imperialism was the product, and confined to the area, of their collision. Thus Lenin's view of imperialism (and that of nearly all others) was perfectly possible in a wholly capitalist world in which Social Democracy did not exist. In Rosa Luxemburg's equation, however, Social Democracy was essential. It was almost a constituent part of imperialism; without it the necessary heightened social conflict became impossible.

Just as imperialism was an advanced stage of capitalism, so was the Social Democracy in an imperialist country a higher form of Social Democracy—at least it should have been, and Rosa Luxemburg's whole thesis of imperialism was designed to make it so. The pressure under which her physiognomy of imperialism developed was not intellectual but political, not scientific but polemical. It was not an intellectual exercise but a political necessity. This pressure governed and set in motion most of her political writing; it was her main stimulant. Lenin acutely put his finger on it when he referred to her 'self-flagellation', though he neither understood nor did justice to her achievement.¹ By the time he came himself to analyse imperialism times had changed, the breakdown of Social Democracy in 1914 and his own reaction had to be explained and justified—in short a particular theory of imperialism was required there and then. Rosa's main purpose was action. Each one of her comments on imperialism was immediately related to a particular precept for proletarian action in reply.

This becomes clear from the peculiar dual nature which Rosa Luxemburg postulated for imperialism. As foreshadowed in the mass-strike discussion in 1910, it was characterized as being both strong and weak at the same time. This dichotomy was the essential corollary of the Socialist tactic of simultaneous defence and attack which Rosa had elaborated in order to weld the party's half-hearted commitment to a defensive mass strike on to her own strategy of attack. Society was attacking Social Democracy and simultaneously defending itself; it was both strong and weak. The

¹ *Leninskii Sbornik*, Vol. XXII, p. 346. See below, p. 533.

economic features inherent in imperialism were an undeniable source of economic strength; that increasing armaments provided greater military striking power was evident. But in order to prise Socialist policy loose from the hypnotic paralysis induced by an ever more powerful imperialism, which had affected Bebel so noticeably during his last years, Rosa was now at pains to demonstrate the extent to which these signs of strength were also evidence of weakness. This was not just an example of classical dialectic technique according to which the perfection of imperialism necessarily predicated its final collapse. Rosa Luxemburg dealt with this aspect separately in *The Accumulation of Capital*. It was rather a demonstration that as the power of imperialism increased it also became more fearful and therefore more fragile.

This proud German militarism which according to Bismarck was afraid of God but nothing else, this militarism which is supposed to frighten us in the guise of a colossus of iron and steel bristling with armament from top to bottom—*this colossus shivers at the very thought of a mutiny of precisely twelve soldiers. The whole of the German Empire is seen as dissolving in ruins as a result of a Social-Democratic demonstration.*¹

Rosa Luxemburg's apparently contradictory emphasis on the simultaneous weakness and strength of imperialism was the product of her particular time. Her physiognomy of imperialism in fact synthesized two prevalent but opposing Socialist moods—one optimistic and one pessimistic. The optimistic view was Kautsky's. His strategy of attrition was based on it—an ever-growing array of Social-Democratic forces which would peacefully overwhelm the shrinking and alienated supporters of society. Such a view had really nothing to do with imperialism at all—it hardly admitted its specific existence. Kautsky rarely used the word before 1914 and then only in a purely economic context; when he was forced to take issue with imperialism after the outbreak of war he still concentrated on the economics. Ironically he, who was always the first to knit empirical observations into a theory, notably failed to appear among those who contributed to a special theory of imperialism. The whole basis of his attrition strategy rested on the assumption that there was no such thing as imperialism—or aggravated capitalism.

As so often, the pessimistic view went with the burdens of

¹ Speech at Freiburg, 8 March 1914, *Rosa Luxemburg . . . gegen . . . Militarismus*, p. 102. The italics are those of the original stenographic report in the local paper.

organizational responsibility. It hung over the party leadership like a pall. Since it was directly contrary to the official ideology of the party, however, it was never clearly articulated, and has to be picked out from private letters and above all inferred from overt action—or lack of it. Bebel had repeatedly confessed in private before his death that if the full might of imperial Germany were to be launched against the SPD, the party was powerless—and therefore would never risk any open confrontation. The extent of these fears was put to the test at the outbreak of war; while it is easy to show that the SPD leadership really wanted to collaborate with the German government for patriotic reasons, they dressed up their decision in the coy veils of helplessness. This pessimistic view thus gave full credit to imperialism; by implication it too enjoined the party to sit back and wait for the collapse of society predicted by the dialectic—and its foremost interpreter, Karl Kautsky.

Rosa Luxemburg differed from both these views. She emphasized imperialism as a special condition of society; as an aggravation—a necessary and inevitable one since she had never subscribed to the notion of a normal and more amiable capitalism of which imperialism was a temporary variant that could be contained. At the same time she refused to accept the implication of powerlessness. Apart from and because of the dialectic, imperialism was as weak as it was strong; every increase in strength brought a simultaneous weakening. Nor was she content with paradoxes alone. To the practical question of what could be done, she replied by emphasizing the initial strengthening of class consciousness along the whole line of confrontation with the imperialist state. Class conflict existed not only in the obvious battlefield of factory or political arena but for instance in the army where the soldiers—‘proletarians in uniform’—confronted the officers. As soon as the soldiers could be made conscious of the fact that uniforms were merely a disguise and that wearing them and taking soldiers’ pay could not get rid of the omnipresent class struggle, obedience—the whole basis of militarism—was eroded.¹

¹ This idea survived and was much in vogue in the early stages of the Russian revolution. Bolsheviks like Radek and Dzierżyński, who had been under Rosa’s influence, thought that they could counter the danger of foreign intervention in Russia with this sort of propaganda among the troops. Lenin, however, remained sceptical.

Agitation and propaganda among actual or potential enemy soldiers long remained a feature of Soviet policy, but was progressively given less emphasis. Certainly no one now considers it a substitute for armed defence.

This then was Rosa Luxemburg's physiognomy of imperialism. It was consistent and broad enough to be called a doctrine, even though she never claimed any such title. As with the mass strike, the doctrine developed by implication; the product of polemic not of analysis. The interest at all times is focused on Social-Democratic action and not on the features in society with which it was intended to deal—indeed the latter tend to be means of justification rather than preceding mainsprings of causality. We know this from the circumstances under which the doctrine developed, beginning with concern over the state of the party and broadening outwards to embrace society as a means of curing the party's lethargy. She used the word imperialism sparingly and rarely put her readers on notice that she was dealing with it specifically. Thus it is only from the context that the following quotations can be taken as an image of the imperialist state. "This state uses all the resources of its infamous courts and police network . . . it is armed to the teeth like the robber barons of the middle ages, covered from tip to toe in steel armour. But even so the exploiters want to disarm their victims completely and make them defenceless. . . . This is the picture of today's class state in all its infamy."¹ Curiously, her work was largely free from slogans—perhaps a natural concession to literary standards. But much as slogans distort meaning, they are often a useful means of focusing interest, as any reader of Lenin well knows.

For this reason her contribution to imperialism so far has deliberately not been described as a theory. To qualify for this any exposition has at least to be logically consistent and its component parts must be capable of substantiation. But this was not Rosa Luxemburg's method or intention. The postulated sharpening of class confrontation was a matter of cognition and will, not a logical or automatic consequence of imperialism. Her totality was comprehensive rather than structural—like the identicast used by police forces to catch criminals. Hence the repeated use of the word 'physiognomy'.

It is not at all surprising that Rosa Luxemburg's physiognomy of imperialism has almost completely escaped recognition, let alone acceptance. Both her critics and her sympathetic biographers have ignored it. But this is due only in small part to ignorance or unwillingness to reconstruct her views from difficult primary material.

¹ *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, p. 179.

The main obstacle is *The Accumulation of Capital*, that curious work of genius which has overshadowed all her other work on imperialism.¹

In *The Accumulation of Capital* Rosa Luxemburg set out, not to describe, but to justify and analyse the basic causality of imperialism. The sub-title of the book was 'A contribution to the economic clarification of imperialism'. The emphasis throughout was on economics and she wrote to Konstantin Zetkin in November 1911: 'I want to find the *cause* of imperialism. I am following up the economic aspects of this concept . . . it will be a strictly scientific explanation of imperialism and its contradictions.' Rosa Luxemburg was teaching political economy at the time. The particular problem that excited her interest was a technical one concerned with Marx's economics, more specifically the problem of capitalist reproduction which Marx had begun to set out in Volume III of *Capital*.² It is almost certain that her solution of this problem led to the discovery of what she took to be the theoretical

¹ Frölich made no attempt to analyse Rosa Luxemburg's political physiognomy of imperialism. His assumptions and terminology are those of the 1930s, when he wrote his biography; he speaks, for example, of 'the imperialists in the Social-Democratic camp' and 'the imperialist bourgeoisie', without attempting to explain these terms or analyse them in accordance with Rosa Luxemburg's own developing ideas (Frölich, p. 194). Moreover, he turns the chronology upside down by presenting Rosa's 1910 writings as already directed against a ready-made concept of imperialism, whereas in fact the 1910 mass strike and suffrage campaign preceded and helped to create her concept of imperialism. Similarly, internal party preoccupations and the confrontation of Socialism with imperialism are hopelessly jumbled up without any attempt to explain their causal relationship (pp. 197-205). Thus 'Rosa Luxemburg did not often write on foreign politics and she did so only when confusion in the Marxist camp made it necessary to clarify a particular question and rectify party policy. She laid down the general standpoint of Social Democracy to imperialism . . .' (p. 195). Possibly if the issue of the *Collected Works* had continued as far as the projected volume on imperialism Frölich, who was responsible for the project and for writing the introduction to each volume, might have provided a more satisfactory analysis of Rosa Luxemburg's attitude. (See Bibliography, p. 916.)

The same mistake has been made by Rosa Luxemburg's orthodox Communist critics. Here, however, the circle was completed and the criticism of her economic analysis of imperialism in *The Accumulation of Capital* was extended (over-extended) to cover an arbitrary 'equivalent' political theory which in fact she never held. Thus Kurt Sauerland, anxious to cash in on Stalin's 'denunciation' of the pre-war Radicals, wrote in 1932: 'This undialectical, not really historical analysis greatly influenced the whole problem of capitalist collapse, the theory of revolution, the theory of the colonial, national, and peasant problems . . . the dictates of the political struggle which follow from her theory no longer correspond to the true requirements of the proletarian class struggle.' (Kurt Sauerland, *Der dialektische Materialismus*, Berlin 1932, pp. 141, 143.)

² For the problem and Rosa Luxemburg's interesting, wayward, and brilliant solution, see below, pp. 831-4.

cause of imperialism. Important as this obviously was, the discovery was clearly incidental. She was able to kill two birds with one stone and in the process discovered not only how compound reproduction in capitalist societies is possible, but how it must inevitably lead to imperialism and finally to collapse. In *The Accumulation of Capital* we thus have a *theory* which was lacking in her political writings—hence the reason why her followers and critics promoted *The Accumulation of Capital* at the expense of her other diverse and individually minor political writings.

The theory evolved in *The Accumulation of Capital* is in essence simple enough. Marxism postulates the collapse of capitalism under the weight of its economic contradictions. Marx himself went part of the way in underpinning this assertion with mathematical and empirical evidence. Rosa Luxemburg believed that this evidence did not justify the conclusion—this was her specific problem. Failing to resolve the mathematical equation, she looked for an alternative outside cause of collapse. This she discovered in the ability of capitalism to continue its existence and growth (capitalism was essentially a growth process which could not exist statically) just as long as there were pre-capitalist societies to be captured and brought into the economic sphere of influence of the capitalist colonial power. When the entire surface of the earth had been drawn into the process of capitalist accumulation, then capitalism could no longer grow and must collapse. But what had all this to do specifically with imperialism, beyond explaining its logical (economic) necessity?

The answer is, very little. Paradoxically, her one major work on the subject of imperialism took almost all the political implications for granted. The question she asked was not ‘how’, but ‘why’; not ‘what is imperialism’ and ‘how does it look’, but ‘why is it inevitable’. In more than 400 pages of untidy and often highly polemical argument (against other economists) she tried to provide a neat and fastidious *economic* solution; far neater than could be provided by any *political* discourse. There is no obvious connection between the two. Not only was *The Accumulation of Capital* intended to be a consistent theory, but it was confined largely to economics and economic history. Rosa Luxemburg offered no specific recommendations for policy; Social Democracy is not mentioned throughout the book in any political context—or for that matter in any context at all. In fact, it was Rosa Luxemburg’s only large-scale

essay in the theoretical social sciences. She herself claimed that its real origin was her interest in 'higher mathematics'.

If we are to relate this work to the rest of her writings on imperialism—and the validity of such a relationship is by no means certain—then one large step at least is missing. On the one hand we have a rigorous economic causality of the enemy's being, on the other a series of pamphlets on tactical combat. How does the one become the other, how was theoretical economic necessity transformed into the political provocations which required specific Socialist action? Rosa Luxemburg does not tell us. The two aspects of her work were kept in separate compartments; she never referred her political readers to *The Accumulation of Capital* nor did she refer her economic readers to the political conclusions of her newspaper articles. Indeed, she admitted that *The Accumulation of Capital* was intended only for advanced students and wrote a simplified commentary on it in prison during the First World War in order to clear up the widespread misunderstandings to which the book had given rise.

An additional difficulty is that the tone and tempo of *The Accumulation of Capital* differed substantially from her normal writing. It was a tremendous act of will; she claimed that it was written in one continuous session of several months, night and day.¹ Rosa Luxemburg was swept into the vortex of her ideas which grew in intensity and excitement as she wrote. There was none of the cold and calm discipline which she forced on herself in her political analysis.

In spite of this, *The Accumulation of Capital* has been used as the basis for criticizing Rosa Luxemburg's attitude to imperialism in all its aspects. The foundation stone of this pyramid of criticism was laid by Lenin. He read *The Accumulation of Capital* in 1913, at a time when his political relations with Rosa Luxemburg were at their worst; his critical notes in the margin of the manuscript indicate that he was out to fault her wherever possible; they abound with exclamations like 'nonsense' and 'funny'.

His chief criticism was fundamental: her thesis that enlarged capitalist reproduction was impossible within a closed economy and needed to cannibalize pre-capitalist economies in order to function at all, he described as a 'fundamental error'.² This has provided

¹ This was an exaggeration, though it may have seemed so to her in retrospect. See above, pp. 473-4.

² *Leninskii Sbornik*, Vol. XXII, p. 337.

the springboard for all later Communist criticism of a much more detailed and sophisticated kind.¹ From it has been deduced Rosa Luxemburg's allegedly 'objective' attitude to capitalist collapse which by implication almost completely destroys the role of Social Democracy and its leadership—the entire subjective element. From this in turn there developed the heresy of Luxemburgism, based on a theory of spontaneity which systematically negated the function of rational cognition, of will and of decision on the part of Social Democracy. In the words of Rosa Luxemburg's most bitter opponent in Germany, whose views were one long campaign against her predecessor's heritage: 'The German party based its theory and practice in the main on Rosa Luxemburg's theory of accumulation, and this is the fount of all errors, all theories of spontaneity, all erroneous conceptions of organizational problems. Even in the best of cases the party never got more than a synthesis of Luxemburg and Lenin.'² A vast top-heavy structure of criticism was built on this one book of Rosa Luxemburg's.

More immediately, however, Lenin looked for specific political content in *The Accumulation of Capital*—not only by way of implication but by challenging the immediate context of her work. The vivid analysis of colonialism irritated him: 'The description of the torture of negroes in South Africa is noisy, colourful and meaningless. Above all it is "non-Marxist".'³ Apart from her errors in economic theory, he considered Rosa Luxemburg's whole attempt to transport the problems of imperialism into foreign and colonial territories—instead of leaving them at home where they belonged—a piece of 'unnecessary self-flagellation' (*sechet sama sebya Rosa Luksemburg*).⁴ He did not think that she was really concerned with solving the problem of surplus value but needed the 'comfort of colonial exploitation'—a moral issue. He hinted without clearly stating that the whole effort to shift the basis of imperialism abroad was in the last resort a combination of revolutionary temperament and national self-regard; a *narodnik* approach which Lenin, with his hatred of chauvinism, particularly

¹ See N. Bukharin, 'Der Imperialismus und die Akkumulation des Kapitals', *Unter dem Banner des Marxismus*, Vienna/Berlin, 1925/1926, Vol. II, p. 288. See also the summary in F. Oelssner, *Rosa Luxemburg*, Berlin (East) 1956 (3rd ed.), pp. 172–87.

² Ruth Fischer, *Die Internationale*, Vol. VIII, No. 3 (1925), p. 107. See also below, p. 801.

³ *Leninskii Sbornik*, Vol. XXII, p. 346.

⁴ *Ibid.* The phrase and the concept are, I think, Gogol's.

despised. The relationship between the problem of self-determination—which was the vehicle of his most acid polemic against Rosa Luxemburg in 1914—and the problem of imperialism did not particularly strike Lenin at the time, but three years later, in 1916 when he was working specifically on imperialism himself, he suddenly saw the intimate connection between them. The offensive ‘caricature of imperialism’ in this instance was not Rosa Luxemburg’s but Pyatakov’s—though the latter’s work and Lenin’s criticisms of it are clearly related to *The Accumulation of Capital*. The fact that the national question was fresh in his mind from the 1914–1915 polemics, and provided a useful additive to his own analysis of imperialism in 1916 which had not struck him in his original critique of *The Accumulation of Capital*, again shows clearly the self-sufficient compartmenting of Lenin’s mind to which we have already referred several times. He suddenly discovered a new name for those whose economic determinism on the one hand, and opposition to self-determination as out-dated on the other, seemed to him to throttle any effective revolutionary action against imperialism. He called it ‘imperialistic economism’—the transfer of the economists’ low-level work against capitalism into the present phase of imperialism. Thus ‘imperialistic economism’ might have become Lenin’s retroactive label for *The Accumulation of Capital*.¹

It is obvious that the accusation of implicit populism can hardly be justified against *The Accumulation of Capital*; it can certainly not be maintained for one instance if Rosa Luxemburg’s political writings are taken into account. Almost certainly Lenin, who had other preoccupations at the time, was unaware of the political context of her dispute with Kautsky and later the executive. His views on the Luxemburg–Kautsky controversy were not particularly well

¹ Lenin, ‘A caricature of Marxism—“Imperialistic economism”’ (review of an unpublished article by Kievsky (Pyatakov), reprinted in *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXIII, pp. 16–64, August/October 1916. *The Accumulation of Capital* is not mentioned specifically in this review article. But Pyatakov’s opposition to self-determination in conditions of imperialism is obviously based on the theory put forward in *The Accumulation of Capital*. Lenin’s insistence on national self-determination as a factor destructive of imperialism is clearly an implied critique of Rosa Luxemburg as well.

Pyatakov’s friend and ally Bukharin (against whom Lenin polemicized at the same time and on the same subject) played a most important role in post-revolutionary Russia, finally as deputy to Ordzhonikidze in the Commissariat of Heavy Industry, and was tried for his life in January 1937 together with Radek, Sokolnikov, and Preobrazhenskii. For Bukharin’s recantation and ‘Leninist’ polemic against Rosa Luxemburg in 1925, see above, p. 533, note 1, and below, Appendix 1, pp. 830, 834 note 1.

informed.¹ But nevertheless his approach became mandatory for others in this as in so many things; Bukharin and others only took up the thread he had begun to spin before the war.

The most likely thesis is that Rosa Luxemburg did not attempt to relate *The Accumulation of Capital* to her immediate political purposes, that she saw no contradiction between a rigorous theoretical analysis of the economic causes of imperialism and her physiognomy of its political manifestations.² It is, however, possible to argue—a view moreover that has the advantage of consistency—that Rosa Luxemburg did indeed believe that her economic analysis provided the only feasible explanation of the transition from capitalism to imperialism. This would have meant that the militaristic phenomena of imperialism, resulting in more intense pressure on Social Democracy, were the direct consequence of the need to protect the vital under-developed economies within each national sphere of influence, without which neither economy nor society could survive. Such an interpretation need not necessarily alter her description of imperialism as a force to be combated at home. Then indeed we do have here a propensity to spontaneity and objective automatism, only mitigated by the specific recommendations to action. But there is no positive evidence of this view at all—such negative evidence as exists (her failure to relate her political and economic writings) points against this conclusion. In this connection it may be significant that Rosa Luxemburg developed no political policy for colonial countries, that she made no recommendations as to how colonial peoples might resist their exploitation and thus further hasten the collapse of capitalism. Nor did she recommend any specifically colonial policy to the SPD.

Why then the missing step? Was it oversight? Is there significance in the fact that Rosa Luxemburg did not emphasize or define the 'imperialist' features of her political ideas, but relegated them

¹ See above, p. 433.

² Cf. the similar methodological and analytical break between politics and economics in Rosa Luxemburg's portrait of capitalist society during the revisionist debate (*Social Reform or Revolution*; above, pp. 215 ff.). Readers interested in the sociological context of this problem are strongly urged to read Talcott Parsons' remarkable but little known essay 'Democracy and Social Structure in Pre-Nazi Germany', *Journal of Legal and Political Sociology* (U.S.A.), Vol. I (1942), pp. 96-114. It is argued there that the analysis of capitalism presented a *special* problem for German intellectuals and social thinkers, because of the incongruence between the static social structure and the dynamics of rapid industrialization. Much of the argument developed in the present chapter, and in Chapter VI above, can profitably be considered within this wider context (not to mention the work of Max Weber).

simply to being a sharpened version of an already existing class conflict? Perhaps the reason was political—a question of tactics. If applied to practical politics, her ‘new’ theory of imperialism outlined in *The Accumulation of Capital* might indeed have given rise to a ‘new’ theory of political inaction. By emphasizing imperialism merely as capitalism writ large and fierce, Rosa Luxemburg was more likely to get action—of a kind already familiar from the Russian revolution, not some new anodyne by ballot of the sort Kautsky was already advocating as his contribution to ‘the great times in which we live’. In that case the separation of her economic from her political work was deliberate—to avoid the very spontaneity theory of which she was later accused.

If we add up the results of the investigations conducted so far, we obtain a concept made up of three main elements.

1. The need for and technique of dynamic mass action (Mass Strike).
2. The growing uniformity and fierceness of society’s pressure on Social Democracy and the need for a similarly total and active response (Imperialism).
3. The economic basis of imperialism which made it inevitable (Accumulation of Capital).

The struggle to apply Rosa Luxemburg’s conclusions to Socialist practice in the teeth of official disinterest and opposition produced a dynamic of its own. For practical purposes the analysis of an aggressive imperialism had less and less to do with the confrontation of the two worlds but served instead as a nutcracker in which to break the party’s shell of self-absorption. Imperialism was called in to redress the balance in the party. We must now examine the implications of this dynamic on Rosa Luxemburg’s view of class conflict, and any conclusions about eventual revolution that can be drawn from it.

The relationship between society and Social Democracy implied by Marxism was perhaps the most difficult problem facing Socialist parties before 1917. Even the fact that there was such a problem has been ignored, if not denied. As long as one believes in a dialectic process followed by a cataclysm, the class relationship before the revolution is simply one of increasing hostility, while after the revolution it presumably ceases to exist. Yet hostility alone is a normative and sufficiently vague word to present Socialist leaders

with a continual series of awkward choices, and most of the tactical problems facing members of the Second International actually arose from this. One set of answers was given by the 'orthodox' during the revisionist debate. This particular controversy led to firm negation of the attempt to approach society and to exercise leverage within it. The majority decision was that Social Democracy must keep away and erect impenetrable barriers between society and itself. After 1898—now aware of the rot—the preoccupation of the orthodox, including Rosa Luxemburg, was to eradicate the influence of society on and in Social Democracy, and to concentrate on its theoretical purification. The revisionists were seen as spokesmen of society in the Socialist camp. The ideal was to build a complete alternative society for Socialists so that they would never need to look out to the other society for anything.

By the end of 1905 Rosa Luxemburg had become disenchanted with this inward-looking philosophy. The gap between society and Social Democracy had become too large. The result was that the exclusive internal preoccupations of Social Democracy made it immobile and static. Comparing Russian dynamism with German immobility made Rosa Luxemburg realize that unless Social Democracy were brought more closely face to face with society the Marxist *idea* of dialectic dynamic would engulf dynamic Marxist *practice*. By emphasizing the pressure of society on Social Democracy, by showing how closely the two worlds were locked in combat, the Socialist camp would be galvanized into a dynamic response. Rosa Luxemburg's frequently used phrase, 'eye to eye, fist to fist, breast to breast', was not mere rhetoric but was intended to convey a sense of in-fighting which prohibited any attempt to ignore society and settle down to comfortably internal preoccupations.

This is an important contribution to the theory of alienation, if we are prepared to regard it in this light. Marx had postulated the increasing alienation of the proletariat from society in various detailed ways: alienation between people, between the individual and his economic product, between human beings and the material world in which they functioned. It was this alienation that caused part of the vacuum into which class consciousness would be pumped by Social Democracy.¹ As it turned out, the development

¹ Alienation has made a dramatic reappearance as a tool of academic sociology in recent years—and this *in turn* has led back to a re-examination of original

of Social Democracy in Germany had indeed sharpened class consciousness, but instead of breaking the emptiness of alienation with a positive spirit of revolt, it had formalized it by substituting a false illusion of social security—a state within a state. The victory of the orthodox over the revisionists had in one sense merely strengthened alienation by pushing reality away. The SPD and its self-consciousness as a class party functioned in a vacuum.

The revisionists had tried to break alienation by establishing positive links with society—trade-union activity in factories, political activity through participation in government and administration. Rosa Luxemburg's solution was also through a closer approach to society. If alienation is due to a break in the relationship between two objects, then *any* rapprochement reduces or destroys it, whether friendly or hostile. In this sense Rosa Luxemburg's theory of imperialism provided a way out of the blind alley of alienation resulting from the victory over the revisionists; an antidote similar in form to that of the revisionists but totally opposite in content. Instead of inspiring approval of society, her postulate of a closer relationship would inspire increasing disaffection and hatred. The main thing was to ensure that Social Democracy did not continue in isolation, in a state of suspense that could go on for a long time but must eventually lead not to the dialectic collapse of society but to the disintegration of the Socialist camp. Alienation without the saving grace of revolutionary class consciousness must eventually destroy the alienated person or class. Even during the revolution itself Rosa Luxemburg always postulated failure as an alternative to the successful resolution of the dialectic; chaos or defeat could engulf the emerging society.¹ There was nothing inevitable or automatic about her doctrine—provided one does not rely on *The Accumulation of Capital* alone.

Compared to this overriding necessity of conflict, the purity of internal doctrine and the health of the organs of internal self-sufficiency were all of secondary importance. Her attack on the

Marxist doctrine on the subject. See, for instance, D. Bell, 'The "rediscovery" of Alienation', *Journal of Philosophy* (U.S.A.), 1959, No. 56, pp. 933–52; also Bell, *The End of Ideology*, Glencoe (Illinois) 1960, pp. 335–68. A rather fanciful analysis of the Marxism-as-religion school is Robert C. Tucker's *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx*, Cambridge 1961.

¹ The continuity of chaos as a looming alternative to dialectical progress in fact strangely resembles the chronological continuity of the state of nature menacing 'failed' societies in Hobbes's *Leviathan*.



Staff Portrait at the SPD Party School, 1910
(1) Wurm, (2) Stadthagen, (3) Mehring, (4) Rosenfeld, (5) Cunow,
(6) Eckstein, (7) Rosa Luxemburg, (8) Schulz (Director), (9) Ebert

Mais aussi pardonnez, si, plein de ce beau zèle,
 De tous vos pas fameux observateur fidèle,
 Quelquefois du bon or je sépare le faux,
 Et des auteurs grossiers j'attaque les défauts ;
 Censeur un peu fâcheux, mais souvent nécessaire,
 Plus enclin à blâmer que savant à bien faire.

Mein Liebes Frä. Jezierska!
 Durch ein für mich rätselhaft
 Missverständnis ist ein geschlossener
 Brief, der augenscheinlich an Sie ge-
 richtet war, mir zugestellt worden.
 Da ich erst in einigen Wochen
 vielleicht die Gelegenheit haben
 dürfte, ihn wieder hinauszugehen,
 so bleibt mir nichts anderes üb-
 rig, als ihn Ihnen hier wortge-
 treu abzuschreiben, um Sie so
 schnell wie möglich von seinem
 Inhalt in Kenntnis zu setzen.
 Dem Brief lag ein Manuskr.
 auf 8 engbeschr. Seiten bei, das
 ein detailliertes Konzept zu
 einer Abhandlung über mili-
 tarismus darstellt. Dieses muss ich

Secret letter from Rosa Luxemburg to Fanny Jezierska, written from prison in urine on a page from a book of French poems, dated probably

1917

preoccupation with organization was not merely concerned with wrong priorities—organization as a condition for action instead of being its most beneficial result—but with the very base of the SPD's isolation. Before the party could come to grips with society and get moving again, the institutional foci of internal preoccupation had to be destroyed. Underlying all the tactical considerations of her struggle—first against the trade-union leadership, then against the SPD parliamentary group, and finally against the executive itself—was the need to break the very structure of self-absorption.

A problem of this kind could only arise in the first place in a party like the SPD, a mass organization large, disciplined, and legal enough to create such a state within a state. This is why no similar doctrine was evolved elsewhere at the time, and especially not by Lenin who did not know such problems between society and Socialism existed until after the Bolshevik revolution. Before 1917 his concern was the creation of a disciplined, cohesive, conspiratorial group in exile. All the problems and conflicts of theoretical purity related to the universe of the RSDRP and, except for a revolutionary moment at the end of 1905, hardly impinged on Russian society at all. Hence, paradoxically, Lenin's view was if anything closer to that of Kautsky than to Rosa Luxemburg's; for Lenin's concentration on the internal cohesiveness and purity of his faction within the RSDRP corresponded neatly with Kautsky's view of the SPD in society. In both cases the main effort was directed against rival ideas which might disturb the unity and separateness of the desired group; for their different reasons neither was prepared to drown differences of opinion in the party in the dynamic struggle with society. Was this the reason for Lenin's overlong honeymoon with Kautskyism? Indeed the analogy can be carried further. The circumstances which caused Rosa Luxemburg to struggle for a closer link between party and society approximated more closely to those of Stalin in the 1930s than those facing Lenin after the revolution. For very different reasons and with entirely different techniques, Stalin grappled with the problem of making the party more conscious of its relationship to society, and reduced its role and status of proud isolation in the process. He now used the techniques of terror, hitherto reserved for society, on the party; he destroyed the privileged self-regarding life of the party when he broke the old Bolshevik élite, when he pushed forward the policy of massive industrialization—a policy which

demanded and led to a greater impact of society in the party instead of the previous, relatively privileged isolation. And, most ironic of all, the old Luxemburg concept of heightened imperialist pressure, this time from abroad, was used to galvanize and purge the party—not, as in Lenin's day, to mobilize Russian society in support of the party. It is a curious analogy between two figures who in all conscience had little enough in common. What really created the analogy was, of course, nothing more than a similarity of Marxist responses to a rationalized objective need—which either puts Stalin unconsciously in Rosa Luxemburg's debt, or validates the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist orthodoxy of her concept of imperialism and how to deal with it.¹

Rosa Luxemburg's doctrine of imperialism was necessarily based on certain assumptions about democracy which we must now sketch briefly if we are to understand her whole theory of action. They will be examined in greater detail later in relation to the Russian and German revolutions. Mass action was never a purely formal concept. Rosa Luxemburg's longstanding emphasis on class consciousness predicated an important role for the 'conscious' or educated masses. The example of the first Russian revolution increased her estimate of this role even further. Thus the concept of mass action in Rosa Luxemburg's mind existed long before the development of a polarity between the leaders and masses after 1910. She never formalized the masses into an abstraction to the extent that the Bolsheviks did; nor was there any trace of a doctrine of substitution of party leadership for mass action. The role of the masses could never be assumed.

During the war, when a choice between secret organizational activity and mass propaganda under difficult circumstances had to be made, the *Spartakusbund* chose the latter. The reason for remaining in the party, for avoiding an organizational break, was again and always the need to keep open the channels of approach to the masses which they believed could only be done within the official organization of the SPD. Much incidental light is shed on this problem in Rosa Luxemburg's comments on the Russian revo-

¹ For further discussion of this idea, see below, pp. 858–9. In view of the importance of this relationship between party and society—which I believe to be the single most important and chronic problem of Marxism—I have ventured this sketch of an interpretation of Soviet history after the revolution.

lution. One of the main reasons for acclaiming the Bolsheviks was that they had solved the problem of obtaining a majority. Only through their dynamic and active policy had they built themselves up from being 'a small hunted and despised minority to the leadership of the revolution in the shortest possible time . . . and with this had solved the famous question of the "majority of the people", which has oppressed German Social Democracy from the beginning'.¹

During the German revolution Rosa Luxemburg specifically emphasized that there could be no question of seizing power without the clearly expressed support of a majority of the people. There was therefore no contradiction but only the strongest dialectical connection between a revolutionary policy on the one hand and the resultant approbation and support by a majority on the other; a majority moreover that had to be real and could not merely be assumed.

What were these masses? Clearly not numbers trooping through voting booths to scribble on bits of paper. Equally not, as has just been explained, proletarians by definition with no choice but to support the party which spoke in their name. Rosa Luxemburg never explained the positive content of the word 'masses', but since she most frequently used it in connection with dynamic physical action it is probable that her view approximated to the sort of visible manifestation of mass support which Rousseau may have had in mind;² at least potentially, in a revolutionary situation or period.

Rosa Luxemburg's view of revolutions coincided perfectly with such a concept. Revolutions were long-term not short seizures of power. Like Mehring she was deeply anchored in history. Its revolutionary examples—the English seventeenth-century revolution and the great French revolution—always played themselves out over long periods of time; hence Mehring's phrase about revolutions having a very long breath. We shall see this doctrine applied in practice during the German revolution; here it concerns us particularly as a necessary consequence of Rosa Luxemburg's

¹ *The Russian Revolution*, pp. 52, 54.

² Rousseau was probably the last political analyst who spoke of the people as a whole in terms of a demonstrable gathering—and even here it is not certain that he meant this literally. Later writers either used 'masses' or 'people' in a purely formal sense or broke it down into recognizable parts (classes, groups, demonstrators, voters).

preoccupation with the masses and the question of majority.¹ Though she occasionally accepted the need for armed uprising, she saw this entirely as a further manifestation of mass action not as a coup by armed conspirators. This was her conclusion from the Moscow uprising of December 1905. In her analysis of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 Rosa Luxemburg never investigated the technical seizure of power; the *ex post facto* majority support had clothed it in the necessary aura of legitimacy.

The need for a majority was thus an essential part of Rosa Luxemburg's doctrine of imperialism and of revolution. This particularly has been the cause of an almost unique situation in which two utterly opposing Socialist camps continued mightily to document their claims on her allegiance. Such tenacity cannot be based entirely on fiction. The Communists emphasize the revolutionary aspect of her thought; the Socialists rely on her preoccupation with a majority—democracy, for short. Because of the deep division between them, both parties insist on their possession as exclusive; for the Communists her revolutionary determination precludes vulgar democracy, whilst for the Socialists her deep feeling for democracy would eventually have counteracted her impatience for physical revolution. In this respect the date of her death is important, for the choice—if indeed it is a choice—did not have to be made during her lifetime. But Rosa Luxemburg herself certainly did not see any exclusiveness in these two ideas, but believed them to be interdependent. Her Communist critics have never belaboured her for any excessive preoccupation with democracy. The theoretical attack on spontaneity carefully avoids any disagreement with her concept of democracy as such, and concentrates on the automatic and excessively objective features of *The Accumulation of Capital*. Lenin himself did not even mention spontaneity expressly or by implication in his summary of Rosa Luxemburg's errors in 1922.²

Rosa Luxemburg's view of democracy did for a short period in the 1920s assume critical importance. The Germany Communist Party was being disciplined to accept Russian control. Since she had specifically opposed the foundation of the Third International for that very reason, and had warned the new KPD in the few

¹ See below, pp. 698–9, 749–52. I prefer to use the word 'majority' rather than 'democracy' since the latter carries such strong connotations of a particular type of democracy which Rosa Luxemburg opposed.

² Lenin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXXIII, p. 184.

weeks before her death against importing the oligarchical traditions of the SPD, the prestige of her name was an important weapon for those resisting the Bolshevization of the German Communist Party. It was from that moment on that Rosa Luxemburg's views were subjected to an over-all systematic criticism. But even then there could be no overt disagreement with the concept of majority support as such. Her view of the masses as the repository of final authority was attacked as leading to indiscipline—an unnecessary inheritance from the bad days of the SPD. An attempt was made to identify such indiscipline with the failure of the SPD and its betrayal of the real cause of Socialism—leading to the absurd proposition that it was the SPD's inability to maintain discipline and cohesion which caused its failure in 1914. And out of this practical need to counteract Rosa Luxemburg's undisciplined influence eventually grew the onslaught on the more sophisticated notion of spontaneity which has already been discussed.

Whatever the polemics against the doctrines of Rosa Luxemburg, however, they were never classed as reactionary. There was no attempt to make any specific identification of her writings with opportunism until Stalin's famous letter to *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya* in which he brought his chorus of ancillary analysts to the point where the German Left was identified as its half unconscious and half deliberate ally. At the same time the criticisms of Rosa Luxemburg's ideas were knit together into the coherent doctrine known as Luxemburgism—national question, spontaneity, poor arithmetic, failure to understand opportunism in organizational matters; it is always easier to build on the ruins of a whole system than merely to contradict individual deviations from orthodoxy.

The final question remaining is the extent to which Rosa Luxemburg's theories as they developed between 1906 and 1914 add up to any coherent system. That she produced a coherent *theory* of imperialism and a consistent *policy* for Social Democracy cannot be doubted. But was this all? Her later Communist critics certainly credited her with a total system—Luxemburgism. To what extent was this an artifact for purposes of demolition and how much of it, irrespective of content can really be called a system?¹

¹ At some stage every writer on Marxism or on any important Marxist must face for himself the problem of the 'correct' relationship between theory and practice, as implied by a Marxist system of thought and as interpreted by current Marxist orthodoxy. Every Marxist must 'know' Marxism sufficiently to relate

No one in the Second International, and certainly not Lenin and his supporters, ever tried to work out a formula of government for the post-revolutionary state. In all this time there was only one article in *Neue Zeit* which even posed the problem, and then it dived away from all modern political contexts by analysing the various utopias of the past.¹ Speculation on this subject was frowned upon as romantic. Even the form and nature of the revolution which would usher in the Socialist future was not discussed except in a purely formal context and then strictly with relevance to present problems. After the Bolshevik revolution Lenin, an extremely empirical tactician, was therefore able to act without fear of counteracting any established doctrine. But then he was less bound by *tradition*—as opposed to Marxist *orthodoxy*—than almost anyone in the Second International.

Rosa Luxemburg followed established practice in avoiding any overt speculation about the future. But in her case this was no mere sin of omission. Instead it became a doctrine full of positive content. Believing as she did in the creative force of mass action, she stated more and more specifically that the creative aspect of action would solve not only the immediate problems which had called it into being but also those that would arise as the revolution moved forward. This followed logically from the belief that organizations grew out of mass action, that class consciousness was increased by it. If such organizations and consciousness grew in a healthy way, they would automatically be equipped to deal with the problems of revolutionary technology and the problem of power after victory. Her criticism of the

any particular problem to the general thesis. At the same time he must demonstrate the *relevance* of the general to the particular, as well as the *illustration* of the general *by* the particular. The empirical fact of the particular is supposed to be given (and therefore presumably unalterable), the establishment of relevance and illustration highly desirable; any adjustment to the general thesis in the process of analysis is both the epitome of achievement (if valid, or accepted as such) as well as a great risk (if not). Hence the vulgarization of Marxism under Stalin—a stereotyped, unimaginative application of formal and often irrelevant categories and theses handed down from above.

Rosa Luxemburg scores highly on two levels: first, her untiring efforts to establish the connection of relevance between the general and the particular which makes her a master of Marxist *method* (see Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*; also above, Chapter VI); secondly, her willingness to amend the general thesis in the process of illustration, which makes her an original (but controversial) Marxist *thinker*.

¹ Karl Kautsky, 'Zukunftstaaten der Vergangenheit', *NZ*, 1892/1893, Vol. I, pp. 653-63, 684-96.

Bolshevik revolution contained strong elements of this theory. Not only did she criticize the Bolsheviks for specific mistakes in the face of accepted Socialist doctrine (distribution of land), but she believed that any oligarchical tendencies must by themselves prevent the right solutions or at least make them more difficult. This was one of the most important and at the same time disastrous criticisms of the Russian revolution—disastrous because she and those who looked to her for inspiration in Germany became burdened with an obstinate lack of realism with regard to revolutionary technology. We shall see how the consistent refusal to face up to problems of power, the postponement of these problems till they would be solved by action itself, ultimately helped to make *Spartakus* success impossible even if objective circumstances had been more favourable. Her system consisted of an emphatic refusal to construct a system.

But even in her criticisms of others within or without the SPD, Rosa Luxemburg never tried to build one system in order to oppose another, like mediaeval assault troops with their towers of the same height as the besieged fortress. More and more her answers to unsatisfactory systems were not alternative systems, but movement—anti-system. She came to see systems as static and movement as dynamic, so that the very existence of an accepted system of society was already a fault. In her criticisms of Kautsky, a system-builder *par excellence*, she carried the distrust of complete panaceas to its furthest possible limit.

This applied not only to her refusal to construct a theory of Socialist government with which to confront society, but also to her unwillingness to meet the unsatisfactory system within the SPD by any alternative. Though she was one of the first to do so, she only recognized the systematic nature of German Social Democracy in 1912, deducing it from the party's excessive preoccupation with itself. In this respect she was unique, for nearly everyone else had some pet 'system' up their sleeve to substitute for existing reality. Lenin had his detailed scheme for party organization on which he had been working since 1902; Karl Kautsky had a whole constellation of systems according to the circumstances of the moment. Finally, the SPD executive had its own definite notions on how a party should be run and put these into practice behind a veil of theoretical window-dressing. Rosa Luxemburg had nothing like this. The more closely she felt

herself surrounded by systems the more she emphasized the importance of her anti-system philosophy of action and movement—spontaneity, in modern Communist terminology. In her view systems were reification, one of the nastier features of alienation adumbrated by Marx and elaborated in detail by those like Max Weber who took up his sociological techniques without their political content. This strong opposition to system building naturally had its roots also in her personality. A highly articulate and independent individual, Rosa Luxemburg reacted unfavourably to intellectual discipline imposed from outside. When she did accept it, it was a matter of sacrifice almost (in the Polish party) verging on masochism. Nearly all those who founded the *Spartakusbund* were strongly driven by their hatred for the SPD bureaucracy. Rosa Luxemburg was by no means the fiercest opponent of party discipline; as her correspondence in 1915 with Karl Liebknecht shows, he went much further in his negation of discipline than she did.¹ None of these German left-wingers was ever able to envisage Socialism in static terms again or feel at ease in a static situation. This goes a long way to explain the constant fever among the *Spartakus* leaders, at least for the first twelve months after the war.

In the last resort Rosa Luxemburg was a critic, albeit profound and acute, rather than a political theorist. Through her writings we learn a great deal about society and about Socialism, but we do not see a coherent alternative system to the ones she was criticizing. Luxemburgism—if it exists at all—is at most a tendency, a way of thought, an attitude to existing societies; never the system which the imperatives of Communist analysts have made out of it. It cannot exist in a vacuum, in the rarefied air in which pure political speculation takes place. It needs strong meat on which to fasten its teeth. The great difference between Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg was that the former could have taken himself off to the moon and produced exactly the same thought and action from there. Rosa Luxemburg on the other hand needed not only society and Social Democracy as humus for her thought but the specific society of imperial Germany and particularly the German Social-Democratic party that had grown within it. Once more we are back to the problem of the relationship between

¹ *Unter dem Banner des Marxismus*, Vienna/Berlin, 1925/1926, Vol. II, pp. 416 ff. (see particularly p. 420). See also below, p. 630.

Socialism and society. To what extent did Socialism then and does Communism now need hostile societies within or without in order to survive and flourish? Rosa Luxemburg's Socialism is unthinkable except in terms of an imperialist society pressing closely upon Social Democracy.

And it is precisely this sense of continuous involvement with society in its widest context (rather than any retreat into internal party preoccupations) which infused Rosa Luxemburg's Socialism with its strong glow of humanity. Unlike Lenin, she could not theorize about the First World War in abstract terms as History's contribution to revolutionary midwifery. Nor, like Mussolini and other Socialist admirers of action first and foremost, could she welcome the war as a personal escape route from preaching into doing.¹ Hence the immensely painful contradiction of the first war years, the disorientation which Lenin was to seize on as a sign of weakness: society must indeed be transformed by revolution, but if millions bled to death in a holocaust of mutual butchery, there would be little left to transform. Society for Rosa Luxemburg always consisted of people first and foremost. They might, most of them, be playing the roles in which capitalism had cast them, but the whole point of social revolution was precisely to reallocate their roles. Rosa Luxemburg's whole notion of revolution can only be understood in this light—one that was steeped in morality and humanitarianism.

¹ A good account of Mussolini's progress from radical socialist to fascist via an almost hysterical fascination for action is in Renzo de Felice, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario, 1883-1920*, Turin 1965. This analysis has relevance to the story of people like Haenisch, Lensch, and Parvus in Germany.

XIII

POLES AND RUSSIANS, 1907–1914

THE Russian revolution, which had burst so unexpectedly into the red face of the unprepared revolutionaries, was now ebbing away almost as fast. From the spring of 1906 onwards, apart from a few major factory lockouts and some peasant outbreaks, the manifestations lost their spontaneous mass character. Small groups of conspirators were still active—the armed squads of Pilsudski in Poland and the Bolshevik raiding parties in the Caucasus. Reaction advanced fast on retreating revolutionary heels, and a wave of police counter-terror began. Each one of the émigrés had friends or family to worry about. Rosa Luxemburg knew nothing of Jogiches' fate until January 1907, when he was finally put on trial; she was indicted alongside him but naturally refused to appear. No doubt she was kept informed through party channels of the sentence of forced labour passed on him as a deserter and a revolutionary leader, and of his subsequent escape; no official notification seems to have reached her with regard to her own sentence *in absentia*.¹ But personal anxieties were a continuing feature of the next few years. Her own family was not molested though she feared for them until 1908; none the less, many SDKPiL members were captured and suffered from that particular blend of cruelty and neglect which characterized the Okhrana. One particular case roused her to a desperate flurry of activity; someone whose survival she described as 'a vital piece of my own life', who was sick and, as she feared, unlikely to survive imprisonment. As in her own case two years earlier, the security of the Russian state could, on medical advice, be satisfied by a cash transaction. Rosa bombarded her German friends for loans to supplement the pathetic resources of the boy's own family,

¹ See above, p. 360, note 2. Some of the court documents relating to her own case are in a special Rosa Luxemburg file in Zakład Historii Partii, Warsaw.

after pledging all her liquid cash. And she succeeded, for a month or so later 'her own boy' was in Berlin, safe and sound.¹

These personal tragedies, the inevitable aftermath of failure, took place in an atmosphere of disillusion in Russia and indifference abroad. The German Socialist leaders, after their early enthusiasm, had already lost interest by the summer of 1906; revolution in Russia was a fine foreign venture, but strictly to be deplored if liable to catch on at home, and the imperial authorities contributed their own warning. There was even talk—baseless as it turned out—of supporting the Romanov cousin with arms. In Russia itself hopes for legal agitation dimmed as Duma succeeded Duma with a progressively restricted franchise, and in June 1907 the Social-Democrat deputies were arrested en bloc—*pour décourager les autres*. With very few exceptions, all the SDKPiL leaders got away during 1907. Dzierżyński and Hanecki helped Jogiches to escape; they themselves were caught and deported to Siberia several times between 1907 and 1909, but managed to escape on each occasion. Marchlewski, whose alibi had not been broken during a short period of arrest, was with difficulty dissuaded by Jogiches from returning to Poland after the 1907 International congress and finally settled in Germany once more. By the end of the year even Finland was no longer safe, and the Bolshevik leaders split into little groups and flowed away westwards to Paris. By 1908 the pre-war revolutionary pattern was re-established: the leadership in exile, a hard core of militants underground, and rapidly dwindling membership. Police activity did not end at the border. They penetrated the émigré organizations with their own agents disguised as revolutionaries and tried to catch the couriers and delegates as they crossed the frontier. The existence of a legal Socialist delegation in the Duma made the police task of identification much easier, through all the Socialist parties, Polish as well as Russian, tried hard to keep the legal organization as watertight and separate from the clandestine groups as possible. The nervous awareness of successful police penetration at almost every level made the leadership abroad suspicious and intransigent; oppon-

¹ This incident has been pieced together by isolated references in various unpublished letters, i.e. to the Zetkin family, and Faisst. The identity of the young man was never revealed; apparently her friends were familiar enough with the story and name of Rosa's protégé. Possibly it was Leder, for whom Rosa always had a high regard and whose known circumstances—illness, imprisonment, release against payment—fit these facts. If so, he repaid Rosa's devotion with a slashing attack on her in 1912. See below, pp. 582, note 2; 585.

ents in the party were all too quickly labelled as police spies or at least as their unwitting tools. After 1907 the party atmosphere abroad, in the SDKPiL as much as in the RSDRP, deteriorated to one of extreme nervousness and irritation. Unable to influence events at home, all the considerable energy of the leaders was concentrated once more on internal party affairs. Every dispute was pursued to the bitter end. For the next seven years the history of both parties, jointly and severally, is only comprehensible within this atmosphere of suspicion and disillusion. None the less, the effect on the two parties was very different. The SDKPiL split up, while the RSDRP was torn apart.

Active participation in revolution was now replaced by elaborate post-mortems. The returned revolutionaries threw themselves into this important Marxist task with zeal. As usual it was a battle on two fronts—for all Marxist analysis is essentially a battle, a creative contribution to the very struggle which it is supposed to analyse, for analysis is struggle, and criticism even more so. On the one hand there was the relationship between proletariat and society, the broad confrontation of classes; on the other the struggle for a correct tactic against opponents within the party. This latter aspect was especially important in Russian and Polish Socialism, where the division between Bolsheviki and Mensheviki, between SDKPiL and PPS, was sharp and permanent. In practice the two elements of struggle were closely connected, and Rosa Luxemburg was particularly well qualified to concentrate on this continuing two-variable analysis. Her writing for the next few years brilliantly formulated the SDKPiL view, both on intra-party tactics as well as on the Socialist confrontation with resurgent Tsarism. In addition to these two aspects, we have to disentangle the specifically Polish from the general Russian context. At the fourth or unity congress of the RSDRP at Stockholm in 1906 the SDKPiL had at last become an autonomous member party of the reunited RSDRP; following the fifth congress there were two Polish representatives on the Russian Central Committee and one on the central party organ, *Sotsial-Demokrat*. For the next three years Rosa Luxemburg wrote as freely and frequently on Russian as on Polish affairs.

The first major post-mortem on the revolution was staged at the fifth Russian congress in London from 13 May 1907. Perhaps

calling it a post-mortem is hindsight, for many of the participants still believed in the vitality of the revolution and intended to return to their secret hideouts in Finland and Poland. The congress was a more sober, practical affair than its predecessor at Stockholm the year before; the impulse of events, which had compelled even the Bolsheviks to submit to everyone's heartfelt desire for an end to émigré squabbles, was fast losing its hold. The old alignments were hardening once more and, though the congress was representative of all the groups, there were continuous caucus meetings of the factions behind the scenes. The Bolshevik 'Centre' within the officially united RSDRP which had been formed in great secrecy at Stockholm in April 1906 was now agitating actively for support among the uncommitted delegates—the *Bund*, the Poles, and the Letts—all of whom had joined the Russian party as separate groups at Stockholm. Rosa Luxemburg, Jogiches, and Marchlewski attended the congress as Polish delegates; Warszawski and Dzierżyński, who represented the SDKPiL on the Russian Central Committee, did not. The Bolsheviks negotiated with these outstanding personalities individually as well as with the Poles as a group. Rosa Luxemburg had at least two conspiratorial encounters on the day before the congress and on the opening day, at an address which proved to be a dubious public-house in the East End. It was raining outside and wraiths of smoke pervaded the sleazy public rooms; a backdrop which corresponded with Rosa's alternating mood of depression and excitement.¹

The convening of the congress itself had been largely inspired by the Bolsheviks who hoped to marshal a majority and thus gain control of the reunited party. There were no major problems before the delegates, many of whom grumbled that the whole effort was a waste of time and money.² The actual congress showed up once again the sharp edges of the split between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks; while the latter believed in the prophylactic properties of public discussion and reason—like the SPD—the Bolsheviks pulled their hidden strings, and reaped mysterious rewards in the voting. With one significant exception, they achieved small but consistent majorities during the meetings. *Sotsial-Demokrat*,

¹ From unpublished letters written from the congress, in Zakład Historii Partii, Warsaw. We do not know whom she met there.

² L. Schapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, p. 95.

the party central organ, now passed into the hands of the Bolshevik majority and Warszawski was voted on to the new editorial board as the representative of the SDKPiL. He also took one of the two Polish places in the newly elected Russian Central Committee together with Dzierżyński, while Jogiches, Marchlewski, Małecki, and Hanecki became candidate members.¹ All were personally known to Lenin; the qualities of Hanecki, Warszawski, and Dzierżyński had already been noted for future reference. At the congress the Poles supported the Bolsheviks fairly consistently, since they had begun, in return for support against the PPS, to identify themselves increasingly with Lenin's policy and with opposition to the Mensheviks after the last major flare-up of the revolution in January 1906.² But this support was not total or automatic. The big exception was the overwhelming adoption of the Menshevik resolution condemning armed raids and expropriation of captured money—in general terms, though only the Bolsheviks could be affected. Jogiches as well as Rosa Luxemburg voted against Lenin who obtained only 35 votes against 170, with 52 abstentions which included such prominent Bolsheviks as Zinoviev.³ As far as Lenin was concerned, Polish support was invaluable in view of the almost even balance of the factions; but he resented his dependence on a group over which he had no control and for whose goodwill he had to negotiate on each occasion.

The official Polish position on the internal questions of the RSDRP was expounded by Rosa Luxemburg in two long speeches. Russian congresses did not suffer from the need of the annual SPD congress to get through a heavy agenda quickly so that the delegates could return to their normal duties. The Russians had no 'normal duties' and Rosa, like all the others, held forth at length. There was no PPS delegation; the SDKPiL had adhered in 1906 on the condition that it should be the sole representative of the Polish proletariat. Rosa thus spoke in the exclusive name of

¹ *Protokoly, Londonskii s'ezd RSDRP, Izdanie Tsentralnogo Komiteta*, Paris 1909, p. 786.

² For a summary of SDKPiL support of the Bolsheviks between the fourth congress of 1906 and the fifth in May 1907, see Jan Sobczak, 'Antimenshevistskaya pozitsiya SDKPiL po voprosy vnutripartiinoi borby v RSDRP v period mezhdu IV i V s'ezdama RSDRP' (The anti-Menshevik position of the SDKPiL in questions of the intra-party struggle in the RSDRP in the period between the fourth and fifth RSDRP congresses) in *Iz istorii polskogo rabocheho dvizheniya*, Moscow 1962, pp. 58–102.

³ *KPSS v rezolyutsiyakh i rezheniyakh s'ezdov, konferentsii i plenumov Ts. K.*, Moscow 1954, Vol. I, p. 109; *Protokoly*, pp. 609–10.

the most advanced, prosperous, and revolutionary area of the Russian empire. In addition she spoke for herself; she was now a distinguished figure in her own right whose writings were known to many of the delegates. An obscure Caucasian Bolshevik and disciple of Lenin's, sitting quietly at the back of the hall, found Comrade Luxemburg's speech 'especially impressive' and noted with pleasure that she, as the fraternal delegate of the SPD as well as a leader of the SDKPiL, 'fully supported the Bolsheviks in the most important tactical problems of the revolution'. Her formulations were sufficiently striking for the young Stalin to reproduce some of them *verbatim*.¹ But though Rosa Luxemburg always spoke for herself, her analysis was also that of her Polish party; it had been discussed with Jogiches just before the congress, in spite of the harrowing difficulties of their relationship.

The Poles supported the Bolsheviks particularly in their emphasis on the primary and self-orientated function of the proletariat in the revolution. Rosa Luxemburg's analysis of class roles corresponded exactly to that of the Bolsheviks—the achievement of constitutional democracy but *through* the self-conscious action and determined primacy of the proletariat. Instead of pressing (or, worse still, begging) the liberals for efforts to screw democratic concessions out of the autocracy, the proletariat had to achieve these by itself, dragging the reluctant liberals in its wake even though the latter would be the immediate and prime beneficiaries. The analysis hinged on a different evaluation of liberalism by Mensheviks and Bolsheviks. The former saw the Russian liberals as a belatedly developing force with revolutionary or dialectic potential—the equivalent of western middle classes at the time of emergence from feudalism—while the Bolsheviks had already written the liberals off as puppet figures of the autocracy, willing to make noises but falling over towards the government for fear of the Left as soon as they felt the slightest pressure.²

A full analysis belongs more to Russian history than Polish. But in accepting the Bolshevik indictment of Russian Liberalism the Poles, and particularly Rosa Luxemburg, committed themselves to a view that was to have far-reaching consequences. In the immediate context it provided useful ammunition against the Polish National Democrats, the equivalent of the Russian Cadets—just

¹ Stalin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. II, pp. 63-64.

² *Protokoly, Londonskii s'ezd*, pp. 286-7.

as the PPS was pretty much a Polish version of the Mensheviks, admittedly without the poison teeth of Polish patriotism. Thus the Russian situation provided a happy skeleton model for use in Poland—and again emphasized the interdependence of Polish and Russian developments, so important for those who believed in the all-Russian revolution. But the analogy did not end there. As Rosa Luxemburg pointed out at the London congress, her interest was not to make merely a local contribution, but to draw lessons on an international scale. According to her, Liberalism was defunct, not only in the East but in the West as well, in Germany, in France, in England. This meant far brighter proletarian perspectives for revolution in the West than had hitherto been supposed—not because the liberals were strong and therefore an effective barrier to dialectical change, but because they were weak and Socialism could therefore leapfrog a whole stage of the dialectic.¹

Now this analysis lacked sophistication and subtlety. It was far too broad and arbitrary. It ignored the real strength of the *bourgeoisie* in France and England, and in Germany the very existence of the class which would come to political power by inheriting the tradition of state authority and strength—the lower middle class. It was admittedly early days for this—in a Germany still flushed with imperial strength. But was it too much to ask that those who anyhow claimed to see collapse as an integral function of such great strength should also see the realities of that collapse? Was not the *Reichstag* election of 1907 a clear warning? What was clear to Trotsky twenty-five years later was already stated by Rosa Luxemburg in 1907; the German, like the Russian, classical *bourgeoisie* had neither past nor future—but in Germany the lower middle class had. These latter would turn their backs on the liberal attempt of their unsuccessful ancestors to restrict the power of the state, and use that power, even increase it, for their own ends till they reached the superstates of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. As far as England and France were concerned, however, the *bourgeoisie* did have the capacity for survival, but at the cost of their own liberalism. By resuscitating the power of the state *against* the political onslaught of the workers, and at the same time *using* the state to *fulfil* some of their economic demands, the *bourgeoisie* survived—minus their own traditions; a conservative and no longer a liberal force. Thus the Bolshevik-Polish view,

¹ For this view elaborated in the German context, see above, pp. 452 ff.



Rosa Luxemburg's self-portrait, painted about 1911

Freunde 15. XI. 12

Werken Quone Henke!

Der Brief v. 9 d., in dem Sie mich auffordern, in der Bremer Bürgerzeit gegen Kautsky zu polemisieren, hat mich nicht wenig verwundert. Sie spielen darauf an, dass ich Ihnen das einen Jahre, als Sie fragen, ob ich Kleiner noch so wäre, gewalt wärdet habe, die seien ein großes ~~Wort~~ Thema, handelt es sich um einen Artikel verfallen und taillieren Artikel, den Sie angeblich zu meiner Verteidigung auf veröffentlicht hatten, also um einen persönlichen Tort, den Sie nicht ausgehen hatten. ~~Ich~~ persönliche Kränkungen habe ich sehr geringe Empfindlichkeit und sehr kurze Gedächtnis. Jetzt handelt es sich um etwas ganz anderes. Das Blatt hat ~~mit~~ seit Kurzem wieder sehr passiv

Facsimile of first page of Rosa Luxemburg's letter to Alfred Henke, 15 November 1912, protesting against the latter's public support for Karl Radek

crude as it was, was also not wrong; its very crudity saved it from the later Stalinist-Trotskyite failure to understand fascism. But to any Englishman or Frenchman listening to this exposition, which arbitrarily insisted on sweeping in their own societies, the picture of the democratic rulers blotted out as a spent force must have sounded strange and foreign indeed.

Where Rosa Luxemburg's analysis and that of the Polish party differed from the Bolsheviks' was in the evaluation of armed uprising. This part of the speech naturally earned the ungrudging applause of Plekhanov and Akselrod. Interestingly enough, Rosa Luxemburg to some extent went back on her own previous evaluation of the Moscow December days—presumably she was carrying out agreed party policy.¹ In fact the Poles were in a quandary here. Apart from their reluctance to accept the validity of Lenin's concept of organization—the only way a revolutionary situation could sensibly lead to armed uprisings—it was difficult to find a consistent argument for supporting the Bolsheviks on the one hand while strenuously and violently opposing the armed raids of Piłsudski's Revolutionary Fraction on the other. To say that the Bolsheviks were good Marxists and Piłsudski was not, was not good enough to settle the point in the necessarily theoretical framework of an RSDRP congress. A choice had to be made—and the SDKPiL decided that its primary duty lay in emphasizing mass action as against armed uprising; in taking a stand against Polish opponents even though this must mean disagreement with the otherwise more acceptable wing of the Russian party.²

In the course of her argument Rosa Luxemburg developed a theory of causality between Left and Right which was to appear again in different circumstances.

You Comrades on the right-wing complain bitterly about the narrowness, the intolerance, the tendency to mechanical conception in the attitudes of the Bolsheviks. And we agree with you. . . . But do you know what causes these unpleasant tendencies? To anyone who is familiar with the party conditions in other countries, these tendencies

¹ See above, pp. 332-5. Communist history absorbed her remarks at the congress, but not her Polish writings of 1906—hence its false characterization of her attitude to strikes and armed uprising.

² 'The Polish comrades and I do not share the point of view of the Bolshevik comrades . . . as regards the so-called armed uprising.' (*Protokoly*, p. 288.) Though Rosa Luxemburg spoke against the Bolsheviks on this point, she voted with them for a watered-down resolution. Hence the confusion about her attitude (cf. L. Schapiro, *The CPSU*, pp. 106-7).

are quite well known: it is the typical outlook of one section of Socialism which has to defend the independent class interests of the proletariat against another equally strong section. Rigidity is the form adopted by Social Democracy at one end when the other tends to turn into a formless jelly, unable to maintain any consistent course under the pressure of events.¹

This argument had been heard before, as early as 1902, in defence of Guesde's well-known lack of flexibility—due above all to the opportunism of the French Socialist Right in its relations with bourgeois parties. It would eventually be transposed to German conditions too, when the Left would defend its alleged flirtation with anarchism against the strictures of the executive and the trade unions by claiming that anarchism in Germany was no more than an extreme reaction to Bernstein and the revisionists.²

Rosa Luxemburg attended the London congress not only as a Pole but as a German. She was the German fraternal delegate and her opening speech was entirely devoted to an analogy between German and Russian conditions. For the first time before a Russian audience the primacy of the Russian revolution over developments in Germany was openly admitted—part of the same reversal of the flow of experience and advice since 1905 which had already been demonstrated in the mass-strike pamphlet.³ She refused categorically to admit any longer that German conditions were more 'advanced'. On the contrary, she went to considerable historical trouble to show that the weakness and unreliability of the Liberals was the same in Germany as in Russia. The recent *Reichstag* elections illustrated this—at least in Rosa's mind; neither she nor Kautsky nor anyone else would admit that the class war could even temporarily be exorcised by a wave of nationalist sentiment; that there was one appeal which was irresistible to all classes if made strongly enough—to the radical lower middle classes who had hitherto supported the SPD, to the workers themselves if it came to the crunch of war. To see the Liberals scurrying away from the Left and towards the Right was simpler and more convenient. Part of her opening speech at the Russian congress was reported in the German press; it is doubtful whether the SPD executive enjoyed the interpretation of its fraternal delegate and her evaluation of the status of German Socialism vis-à-vis the Russians.⁴

¹ *Protokoly*, p. 290.

² *Protokoll . . . SPD 1906*, p. 316; also above, p. 240.

³ See above, pp. 509–13.

⁴ *Vorwärts*, 16 June 1907, 1st Supplement.

Her self-confident tone and the easy and on the whole consistent flow of ideas successfully covered up the extreme turmoil of Rosa's private life during the twelve days she spent at the congress (the congress itself went on from 13 May until 1 June, by the western calendar). She had not seen Jogiches since they were taken away to the Warsaw Citadel. The relationship round which Rosa's life had effectively revolved—though in closely guarded secrecy—had now collapsed. Though the physical presence of the man she had loved so intensely frightened and probably disgusted her now—and particularly the obstinacy with which he continued to press his claim—Leo Jogiches was the acknowledged party leader, and Rosa accepted this role without question.¹ Her letters show that the need to confer, to appear smiling together in public, was painful for her. Her public performance at the congress thus bears witness to the strength and discipline of her intellect. But the applause was wasted; she longed to be away, though twice she was obliged to put off her departure. London had never pleased her less. And this paradoxical relationship with Jogiches, personal antagonism and party subservience, dominated not only Rosa's own role in the SDKPiL for the next few years, but also that of Jogiches. His strength and blindness were to be firmly imprinted on the history of the Polish party.

Though Rosa Luxemburg personally stood outside the Russian organization and had no direct voice in its policies or feuds, her contact with the Bolsheviks and particularly with Lenin was not confined to public speeches of support. The consensus reached during the long sessions with him, Zinoviev, and Bogdanov at Kuokkala in the summer of 1906 were confirmed by the meetings in London and at the International congress at Stuttgart the following August.² Their collaboration at Stuttgart culminated in the Luxemburg-Lenin amendment to the congress resolution on war. Lenin displayed enough confidence in her—a rare event—to leave the draft entirely to her, and armed her with a Russian mandate in the commission on militarism. In return Rosa proudly displayed Lenin to close friends like Clara Zetkin.³ Lenin's wife, Krupskaya, who knew how tactical Lenin's friendships were and in her memoirs rarely allowed any personal qualification to warm up the dry pro-

¹ See above, pp. 380-1.

² For her role at this congress, see above, pp. 396-405.

³ Above, pp. 396, 403, note 1.

cession of names and dates, none the less admitted that 'since Stuttgart Rosa Luxemburg and Vladimir Ilyich had become very close'.¹ On their way to Paris in January 1908 Lenin, registered as a Finnish cook, passed furtively through Berlin and one of his few evenings was spent with Rosa.² But Lenin was none the less careful not to put all his Polish eggs in one basket. He also nursed his friendship with Dzierżyński and Hanecki, both of whom were to prove so valuable to him in 1917. Warszawski, too, was favoured by his attentions, and did his stint for the Bolsheviks up to 1911.

Traces of Lenin's hand appear in some of Rosa Luxemburg's activities in these years. She represented the RSDRP at the funeral of the SPD secretary, Auer, her old but never unfriendly sparring partner, in April 1907, and made a solemn speech on their behalf—with her tongue at least partially in her cheek, for Auer particularly had always appreciated her many different guises.³ Just now the element of charade in her official relationships was especially strong; she was representing Russia or Poland in Germany, the Germans at functions of the RSDRP, finally and always the Poles within the heaving bosom of the Russian movement. During the state visit of Edward VII to Reval in the summer of 1908 Jaurès lapsed into an obvious piece of francophile diplomacy with an article praising incipient Anglo-Russian friendship, and Rosa Luxemburg, after consulting with Lenin, answered him with an open letter in which she accused him of helping to sabotage the Russian revolution.⁴

Lenin hoped to have gained a permanent recruit for Bolshevik causes. He commissioned an article for the new Bolshevik paper *Proletarii* in which Rosa Luxemburg denounced the current 'Left' deviations in the party (otzovism and ultimatism).⁵ In writing to thank her for the article, he half-humorously upbraided her for not devoting more time to the RSDRP and its publications; her tendency to relapse all too easily into the fleshpots of the SPD was understandable but a matter of regret all the same. 'We were all very pleased with your articles. . . . Pity that you are writing so

¹ Nadezhda Krupskaya, *Memories of Lenin 1893-1917*, London 1942, pp. 120-1.

² *Ibid.*

³ See above, pp. 133, 376.

⁴ *NZ*, 1907/1908, Vol. II, p. 588. See Lenin's articles in *Proletarii*, No. 33, 23 July and 5 August 1908, in *Sochineniya* (5th ed.), Vol. XVII, p. 186.

⁵ *Proletarii*, No. 44, 8 April 1909 (Russian dating). Just as the Poles solicited Russian articles for their press, so the Russians turned to the Poles; apart from Rosa Luxemburg, Marchlewski, Warszawski, and Leder all contributed to *Sotsial-Demokrat* and other papers.

little for the Russians, that you prefer the rich German Social Democracy to the poor Social Democracy of the Russians. None the less, all the best. Greetings to Tyshka [Jogiches]. A handshake.¹ A joke of course; but meant to be taken seriously like all Lenin's infrequent jokes. Under cover of this letter he sent her his book *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* which Rosa passed on to Kautsky for review in *Neue Zeit*, with a special request to treat it with great respect and await her recommendation of a suitably sympathetic reviewer. It was a far cry from 1904 when she had brushed his work contemptuously aside. After the great break in 1911-12 she would have to work hard to undo the very reputation with prominent German Social Democrats which she was now assiduously helping Lenin to build up. Certainly they were close collaborators during these years, and much of their mutual respect was to survive even their renewed political enmity.

How far was all this a personal compliment to Rosa Luxemburg, and how far Polish—or for that matter Lenin's—policy? The jockeying for position inside the RSDRP was already rocking the flimsy craft of unity, but only reached and surpassed the pre-revolutionary level of savage recrimination in 1909, when it came to apportioning money. SDKPiL policy, which meant in the main the policy of Leo Jogiches, with some contribution from Warszawski in Paris, was to support the Bolsheviks *within* the Russian party; that is, on all issues save those which patently led to organizational disintegration—the much feared split.² Polish attitudes to the re-emerging factions in the RSDRP were not left to any 'spontaneity'; they had to be cleared with Jogiches. Rosa accepted the discipline; when she was asked by Gorky and Bogdanov to lecture at the new party school in Capri, which was opened in the teeth of Bolshevik hostility, she at once consulted Jogiches. 'Will this, do you think, affect party policy in view of the dispute between the colony in Capri and . . . Lenin?'³ Lenin, who

¹ *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXXIV, p. 347, dated 18 May 1909.

² For a discussion of SDKPiL policy within the RSDRP see Jan Sobczak, 'Z dziejów udziału SDKPiL w życiu wewnętrznym SDPRR w latach 1909-1910' (From the story of the participation of the SDKPiL in the internal life of the RSDRP in the period 1909-1910), *Z Pola Walki*, 1963, No. 4 (24), pp. 40-57. This article is the continuation of the series begun earlier (above, p. 353, note 1), but the tone and content is less orientated towards the classical Russian interpretation of party history, since the second article appeared in a less partisan Polish review.

³ Jogiches letters, 10 July 1909, IML (M). For the school, see Schapiro, *The CPSU*, p. III.

knew most of what was said or done at Capri, may not have liked the idea, which anyhow came to nothing since the general intention never materialized into any concrete invitation. But he noted the connection, in the context of the SDKPiL more than with regard to Rosa personally, even though he did invite one Pole to his own party school at Longjumeau two years later.¹

In the Polish movement itself Rosa's position was of course much more important. The revolution had greatly increased the strength of the SDKPiL, both absolutely and relatively, in relation to the PPS. The latter was now split into two mutually hostile camps, the unashamedly nationalist 'Revolutionary Fraction' dominated by the granite figure of Piłsudski, and the more Socialist majority of the PPS-Left. The latter had undergone a considerable transformation since 1906, when it first evicted the fighting squads. Having specifically rejected them as well as their emphasis on Polish independence, the PPS now occupied a middle position. But the uncompromising pressure towards polarity in Polish Socialism necessarily brought it closer to the SDKPiL. There was as little organizational or intellectual room for any consistent middle position in Polish Socialism as in Russian, with all the available no-man's-land long absorbed by one or other of the competing extremes. The undermining of a viable middle position was inherent in the attitude and policy of the SDKPiL, as it was in that of the Bolsheviks in the RSDRP—the creation of a separately organized and intolerant Left in the same year as the foundation of a united party absorbed, aggregated, and articulated all potential opposition to the main party leadership. Where in other countries—Germany, France, Italy—a distinct and coherent Left was precipitated gradually and painfully out of a variety of opposition groups within the party (this was to be especially noticeable in France), and only achieved an autonomous separate existence after the October revolution, the Poles and the Russians had their Left ready-made—the former even before the latter. The PPS-Left in some respects resembled the later USPD as a doomed attempt to establish a middle position—though the analogy must not be carried too far. Its life (1906–1918) was longer and more robust than that of the USPD (1917–1922), partly because splits were anathema in Germany and common in Poland, and partly because of the split within the SDKPiL in 1911. Besides,

¹ The guest lecturer was Leder (see *Z Pola Walki*, 1963, No. 4 (24), p. 232).

Piłsudski's rape of the nationalist cause was far more brutal and obvious than the flirtation and humble courtship of the German revisionists; the circumstances of 1906 in Poland which brought about the creation of the PPS-Left were reproduced in Germany only after 1914.

In this way Rosa Luxemburg fought a curious war on two fronts between 1907 and 1911: against Piłsudski—*Frak*, as the Revolutionary Fraction was known—and against the PPS-Left. The former was an obvious task for the SDKPiL's chief propagandist and theorist; in her eyes *Frak* now became part of the bourgeois alliance against Socialism, together with Dmowski and his National Democrats—*Endecja*—all of them more or less conscious agents of Tsarism.¹ More important and obscure was the attitude towards the PPS-Left. Personal antagonism still ran deep between the respective leaderships, which made each interpret the other's motives as unfavourably as possible. Such almost spiteful dislike prevailed right into the First World War, though by that time it had become meaningless in terms of policy.² Rosa, too, obtained visible pleasure from the difficulty of the PPS-Left in establishing its proper orientation and programme in the changing circumstances since the revolution. For someone who could claim with justice a consistency which the PPS had previously always belittled as sheer blind pig-headedness, it was now gratifying to watch former opponents crawling towards one's own interpretation, with regular, painful reviews of the party line.³ Whatever possibilities of co-operation might have existed, Rosa Luxemburg certainly extended no encouragement to the PPS. And it was not mere personal pique but the agreed SDKPiL party line on the subject.

Mere *Schadenfreude* might be suitable for popular propaganda in *Czerwony Sztandar*, but the differences between SDKPiL and PPS-Left went deeper than this, and it was Rosa's particular task to articulate them. At the instance of her party leadership she set

¹ See for instance 'Czarna Karta rewolucji' (The revolution's Black List), *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, July 1918, No. 5, p. 369.

² See letter from H. Stein (Kamieński) to J. Hanecki, 3 October 1915, IML (M), Fund 486, No. 79; for information on war-time relations between the Polish groups, see F. Tych, 'La participation des partis ouvriers polonais au mouvement de Zimmerwald', *Annali dell'Istituto Giangiacomo Feltrinelli*, 1961, Vol. IV, pp. 90-125.

³ 'Czwarty program—“na razie”' (The fourth programme—for the moment!), *Czerwony Sztandar*, 25 February 1908. An anonymous article attributed to Rosa Luxemburg in *Z Pola Walki*, 1961, No. 1(13), p. 72.

out to do this in a long article in February 1908, which appeared in the party's important theoretical review.¹

Every revolution is an epoch of political elimination . . . promoting healthy and virile foci of success, sweeping aside all relics of the past and all ideological fictions . . . like social patriotism. In three years of revolution a party of numerous workers, intellectuals and writers, a party rich in material resources, unlimited energy and perseverance has been ruined.²

Out of this ruin had grown two bastards, one the old uncompromising Piłsudski 'fraction', the other an opportunist party which, like Bernstein's or Jaurès's followers (but Rosa did not draw the parallel), tailored their unprincipled policies to every political boom or slump as it appeared. For the departure from the commitment to Polish independence was not from one principle to another, but into an opportunist void. 'The real significance of the Polish question for Socialism in our country is that the [new] PPS, rejecting all "theory" and all attitudes based on principles, has suspended, so to speak, its Socialism in thin air.' In the process the 'reconstructed PPS has become neither one thing nor the other, neither fish nor fowl [*ni pies, ni wydra*]'. Rather than this, Rosa Luxemburg almost preferred Piłsudski who at least had a programme and not merely a bundle of tactics.³

But worst of all, the renunciation of nationalism was false. Though it should not be part of the minimal programme, Polish independence was still the ultimate PPS solution.⁴ Thus the difference between *Frak* and PPS-Left was one of emphasis only! Once more Rosa Luxemburg used the 'best-of-both-worlds' argument (*lack* of principles and *wrong* principles) with which she had over-enthusiastically berated the French and Belgian revisionists—and did the same violence to her logic. But by now another element had crept into Rosa's polemics (or perhaps it was peculiar to the Polish question and had always been there): though couched in policy terms, her argument was really *ad hominem*; because her opponents had for so long been members of the PPS they *could*

¹ 'Likwidacja' (Elimination), *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, 1908, Vol. III, No. 1, pp. 46–62; Vol. IV, No. 2, pp. 112–31.

² *Ibid.*, quoted from *Wybór pism*, Vol. II, p. 7.

³ *Ibid.*, *Wybór pism*, pp. 59, 63, 37. Compare a similar preference for the 'honest' conservative Right (Graf Westarp) over the 'dishonest' Social-Democrat Centre in German conditions, below, p. 662.

⁴ See for instance *Mysł Socjalistyczna*, Vol. I, No. 1; also H. Walecki, *Przyczynek do programu PPS* (Comment on the PPS programme), 1908.

not have principles, whatever they believed, did, or said—by definition.

The underlying assumption of this article, which was to be repeated in the future by Rosa Luxemburg and her colleagues, thus was that nothing had fundamentally changed in the PPS; that the eviction of *Frak* was but a little step compared with the big one across to the camp of genuine SDKPiL Socialism which the PPS-Left was not willing to take; that the PPS leadership was still wedded to the evil traditions of Daszyński and the London congress of the International. After all, the remedy was at hand—self-abasement and *mater, peccavi*; unequivocal adherence to the SDKPiL; unwillingness to perform such ablutionary rites surely justified the SDKPiL's scepticism to the hilt. That these demands were humiliating and impractical was beside the point. More serious, however, was Rosa Luxemburg's refusal to see a new, younger, and more radical leadership emerging behind the old stalwarts, one which represented aspirations that really did approach those of the SDKPiL. The problem of bridging a gap cannot arise until at least a minimum of bridge construction is undertaken on both sides. And when the time came the operation of merging Centre with Left actually proved easier than in any other country and took place far earlier; the Communist Party of Poland was quickly welded together out of these hitherto inimical components before the last year of the war had ended, two whole years before similar operations could be carried out in Germany and France. But then Warszawski, representing the SDKPiL whose former leaders were now scattered between Berlin and Moscow, was able to put his back into the effort—so much so that he was accused of going too far to meet the PPS-Left leadership.¹

Though the relationship between SDKPiL and PPS-Left was the typical product of Polish conditions in the post-revolutionary period, it also represents a much more general principle governing the relationship between Socialist parties—or any parties for that matter. The immediate rival—or opponent, in a radical context—is the party next door, the one which appeals fundamentally to much the same class of supporters. Thus Socialists cannot usually expect to make much impact on the supporters of right-wing agrarian parties in a multi-party system, but they do compete with Communists and radical liberals. Within the 'world' of Socialism before

¹ See his article in *Nasza Trybuna*, 13 December 1918; see also below, p. 597.

1914, the SDKPiL was unlikely to steal much support from Piłsudski—therefore denouncing *Frak* in general terms sufficed—but it had to compete with the PPS-Left for popular Socialist support, and was therefore preoccupied with this rivalry. Paradoxically, the closer the programme of two parties, the more extensive and violent their rivalry, especially when tradition and the self-interest of the leadership militate against fusion. We shall find the same phenomenon even more glaringly exposed in the relationship between *Spartakus* and the Independents in Germany during and after the war. It is an occupational hazard of politics with its own self-generating energy—as so often, Marxism merely sharpened the vocabulary of conflict but did not create its conditions.

All these are valid if extraneous reasons. There was one fundamental but specific factor which made any collaboration between the existing SDKPiL and PPS-Left well-nigh impossible. The national question had been toned down; it had not disappeared. The PPS-Left decided that Polish independence had no priority or a low one in any Socialist programme, but they did not oppose it as basically wrong.¹ The difference was vital. The PPS-Left had gone a long way in abandoning Polish patriotism, but they did not accept the SDKPiL's own very different patriotism, that of the international proletariat. This Socialist fatherland was as real to Rosa Luxemburg as Poland was to Piłsudski, a substitution of references not a denial of concepts. It was the cement of the SDKPiL peer group, binding together such diverse personalities as Rosa Luxemburg, Marchlewski, Dzierżyński, and Hanecki. Thus its importance went far beyond mere policy; something like the 'natural law' of the eighteenth-century philosophers. How then could such a group work with the PPS-Left for whom patriotism was a mere tactical consideration, a matter for opportunistic programme juggling in accordance with the requirements of the moment? The more the PPS-Left decried the tactical assertion of Polish independence, the more opportunistic they showed themselves—hence Rosa's contempt for their many programmes when the SDKPiL never had or needed more than one—Socialism. As long as Rosa was there, the gap was unbridgeable. Only Zalewski or Warszawski could have overcome it—and in 1918 only the latter

¹ For the PPS programme, see above, p. 343, and F. Tych (ed.), *PPS Lewica, 1906–1918, Materiały i dokumenty*, Vol. I (1906–1910), Warsaw 1961, pp. 279–86 (1907) and pp. 389–95 (1908).

was left to do it, with the help of a PPS-Left leadership now approaching Socialist totality.

Having participated in the general Russian post-mortem on the revolution at the London congress—though everyone still strove officiously to keep the patient alive—the SDKPiL set about polishing its own analysis of these great events, and drawing lessons for the future. Once more Rosa wrote one of her major policy summaries for the Polish review, a broad explanatory justification of her party's policy in *combating* the liberals, Russian as well as Polish, in order to *achieve* a liberal monarchy.¹

More important—and certainly livelier, because not for publication—were the proceedings of the SDKPiL's sixth party congress, which in retrospect were to assume such importance after the split in the party. This congress took place in semi-secret in Prague in December 1908, the Polish version of the fifth Russian jamboree, though a much smaller and tighter affair. Rosa Luxemburg did not attend, apparently by her own wish—she was in a highly nervous state and the prospect of lengthy claustrophobic confinement with Jogiches was too much for her. But her influence at the congress was strong. Her article was the Central Committee's brief for its report to the congress. Jogiches' keynote speech had been discussed with her at length and had her full approval; as early as 22 July 1908 she had written to a friend with evident self-satisfaction that 'the *Slaventag* [Polish congress] will be a resounding triumph for my views'.²

Jogiches' speech was a curious hotch-potch of Bolshevik and Menshevik ideas, with much self-conscious emphasis on a distinct Polish approach separate from either Russian view. On the peasant question the Poles showed the same neo-classical Marxist incomprehension of tactics as the Mensheviks. 'The government', solemnly intoned Jogiches, '*does the work of the revolution for it* by getting rid of obsolete agrarian forms, creating a landed proletariat and, by causing the accumulation of land ownership in the hands of the village bourgeoisie, will [actually] bring about greater class contradictions and an increase in the [overall] revolutionary potential.'³

¹ 'Nauki trzech Dum' (The lessons of three Dumas), *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, Vol. V (1908), No. 3, pp. 177-94.

² Unpublished letters, ZHP, Warsaw.

³ *Sprawozdanie z obrad zjazdu, VI zjazd*, ZHP, p. 101. My italics.

This prognosis need only be contrasted with Lenin's on the same government's policy as expressed by Stolypin's land reforms: 'If this continues for long . . . it may well force us to renounce any agrarian programme whatsoever . . . agriculture will become capitalistic and any [revolutionary] "solution" of the agrarian problem—radical or otherwise—will become impossible under capitalism.'¹ It is all the more surprising since there was present at the congress the one man who really knew something about the peasant question, and particularly the extent to which Polish agrarian relations differed from those in Russia in generating a far lower revolutionary potential on the land. But Julian Marchlewski delivered his report on the agrarian question in his usual rather involved and learned style without making much impact.² The SDKPiL was never specially interested in or practical about peasants, and neglected this question almost disdainfully; already in London Rosa Luxemburg had been challenged by the Russians on this score.³ Jogiches' formulations now were surprisingly similar in tone and content to Rosa's speeches three years earlier.

None the less, the challenging slogan of the Bolsheviks could not simply be ignored—'Revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry'; not least because there was too much that was admirable and worth supporting about the Bolsheviks as a group. So the Poles produced their own slogan—this was Jogiches rather than Rosa Luxemburg: 'The dictatorship of the proletariat supported by the peasantry.'

When the proletariat comes to try and exploit the achievements of the revolution, its allies—the peasantry—will certainly turn against it . . . the political make-up of the peasantry disbars it from any active or independent role and prevents it from achieving its own class representation. . . . By nature it is bourgeois and shows its reactionary essence clearly in certain fields. . . . That is why the proposition before the congress speaks of the dictatorship of the proletariat alone *supported* by the peasantry. . . . Peasantry must assist proletariat, not the proletariat the peasantry in the achievement of the latter's wishes.⁴

¹ Quoted by Bertram D. Wolfe, *Three who made a Revolution*, p. 361. Cf. Lenin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XV, p. 30.

² For his writings on the peasant question see Julian Marchlewski, *Pisma Wybrane* (Selected Writings), Warsaw 1956, Vol. I, pp. 559 ff., 567 ff.

³ *Protokoly, Londonskii s'ezd*, p. 321.

⁴ *Sprawozdanie . . . VI zjazd*, p. 105.

Whatever concessions to the role of the peasantry had been made in the keynote speech, they were largely obliterated in the discussion. 'In the Bolshevik conception the peasantry plays the role of a third man in bedroom farces whom the author produces whenever he is in trouble and unable to resolve his situation in a natural way. . . . The peasantry cannot play the autonomous role alongside the proletariat which the Bolsheviks have ascribed to it.' One speaker did briefly recognize a distinctive feature of the peasant in Poland—only to dismiss him altogether from the revolutionary stage.¹

All this meant emphasis, even over-emphasis, on the role of the proletariat, not only at the expense of the peasant but at the expense of the middle classes as well. Here the SDKPiL followed the Bolsheviks closely, and Jogiches again borrowed extensively from Rosa Luxemburg. The earlier reservations about armed uprising had largely disappeared. As one speaker put it: 'The proletariat has to impose its own solution . . . by an uprising and fighting at the barricades, by reaching a class dictatorship, by capturing the heights of power in order to lift up and help to extend the power of its own eventual antagonists, the bourgeoisie.'² This was the Bolshevik line exactly—except for Lenin's one famous but isolated pledge to continuous revolution in 1905: 'We shall . . . straightaway . . . pass on to the Socialist revolution . . . we shall not stop halfway'; and it differed sharply from the daring projection of permanent revolution on a moving belt worked out by Trotsky 'supported by' Parvus. The Poles acknowledged Trotsky's work—it had after all appeared in their house magazine of which they were so proud—but admitted that they could neither fully understand it nor agree with it.³ When it came to the question of organization, however, Jogiches remained faithful to the principles enunciated by Rosa Luxemburg in 1904.

We are a mass party, we try to increase the proletariat's consciousness of its role, we can lead it but we cannot—and in no sense must we try to—be a substitute for it in the class struggle. . . . On the other hand we must equally not obliterate the distinction between the party organization and the politically shapeless mass—like the opportunist wing of the RSDRP suggests.⁴

¹ Ibid., p. 117.

² Ibid., p. 114

³ L. Trotsky, 'W czym się różnimy (Losy rewolucji rosyjskiej)' (Over what do we differ? (the fate of the Russian revolution)), *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, 1908, No. 5, pp. 405-18. For Polish, and particularly Rosa's, reaction to the notion of permanent revolution, see above, pp. 339, 504.

⁴ *Sprawozdanie . . . VI zjazd*, pp. 105-6.

Without any specific pointer, this was clearly a sideswipe at the Bolsheviks, only slightly tempered by the formal warning against the dangers of shapelessness. And as a statement of policy it had its share of savage irony, for nothing was further from the way the SDKPiL leadership worked in practice. Jogiches was of course referring to the mass-following the party had acquired during the revolution, which it was desperately anxious to retain, and to the need to associate the entire membership in the class struggle. To his listeners, however, some of whom were on the edge of revolt against his personal arbitrariness and the whole oligarchical leadership abroad, these words must have appeared cynical in the extreme. Not being present at the congress, Rosa Luxemburg was unaware of the overtones of coming trouble, but it is easy to see why she considered the congress to have been a triumph for her views and guiding principles.

On one subject, however, there was almost complete consensus of opinion in the SDKPiL—the national question. There was no need for any long elaboration of views that were well established. Nevertheless this subject too was given a brilliant theoretical polish by Rosa in the review, in the form of an up-to-date and complete statement of the SDKPiL position. So much had previously been said about the national question that we should not expect to find anything new. Her article ‘Autonomy and the National Question’ was none the less the most complete and sophisticated statement of her own point of view ever to come from her pen, and the one that Lenin later used when he took up the subject as a weapon against her. The fact that the article provided one of the classic texts on the national question, and the sophisticated and elaborate form of the discussion in the course of later polemics, make it preferable for us to examine the problem separately (see Appendix 2).¹

It will have become obvious that the SDKPiL, apart from matters of policy and conscious attitudes, had undergone other more subtle but profound changes. For the first time since its foundation it had achieved its desire—indeed its official *raison d'être*—of gaining mass support. The decline of revolutionary

¹ ‘Kwestia narodowościowa i autonomia’, *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, 1908, Vols. VII–XII, No. 6, pp. 482–515; No. 7, pp. 597–631; Nos. 8–9, pp. 687–710; No. 10, pp. 795–818; 1909, Vols. VI–IX, No. 12, pp. 136–63; Nos. 14–15, pp. 351–76. Reprinted *in toto* in Rosa Luxemburg, *Wybór pism* (Selected Works), Vol. II, pp. 114–67. Lenin’s polemics in *Prosveshchenie*, 1913–1914, reprinted in *Sochineniya*, Vol. XX, pp. 365–424. See also below, pp. 848–52.

possibilities in Russia made great inroads on SDKPiL support, but though no figures are available, the party was never again reduced to the straits of being a leadership without a following. None the less, the emphasis of policy-making, the entire political centre of gravity, shifted abroad once more, partly to Cracow—the nearest point of contact with Russian-occupied Poland—and partly back to Germany where Jogiches, Rosa Luxemburg, Marchlewski, and other leaders lived. The role of the SDKPiL within the Russian party created a third Polish centre of gravity in Paris, where the Russian headquarters were established from 1908 till 1912 when Lenin moved his Bolshevik committee to Cracow and split the RSDRP.

This, however, did not lead to any loosening of the SDKPiL organizational structure. Far from submitting itself to more democratic control as a result of the revolutionary accretion, the leadership actually tightened its grip on policy and organization. To some extent this was a normal, if hidden, process which always accompanies the growth of parties—and corresponded, for instance, to developments within the SPD. But apart from any relationship between leaders and members, the tendency also affected the relationship of the leaders with each other. Unlike the Bolsheviks, the SDKPiL had before the revolution been much more of a loose association of brilliant individuals co-operating for certain purposes and going their own way in others—the peer group we have already described. Rosa Luxemburg had provided much of the intellectual stimulus and Jogiches the organizational control, but neither ever dominated the party in the way that Lenin dominated the Bolsheviks. Since his return from Warsaw, however, Jogiches had tightened his grip on the party to an extent which closely resembled Lenin's. The history of the SDKPiL from 1907 to 1914 cannot be understood without drawing a picture of its boss, Leo Jogiches.

To the historians of Socialism he is one of the lost figures. His almost complete disappearance from history is made all the more ironic by the fact that many of those who served under him for a time later became prominent in the Bolshevik Party in Russia. Some turned against him in 1911—and thus had no cause to pay homage to him or his role. A certain amount of work on Jogiches was produced in Moscow in the 1920s, mostly by those who had remained loyal to the main leadership of the SDKPiL in 1911, had

joined the Polish Communist Party and later taken refuge in Russia.¹ As with the Germans, the main effort lay in publishing collections of documents to highlight present controversy; biography was not a licensed pastime.² The last of these historians were silenced when the Polish Communist Party fell into disrepute and was dissolved by Stalin in the 1930s, and its entire leadership wiped out. Jogiches wrote practically nothing himself and therefore, unlike Rosa Luxemburg, did not benefit from the automatic self-advertisement of survival in print.

Yet from 1907 to 1911 for all intents and purposes the SDKPiL *was* Jogiches. The flat tone and formal argument of his speeches should not deceive us into confusing appearances with reality. He could be an extremely harsh and intolerant leader who brooked little opposition; his methods of dealing with opponents, if less polemical than Lenin's, were at least as effective. His behaviour had already put the cat among the *Gruppa ozvobozhdenie truda* pigeons in Switzerland twenty years earlier. Those who disagreed with him found it simpler to resign, and between 1908 and 1911 several prominent members of the SDKPiL Central Committee—the Polish executive—quietly dropped out. Those who remained were subjected to increasingly rigid discipline and cavalier treatment—the choice was to put up and shut up, or go. Jogiches bore down with a particularly heavy hand where he detected personal weakness as well as policy disagreements. At the end of 1912 Rosa Luxemburg reproached him: 'Julek [Marchlewski] in spite of his faults you know how to treat properly, but Adolf [Warszawski] you insist on treating like a servant. He suffers from this and does not deserve it.'³ Later still, Marchlewski and Rosa Luxemburg, who out of loyalty and conviction both supported Jogiches in the struggle against the breakaway organization, none the less insisted on sharing in the formulation of policy, particularly when it came to dealing with the dissidents. On 4 October 1913 Rosa Luxemburg wrote sharply: 'I insist on a weekly conference *à trois* with Julek [and me] about party affairs, failing which I simply will do no more work.' And to ensure that the point was well taken Marchlewski wrote a post-script joining in the demand for regular meetings.⁴ These two

¹ The only biography of Jogiches that I have been able to discover is J. Krasny, *Tyszka*, Moscow 1925; but it is maddeningly formal and short.

² For Paul Frölich's efforts in Moscow to gain access to and make translations of Rosa Luxemburg's Polish works, see below, p. 796, note 1.

³ Jogiches letters, IML (M). ⁴ Jogiches letters, 4 October 1913, IML (M).

glimpses among many indicate a situation quite different from the outward appearance of uniformity presented by the SDKPiL, which made the split in 1911 seem so utterly incomprehensible to all spectators. The essential feature of a peer group is its partly voluntary nature, based on a self-esteem expressed through the group. Therefore a purely political association—a party—may survive the ascendancy of a charismatic or merely ruthless tyrant; a peer group by definition cannot.

The circumstances which crystallized these inherent dictatorial qualities in Jogiches—and those who had known him long were well aware of them—were first of all the success of his and Rosa's policy in the 1905 revolution after so many years of uphill struggle and neglect. At long last Jogiches actually had something to organize. From 1898 to 1905 he had suffered increasingly from the feeling of uselessness; watching Rosa's success through her writings on Polish affairs and even more within the German party, he felt the more useless and finished. His long visit to North Africa in 1901 showed that the party did not suffer materially through his absence. At heart he probably begrudged Rosa her success. Then came the unexpected revolution and with it a new feeling of self-confidence which brought all his innate authoritarian habits to the fore. Rosa Luxemburg knew him better than almost anyone else and her own words give a clear description of this process.

Leo for example is totally incapable of writing in spite of his extraordinary talent and intellectual sharpness; as soon as he tries to put his thoughts down in writing he becomes paralysed. This was once the curse of his existence . . . especially since he had to leave the practical work and organization in Russia. He felt completely rootless, vegetated in constant bitterness, finally even lost the capacity for reading since it seemed anyhow pointless to do so. His life appeared completely wasted and he was already in his late 30s. Then came the revolution and quite suddenly he not only achieved the position of leader of the Polish movement, but even in the Russian; in addition the role of leading editor of the party fell into his lap. As before, he doesn't himself write a single line but he is none the less the very soul of our party publications.¹

We have already described Rosa's relations with him and they are a vital factor in judging her own position in the Polish movement at this time.² Jogiches for a long time refused absolutely to accept the change in their relationship from personal to formal party

¹ Letter to a friend, July 1909, IML (M).

² See above, pp. 378-84.

allegiance. His relations with Rosa, supplemented by glimpses of his relations with other leaders, show him to be something of a sadist. Yet Rosa Luxemburg, with all her attempts to prise herself loose from him personally, never for one moment denigrated his political importance or the vital role that he played in the SDKPiL. Her letters to him during this period carefully avoided personal references; they were couched whenever possible in the passive tense and have neither address nor salutation: 'It is necessary . . . ' or 'One must try . . . '. Occasionally, when the pressure became too great, the letters necessarily stood their personal ground as well, though she admitted to Konstantin Zetkin that she hated even raising this issue. At the end of 1909 she was still obliged to protest against his unexpected calls for alleged party reasons: 'I simply cannot support this constant shoulder-rubbing.'¹

Rosa Luxemburg's position in the Polish movement during these years, therefore, showed evidence of an unusual, for her almost unique, submission to a discipline which intellectually she respected, but which she personally disliked and despised. The physical presence of Jogiches was painful to her, yet at the same time she never tried to avoid any necessary meetings or refuse any party task. To Luise Kautsky she complained half-humorously on several occasions about the imposition of her duties to 'my Poles', yet she knew that her role in the Polish movement was vital. Until 1911 she was the main spokesman for the SDKPiL in matters of theory. The octopus grip of the police reduced the circulation of the popular party press in Poland, eventually making the continued existence of many of the new publications impossible. But the main concentration of talent was centred around *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, the Polish theoretical review, and here Rosa Luxemburg's role was particularly important. She was not only the most important contributor, but Jogiches' main adviser on editorial policy. Every article passed through her hands and the bulk of her letters to Jogiches during this period are concerned with editorial comments. To a large extent the reputation of the SDKPiL in the Russian party and beyond was due to the quality of this review; for a time it was probably the most interesting and stimulating of all Socialist publications in the Second International. The subjects treated ranged as widely as those in *Neue Zeit* but without the latter's pedantry and often excessively academic

¹ Jogiches letters, IML (M).

atmosphere. The Lenin-Trotsky debate on the nature of the revolution took place partly in the pages of *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny* in the course of 1908.¹ In fact every major question of the day was covered—if not by outside contributors then Rosa Luxemburg was called upon, often at short notice, to step into the breach. The paper was peculiarly hers and Leo Jogiches'; at the sixth Polish congress it became clear that even many of the delegates there were not familiar with all the arguments which marched through its pages, and had regretfully to confess their ignorance of many of the issues involved. It was a fate which all the more theoretical Socialist papers, good or bad, suffered in common—*Neue Zeit*, too, was more often quoted than read. The only difference was that the Polish delegates expressed regret, while the SPD congresses reported speech after proud speech of ignorance about the contents of *Neue Zeit*. Jogiches and Rosa Luxemburg made every effort to maintain the more popular party paper for clandestine distribution in Poland alongside the theoretical 'heavy'; *Czerwony Sztandar* continued publication—though intermittently—until just before the war. In 1910 a new paper, *Młot* (The Hammer), was followed in 1911 by a further new venture, *Wolny Głos* (Free Voice), and by four others at various times before 1914. The best of Polish talent wrote also for these more popular papers. The SDKPiL was better served with papers, both in quality and in successful distribution at home, than any other Russian or Polish organization.

Rosa Luxemburg was also peculiarly the representative of her Polish party in the SPD. This was a logical consequence of her position in the German movement; she and Marchlewski were the only Poles who were *persona grata* and personally well known to the German leaders. But there was a danger in exploiting this position indiscriminately, so much so that she was obliged to point out to Jogiches after the split in the Polish party that 'I cannot run to the Germans with every major and minor party scandal without endangering our entire position'.² Yet on the whole she carried out these orders punctiliously too, and it is a measure of her success that her *entrée* to the German executive was apparently not diminished

¹ Lenin, 'Przyczynek do oceny rewolucji rosyjskiej' (Comment on the evaluation of the Russian revolution), *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, 1908, No. 2, pp. 102-11; *Sochineniya*, Vol. XV, pp. 35-47; Trotsky's reply, above, p. 567, note 3. Lenin's translation may have been undertaken by Rosa Luxemburg (though that privilege was later claimed by one Waclaw Konderski).

² Jogiches letters, IML (M).

by her own increasingly oppositional stand in German party affairs.

Yet all these activities were to some extent marginal. Her role in formulating SDKPiL policy, as opposed to elaborating it in writing or negotiating with the Germans, was obviously less than it had been before the revolution—and it was decreasing all the time. The suggestions contained in the letters to Jogiches were ignored more often than not—and Rosa Luxemburg was not the person to accept such a situation for ever.¹ In the end, therefore, her interest in the Polish movement declined. From the beginning of 1911 the tone of her writing changed, and she concerned herself increasingly with problems of a general nature and less with specific party affairs.² She dutifully served her stint in the dispute with the party opposition—her sharp and clear pen was essential for the public battle in the Polish and German press and to defend the Central Committee's case before the International. But significantly the quantity of her writing on Polish affairs was much reduced after 1911; in 1913 she published only one article in Polish and thereafter nothing more. By this time a new low point in the revolutionary movement in Russia had been reached, but this alone will not explain her silence; we must accept that her ties of interest to the SDKPiL had loosened considerably by that time.

Frequent reference has been made to the split in the SDKPiL and we must now launch into one of the most obscure and difficult episodes in the history of Polish Socialism, even though Rosa Luxemburg was herself not directly concerned.³ It was not entirely a parochial squabble. The split of the SDKPiL into two separate and noisily polemical groups had wider repercussions in the Russian movement, and also obtruded itself into the German consciousness, mainly through the Radek case—although they never

¹ The evidence is indirect but conclusive. As the Jogiches letters show (and those of Marchlewski to Jogiches, and Rosa Luxemburg to Marchlewski), she gave her views on various matters—sometimes unsolicited, sometimes on request. Similarly she was kept informed on most decisions by the Central Committee, though not on all. But the proceedings of the Central Committee, most of which have survived, do not indicate any reference made, or attention given, to her views. (*Sprawozdanie ZG . . .* in ZHP.)

² See below, pp. 598–9.

³ There is an enormous amount of polemical material following the split, with each side denouncing the other and using not always accurate versions of past events. Much original source material about these events is in the SDKPiL Archives at ZHP in Warsaw, as well as in the SPD Archives in Bonn and IISH in Amsterdam. Since the split itself can be treated only briefly in this book, I have not provided detailed reference to the story except to the activities of particular persons or to important individual facts.

really understood what it was all about. It greatly affected the stability and development of Polish Socialism, in which Rosa Luxemburg was an important figure; it also accelerated her own disillusionment with the SDKPiL and indirectly concentrated her attention more firmly on the affairs of the International and of the German party. But as Jogiches' adviser—increasingly self-appointed since he consistently ignored her advice—Rosa Luxemburg could not escape private or public participation in the polemics generated by the affair. Though she was not a member of the Central Committee—the pre-war self-denying ordinance remained in force—her name appears on several of the public broadsides which headquarters fired at the opposition.¹

Two distinct factors contributed to the split. The first was Jogiches' leadership of the SDKPiL. At the sixth congress in December 1908 a certain amount of dissatisfaction blew up in the face of the leadership. This took the form of policy criticism; as in Germany, the personal and social antagonisms within the party tended to find expression in arguments over policies rather than actions or even roles. Between 1908 and 1911 three important Polish leaders resigned from the executive in turn, Małeck, Hanecki, and Leder.

The actual questions of policy over which there was disagreement centred at first round the problem of trade unions. The revolution had created a largely spontaneous extension of trade-union activity and, in spite of a rapid decline of members after 1907, some organizational cohesion was maintained. Government legislation had established the possibility of legal trade unions, provided that these were not connected with any political movements. The debate in the SDKPiL was focused on the alternative of supporting—at least in part—independently organized and legal trade unions or relying on illegal but closely controlled and necessarily much smaller organizations. Radek, Leder and others supported the idea of legal trade unions—just as there was a body of opinion in the Russian party in their favour. The executive was firmly against this proposal; Jogiches saw little point in mass organizations which he could not control, while Rosa had seen quite enough of the activities of trade unionists free from party control in Germany to insist that any such organization in Poland must be strictly subordinated to political Social Democracy from the start. She wrote to Jogiches

¹ See above, p. 265 and note 2; below, p. 585.

that she was firmly against independent trade unions, saw no point in letting such a proposal gain ground in the Polish party, and did not even want it discussed.¹

Another contentious item was the relationship with the PPS. There was a quiet but growing sentiment among many party members in favour of the PPS-Left; the conviction that since the expulsion of the revolutionary fraction the combat position of the two parties had lost much of its meaning. Instead of continually attacking the PPS, efforts should be made to bring it more firmly into the Social-Democratic orbit. Here again both Leo Jogiches and Rosa Luxemburg thought alike and their views were strictly negative. To them the differences had a content far deeper than was apparent to the newer members, those more closely involved with the daily problems of confrontation in Poland itself.

It was noticeable that the opposition was forming round a geographical nucleus in Cracow, which in turn had the closest relations with the organizations at home. Both the support for legal trade unions and the desire for a *rapprochement* with the PPS were to some extent the expression of practical workers, who faced the daily conflict with the PPS as well as the harassment of indiscriminate police activities, while the intransigence of the party leadership dated partly from old and alien experiences (Switzerland and Germany) and was largely a refusal to budge from a well-founded theoretical position. But there was more to it than a mere rivalry between Cracow and Berlin, between practical activists and intellectual émigrés. Those like Radek and Leder who reflected the opposition's views among the émigrés necessarily propagated their opinions informally; even a few carefully worded articles in the party press before 1911 are hardly evidence for the existence of any real opposition. In the summer of 1910 Jogiches could still succeed in persuading Radek to withdraw an already accepted article for *Czerwony Sztandar* on the ground that it 'was opportunistic in spirit' and that its publication could only do harm.

Jogiches' high-handed refusal to give way to the mounting pressure for more general discussion of these policy matters brought things to a head. In the course of 1910 Hanecki travelled round Germany and Austria and discussed the possibility of a more outspoken opposition with various well-known party members.² This

¹ Jogiches letters, 1909 (?), IML (M).

² Karl Radek, *Meine Abrechnung*, Bremen 1913, p. 57.

journey by an important party leader who had been a member of the Central Committee since 1903 and whose connections with the organizations inside Poland and Russia were second to none, proved decisive. The vague, inchoate, and largely personal feelings of resentment precipitated into an organized attempt to oppose the policy of the Central Committee and soon to challenge the actual authority of that body. Only recently party unity had been strained in a dispute with Trusiewicz, who had created an oppositional group ('Solidarność') within the SDKPiL to counter the intransigent anti-PPS attitude of the Central Committee. It was to prove a harbinger of more serious events.¹

On top of these Polish problems came the backwash of the factional manoeuvring in the Russian party in which the SDKPiL had become heavily involved. On the whole the SDKPiL supported the Bolsheviks, as we have seen. In a letter to Jogiches Rosa Luxemburg characterized the Polish party's preference for the Bolsheviks as a matter of principle as well as tactics—even though there were aspects of 'Tartar-Mongolian savagery' about Lenin and the Bolsheviks which were bound to make the relationship uncomfortable at times.² As long as it was a question of assuring Bolshevik ascendancy in a united party and the success of Lenin's policy, the Bolsheviks could count on Polish support. In the course of 1910, however, this supremacy, which required constant negotiation with allies and manoeuvring within the RSDRP, no longer satisfied Lenin. He had become determined either to throw the Mensheviks and the so-called Liquidators out of the organizational framework of the RSDRP altogether or to establish an entirely separate organization for the Bolsheviks. But being Lenin he did not intend to be left as an isolated splinter movement; he would not only leave but take his opponents' clothes as well. His Bolsheviks were to be *the* RSDRP and the others the isolated splinter group. But this intention was not clear at the time, and Lenin of course did his best to disguise it. Moreover, the manoeuvres and negotiations through-

¹ Trusiewicz (Zalewski) had long been the stormy petrel of Polish Social Democracy. He more than anyone had recently stood for *rapprochement* with the PPS-Left. The party court which considered his case in 1909 was a typical sign of the times—and incidentally a precedent for the Radek affair. Some of the documents relating to the proceedings against him are preserved (*Sqd partyjny nad K. Zalewskim*, ZHP). Trusiewicz joined the Bolsheviks in 1918 and died a year later.

² Extract from Jogiches letters, 10 August 1909. *Protokoly soveshchaniya rasshirennoi redaktsii 'Proletariia' iul' 1909*, Moscow 1934, pp. 260-3.

out 1910 and 1911 were not only highly complicated but took place in a profusion of committees and organizations of a purely temporary and tactical nature. Each group tried to proliferate such organizations and claim legitimacy for them within the party.

Once more we must try to disentangle the personal from the political. In matters of policy the SDKPiL mainly supported the Bolsheviks but by no means automatically or exclusively. The Poles had played a particularly important role in the struggle for control of the central organ of the RSDRP, *Sotsial-Demokrat*. Jogiches had been active in the editorial commission and after 1907 handed his function to Warszawski who lived permanently in Paris and was almost wholly involved in Russian affairs. He fell under the spell of Lenin; to a considerable extent he began to stand for the Bolshevik point of view in the SDKPiL Central Committee more than he represented the latter in the councils of the Russian party.¹ As such he was made to feel 'the shortcomings of the Berlin Troika' whenever there was any air of disagreement between the Bolsheviks and the Poles.² The Berlin Troika was Jogiches, Leder, and Marchlewski. As Lenin's tactics became more openly centrifugal, the attitude of the Central Committee hardened and Warszawski's letters hardened too—in protest against this 'change of direction'. In the end Warszawski was recalled by the Central Committee in September 1910 and his place taken by the 'harder' Leder. Soon Leder seems to have fallen under the same spell. In the course of 1910 'he had often voiced anti-Bolshevik views in the editorial commission which were against his own conscience'.³

But contacts between the two parties were not confined to this. The manœuvres inside the Russian party were largely a confrontation of power, based on votes and funds. In return for their support for Bolshevik policies, the SDKPiL was subsidized by the Bolsheviks out of the accumulated takings from the armed raids in Russia and other sources.⁴ Towards the end of 1910 we find Jogiches at various meetings in Paris called by Lenin of his close

¹ See his letters to the Central Committee during this period in the collection *Pisma A. Warski z Paryża do ZG w Berlinie*, in ZHP, Warsaw. See also Jan Sobczak, 'Z dziejów udziału . . . '.

² Sobczak, loc. cit.

³ ZHP, Fund 179, No. 623.

⁴ See *Protokoly soveshchaniya . . . 1909*, p. 126. These are the proceedings of the editorial board of *Proletarii*, for a time the Bolshevik paper until Lenin's group obtained virtual control of the official organ, *Sotsial-Demokrat*. The editorial board of *Proletarii* acted more or less as the group's organizational centre. The subsidy for the Poles and other allies was regularly discussed at these meetings.

supporters, together with Kamenev, Zinoviev, and Rykov.¹ When the Mensheviks and *Bund* delegates had been manoeuvred into leaving the Central Committee of the Russian party, Jogiches again figured among the remaining Bolshevik supporters. But now there emerged from among Lenin's own Bolshevik supporters a body of opinion that was not willing to go through to the final and official split. These became known as the Bolshevik 'conciliators'—one of Lenin's contemptuous designations of opponents or lukewarm supporters. In accordance with the established SDKPiL policy to preserve at least the appearance of unity, Jogiches was one of the leading figures of this group. Confronted with the clear alternatives of one Russian party or two, the conciliators and Lenin's loyal Bolsheviks faced each other in open disagreement. In the late summer of 1911 the 'Russian manoeuvres', as Rosa Luxemburg put it, resolved themselves into a head-on conflict between Lenin and Jogiches.

Jogiches' strength came from two main sources. One was the support for the Polish point of view expressed by a growing group of conciliators. These controlled the organizations which Lenin had himself helped to set up to break the power of the Central Committee, in which the Mensheviks were strong. Now these creations—the Organizing Commission and the Technical Commission—became the organs in which the strength of the conciliators was marshalled against him. The other base from which Jogiches mobilized against Lenin was his German connection. This was currently of great importance in the Russian party. A sum of money—the so-called Schmidt inheritance—which had been willed to the RSDRP by a young Social-Democrat sympathizer had had to be placed under the control of three trustees—Kautsky, Mehring, Clara Zetkin—pending agreement between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. Easy access to these trustees and the power to persuade them became a vital weapon in the Russian struggle for power. Here Jogiches could rely on Rosa Luxemburg who was personally very friendly with Clara Zetkin and knew Mehring well, though in the summer of 1911 she was still on indifferent terms with him, and of course locked in dispute with Kautsky. None the less, all three trustees—reluctant custodians of what proved to be a hornets' nest—were only too glad of the advice of anyone who appeared disinterested and could save them from the buzz of self-interest

¹ L. Schapiro, *The CPSU*, p. 120.

which emanated from every Russian quarter. Jogiches was in a strong position. The type of close in-fighting in prospect was congenial to both of them.¹

It was Jogiches who lost the fight, a combination of bad luck and inferior generalship. His most important supporters in the Russian party, who had gone to Russia to prepare for an all-party conference, were promptly arrested—Nogin and Lindov in April 1911, Rykov in August of that year.² The Russian police at that time had a particular interest in supporting the Bolsheviki who stood for disunity. In order to prevent a united and therefore more dangerous Social Democracy, Okhrana instructions were to concentrate on the arrest of the conciliators.³ With the number of his supporters thus depleted, the organizations in which Jogiches was entrenched could not survive. In October 1911 Jogiches openly showed his hand. The Technical Commission refused to provide further funds for the publication of *Sotsial-Demokrat* and the Bolsheviki had to borrow. Lenin was determined that both the Organizing and the Technical Commissions should cease to exist. In November he recalled his members and they walked out of both organizations, taking the cash assets with them. All that Jogiches could now do was to denounce Lenin in public, which he did. But in this he was only one of the many whose sole means of revenge for Lenin's objectionable but successful splitting tactics was a recourse to literature.

It is difficult to reconstruct Rosa Luxemburg's position in all this. She confessed to Luise Kautsky that she did not know much about the events in the 'Russian battlefield in Paris, in which Leo

¹ Jogiches' position can best be seen from the following extract from letters to Kautsky:

'Correct as Lenin's accusations against Martov, Dan and their tendency may be . . . he is not at all objective in his judgement of other groups, *Vpered* and *Pravda* [Trotsky]. These groups which he calls anarchists and "liquidators" completely accept the basis of recognizing the illegal party. . . . Co-operation with these elements . . . is not only possible but essential. . . . [Lenin] wants to use the chaos in the party to get the money for his own faction and to deal a death blow to the party as a whole before any plenum can meet.' (30 June 1911.)

'An immediate and negative answer to Lenin's demand for a final decision about the money seems essential to me, since Lenin expressed the intention of removing his representatives from the commission and breaking it up.' (10 July 1911.)

Fund G4 (*Russenfond*), IISH. The relationship between money and power in the RSDRP at this time is clear from the last sentence.

² The latter was denounced by a police agent disguised as a member of the Bolshevik faction.

³ See M. A. Tsyavlovskii (ed.), *Bolsheviki. Dokumenty po istorii bolshevizma . . . byvsh moskovskago okhrannogo otdeleniya . . .*, Moscow 1918, pp. 48 ff.

is immersed up to his neck, with daily telegrams and letters'.¹ Her suggestions for dealing with the fractious Russians reflected his own faithfully enough—without the element of personal involvement; a conference by all means, but of the party members in Russia, and not merely the incorrigible 'fighting cocks' abroad. But probably this ignorance of detail was partly feigned. She did deal with Clara Zetkin and Kautsky about the money on Jogiches' behalf, though she took care not to importune or appear too obviously partisan. But when Martov published a pamphlet exposing the Bolsheviki's financial skulduggery she joined the chorus of outraged protest—for the benefit of German ears—and Kautsky no doubt took his own cue of condemnation from her.² To the Mensheviks Rosa Luxemburg was quite simply Lenin's most active partisan in Germany, and for all practical purposes she also drew the naïve Clara Zetkin in her wake. Akselrod and Trotsky came and slipped in behind the scenes of the SPD congress at Jena in September 1911 to wheedle a favourable decision about the money out of Kautsky. Haase too was solicited; the main thing was not to be spotted by 'any delegates close to Zetkin and Luxemburg'.³ As late as February 1912, when relations between Lenin and Jogiches had already been broken off, Rosa Luxemburg still got Lenin's emissary Poletaev an introduction to Kautsky.⁴ Most important of all, she begged Jogiches on at least two occasions not to use the money as blackmail, once with regard to the trustees, and the second time when the Technical Commission under Jogiches' chairmanship refused Lenin funds to publish *Sotsial-Demokrat*. But she phrased her warnings dispassionately and coldly, without much expectation of being listened to.⁵ As we shall see, she was not prepared to follow Jogiches into unbridled condemnation of Lenin after the dust-up in Paris, not even when Lenin attacked her openly and specifically in 1912.

These events had their effect in the Polish party itself, which since 1910 had been on the brink of division. The details of the manœuvres in Paris were known only to those directly involved,

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 160.

² I. Martov, *Spasiteli ili uprazdniteli* (Saviours or Wreckers), Paris 1911. *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 161. See also the special collection of papers (*Russenfond*) appertaining to Kautsky's trustee activity in IISH, Amsterdam—now withdrawn pending publication (perhaps within the next decade!).

³ *Pisma P. B. Akselroda i I. O. Martova*, Berlin 1924, p. 217.

⁴ *Russenfond*, IISH. See also N. Poletaev, *Vospominaniya o V. I. Lenine*, Moscow 1956, Vol. I, p. 272. O. Pyatnitskii, *Zapiski bolshevika*, p. 153.

⁵ Jogiches letters, beginning of October 1911, IML (M).

like Leder and Jogiches—and of course to those like Hanecki whom Lenin chose to keep informed. Though in the main Jogiches acted within the established policy of the SDKPiL, most of the Polish leaders felt that his involvement had a more personal aspect in pursuit of private aims and ambitions. The virtual eviction of the SDKPiL from the councils of the ‘live’ section of the Russian party provided useful ammunition for an already restive leadership against Jogiches. The Berlin section of the SDKPiL wrote a strong letter of protest to the Central Committee in which they spoke of the latter’s ‘gross neglect’ in failing to keep the party informed of these events.¹ But we should not take this document too literally, as evidence of neglect; it was mainly an offensive weapon.

The opposition in the party did not intend to force any Lenin-style breakaway. With their particularly close relations with the local organizations in Warsaw and Łódź, Hanecki and his colleagues were able to manipulate their supporters into positions of authority. But when two representatives of the opposition came to Berlin to negotiate with the Central Committee, they were promptly handed over to a party court.² After this, in the autumn of 1911, the two local organizations, particularly the Warsaw one, openly challenged the Berlin leadership, and organized an oppositional conference in the capital in December. After some heated public exchanges the Central Committee declared both local organizations dissolved. They refused to accept their own dissolution and announced their intention of remaining in existence, independent of the Central Committee. Thereupon the latter circularized the International Bureau as well as the German and other parties to the effect that a dissident organization now existed which had no standing in the party. The break was now official and public. It split the organizations in the two main towns and elsewhere into two: one continuing to owe allegiance to the Central Committee in Berlin (*zarządowcy*) and the other supporting the ‘splitters’ (*roślamowcy*)—or, as they were sometimes known, the SDKPiL Opposition (*opozycja*). Early in 1914 the Opposition organized an executive committee of its own, known as the National Committee (*Zarząd Krajowy*) in Cracow, while the executive in Berlin continued to be

¹ *List sekcji berlińskiej SDKPiL do ZG*, 22 July 1910, ZHP, Warsaw.

² See letter of Leder to Henke, 17 January 1913. This was later addressed as an open letter in Polish to the Central Committee of the SDKPiL. Copies are in the Henke papers in the SPD Archives, Bonn (in German) and a printed pamphlet in ZHP, Warsaw (in Polish).

known by its old title (*Zarząd Główny*).

Nothing shows the SDKPiL more clearly as a peer group than the way its leaders divided over this issue. The decision was almost entirely personal, and few valid political conclusions can be drawn. The loyal supporters of the Central Committee did centre round the nucleus of those who had founded the original SDKP and nursed it through its infancy before 1900. The four musketeers remained together—Jogiches, Rosa Luxemburg, Marchlewski, and Warszawski. Apart from old loyalties, it is hard to see why; Marchlewski and Jogiches did not get on personally though they always treated each other with circumspection. Warszawski had been drawn into the Bolshevik orbit in Paris and was recalled for that reason; Jogiches treated him very off-handedly. And Warszawski in fact could certainly never bring himself to feel as strongly about the opposition as Jogiches. But, like the others, he did have a very real love for the party which he had helped to found, and it was he who was to be primarily instrumental in reunifying it during the war. More than the others, Warszawski stood for the practical realization of working-class unity, not only in the divided Social Democracy but with the PPS-Left as well.

Among those who pledged their support to the Central Committee was Feliks Dzierżyński. It was only after the arrest of this fanatic personality and devoted organizer that the National Committee could be established on home ground. His adherence was all the more surprising since Lenin, who had a very sharp eye for potential revolutionaries and supporters, had known Dzierżyński since 1906 and wooed him relentlessly—and was in fact to obtain his whole-hearted allegiance in 1917. For the few months he remained at liberty after the open split, Dzierżyński played an oddly schizophrenic role, supporting the Central Committee on the Polish question, but equally firmly supporting Lenin in Cracow in his own Russian splitting tactics.¹

¹ Many western historians of Bolshevik history have become so fascinated with Lenin's manoeuvres that they see his hand in every factional split within the orbit of the RSDRP before 1914 (e.g. Leonard Schapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, pp. 106, 123–4 and particularly p. 129: '[Lenin] had shortly afterwards engineered a breakaway in the Polish Social-Democratic party. This split was designed to leave the two leaders Tyszka and Rosa Luxemburg isolated in their party.'). A close study of Dzierżyński's role and attitude in this period shows clearly that whatever benefit Lenin may later have derived from the Polish split, he certainly did not engineer it. Dzierżyński was Lenin's closest supporter among the Poles in Russian affairs. 'As regards the policy of the CO [*Sotsial-Demokrat*, the party's central organ], I am in agreement with

Against the old leadership were ranged Hanecki, Unszlicht, Małecki, and Ettinger, together with a host of younger recruits like the Stein brothers—and of course Radek. Hanecki was the undisputed leader of the opposition. Neither their past history nor future careers provide any satisfactory general explanation of their alignment. Hanecki became Lenin's confidential agent, which was much more than being just a Bolshevik; by 1917 he had practically severed his connection with the Polish movement and was in Stockholm conducting Lenin's top-secret negotiations with Germany for funds and support. Some of Lenin's close associates viewed his role with suspicion, and did not take to his debonair appearance, which included an ostentatious, invariable buttonhole, but Lenin always defended him stoutly. Unszlicht, too, joined the Bolsheviks after the revolution and was for some time Dzierżyński's assistant in the Cheka (Soviet security police), later serving as a Bolshevik diplomat and official. But both Dzierżyński and Marchlewski also joined the Bolsheviks, in 1917 and 1918 respectively, so it is wrong to read too much into this connection between the Polish opposition and the Bolsheviks.

it as far as my knowledge of these matters goes—only I want to go even further and express my full solidarity with Lenin's policies.' (Dzierżyński to Jogiches, 13–14 February 1911, ZHP, 25/4, No. 593 K1.) Similarly he specifically endorsed nearly every one of Lenin's manœuvres during the spring and summer of 1911, against the *golosowcy* (those aligned with the Menshevik paper *Golos sotsial-demokrata*). Dzierżyński admitted frankly that he could only love and hate completely and never in part. His heart was 'completely Bolshevik' (ZHP, 25/5, No. 685 K1). See also Z. Dzerzhinskaya, *V gody velikikh boev*, Moscow 1964, pp. 160–8 (the memoirs of Dzierżyński's widow). He berated Jogiches for not clarifying his policy in Russian matters to his colleagues; Lenin should long ago have 'spat on the efforts [to create] unity [in the RSDRP] and carried out his policy without any further hindrance' (ZHP, 25/6, No. 754 K1–2). But Dzierżyński, like the other Poles and in spite of his close personal attachment to Lenin and his Bolshevik heart, drew the line at the final split. He disapproved of the action of the Bolshevik 'Russian organizing commission' in calling for the Prague conference in January 1912 at which the Bolsheviks constituted themselves the official Russian party. 'In this way the party would simply split into seven parts and this would mean the end of effective unity. The situation is extremely complex and we [Dzierżyński and Jogiches] have to sit here and somehow find a way out.' (ZHP, 25/5, M679 K1 and 25/6, M789.) After the conference itself Dzierżyński supported the Bolsheviks on principle but also the stand taken by the Central Committee in Polish matters. In his remaining months of freedom he condemned the *rosłamowcy* uncompromisingly. By the time Lenin entered the Polish lists officially, Dzierżyński had been captured and was thus saved from open opposition to Lenin at a time when Polish and Russian matters could no longer be treated separately.

The only English discussion of Dzierżyński's career, a review article of the Russian edition of his works, is by R. W. Davies in *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 11 (April 1960), pp. 373–92; F. E. Dzerzhinskii, *Izbrannye proizvedeniya* (Selected Works), 2 vols., Moscow 1957; and Feliks Dzerzhinskii, *Dnevnik, pisma k rodnym* (Diary, letters to relatives), 2nd ed. Moscow 1958.

A few leaders took up neutral or intermediate positions similar to that of Trotsky in the Russian party before 1914. The most important was Leder who worked in Vienna during this period. Condemning the Central Committee for its intolerance and particularly for its handling of the Radek case, Leder none the less refused to countenance the split and gave his allegiance to neither side. It was no wonder that the split in the SDKPiL remained incomprehensible to the rest of the Socialist world. The polemics and accusations (which included accusations of harbouring and shielding Okhrana spies) flew back and forth in the next few years in all languages and only helped to confuse the issues still further.¹

The events inside Poland itself, interesting and little known though they are, do not concern us here. Rosa Luxemburg had nothing to do with them and her activity in the Polish movement was confined to émigré aspects. She, too, disapproved of Jogiches' tactics but, like Warszawski, felt deeply attached to the SDKPiL, her first political home. To break away meant renouncing the work of twenty years. It is doubtful whether she was given any option. As far as the SDKPiL was concerned, she and Jogiches were in complete harmony and no attempt was even made to solicit her support against him. From 1911 onwards Rosa Luxemburg was therefore in the unusual position—for her—of enforcing a policy with which she had little sympathy. She drafted many of the Central Committee's public statements on the subject of the split, the announcements to the International Socialist Bureau and to the German party.² The task of liaison with the German executive was not always easy. If Jogiches had had his way, she would have been at the German executive offices every second day with the latest aspect of the scandal—a proceeding which would soon disgust the Germans, as she well knew.³ Printing polemics costs money, which was especially scarce now that Bolshevik support had been cut off as had a substantial part of the dues-

¹ The Central Committee had singled Unszlicht out for the role of *agent provocateur*, though without mentioning his name. As far as I can discover, there was no vestige of truth in the accusation. There were some spies, in the second rank of the *rosłamowcy* organization, but this was common to all clandestine groups at the time.

² See, for instance, 'Do ogółu partii', *Pismo ulotne ZG SDKPiL*, June 1912, ZHP; also *Czerwony Sztandar*, July 1912, No. 188, pp. 4-6. Unfortunately there are few references in her letters to Jogiches on the subject of the split; no doubt they talked out their exchange of views on this subject. What there is, however, indicates her general line quite clearly; see below, p. 595.

³ See Jogiches letters, end of 1912 (?), IML (M).

paying membership. Rosa Luxemburg therefore had the unpleasant task of squeezing money out of an SPD leadership to which in German affairs she stood in vocal opposition. Nevertheless she succeeded, though the sums were less than had been hoped. Jogiches wanted to send one donation back to the Germans with a contemptuous note and it was only when Rosa remonstrated at the pointlessness of such a gesture that he desisted.¹

She was necessarily involved up to the hilt in the Radek case. This was less troublesome for her conscience since she disliked Radek herself—though again she did not fully approve of the severity of Jogiches' action. The latter had decided to make an example of the hapless Radek who was within target range in Germany and whose position in the SPD was tenuous. Radek had a sharp and lively pen and his destruction would silence one of the Central Committee's most persuasive critics. An old scandal—or rather string of scandals—was dug up and in December 1911 the evidence was placed first before a commission to look into the charges of theft—charges against which Jogiches, Rosa Luxemburg, and Marchlewski had indignantly defended Radek in September 1910 when they were raised by Häcker, Rosa's old PPS opponent in Germany, and Niemojewski in the very hostile paper, *Myśl Niepodległa*, as part of an anti-Semitic onslaught against the SDKPiL leadership.² The commission dragged on and was repeatedly hustled by Jogiches—and finally dissolved amid its own protests on 30 July 1912. The next step was the hard-working party court. It met in August 1912 and with little ceremony sentenced Radek to expulsion. The German executive was officially informed of the decision on 24 August, in a document signed, not by Rosa Luxemburg, but by Marchlewski, one of the court's conveners.³ In doing so the Polish Central Committee used Radek's

¹ Ibid.

² Karl Radek, *Meine Abrechnung*, p. 57. For Rosa Luxemburg's articles, see *Młot*, 1, 8, 15, 29 October 1910.

³ 'God help him, for he knows not what he does', wrote Radek. The thefts of which he was accused were several:

1. Books belonging to a party newspaper library—these were the subject of Häcker's attack.

2. A coat (or some clothes) belonging to a comrade. This became the traditional item in German party mythology (see Ruth Fischer, *Stalin and German Communism*, pp. 201–2).

3. Money. This was the most serious charge which Radek insistently denied, then and later, though he admitted the books and the clothes.

The case deserves further study, especially in view of Radek's later eminent position in the Russian party and his influence on German left-wing affairs.

real name and thus broke his pseudonym; according to him his departure for Bremen in 1912 was due to the danger from the police in the capital.

Since the first charge against Radek had been laid in the spring of 1911, and no final action taken until the court in the summer of 1912, it is obvious that what had originally been a preventive threat had now been carried out largely for reasons of revenge. Rosa was against the whole proceeding. 'I consider Radek's potential as a centre of opposition grossly exaggerated and am against your plan [of a party court].'¹ Jogiches' reply does not exist but in any case he took not the slightest notice. As expected, Radek got the explicit support of all the *rosłamowcy* as well as Leder who now came out strongly against the executive. As the Polish support for Radek increased, Jogiches pressed ever more strongly for parallel action against him from the German party and it was Rosa who had to press the SPD executive to expel him. Circumstances in Germany helped her considerably, though here too the very action which made Radek unpopular in Germany helped to assure him of the support of the radical party organization in Bremen, itself in opposition to the SPD executive.² As a result of their support Rosa Luxemburg now fell out with her old friends in the north, Henke and Knief, as well as Pannekoek. At one stage her position was almost schizophrenic—Polish pressure was forcing her into a German attitude of which in the end she could not but disapprove. At the 1913 German congress in Jena, where Radek was formally expelled from the German party, she voted against the measure of automatic expulsion, because it set a dangerous precedent for all nonconformists in the German party. At the same time the Polish decision had to be validated and respected. She and Marchlewski had to fight hard with Jogiches to obtain his approval for offering the German party at least a review of the Polish evidence against Radek at the party court, if it was called for. But it never was.³

Part of the campaign conducted by Rosa Luxemburg against Radek in Germany was to show that he was an outsider with no significant support. 'Among the Russians only unimportant and out-of-date personalities like Plekhanov and Akselrod supported him,

¹ Jogiches letters, 1912 (?), IML (M).

² See above, p. 470.

³ Jogiches letters, November 1913, IML (M). For the German story, see above, pp. 469-73.

only the ruins of the former Russian party', she wrote in a letter to *Vorwärts* who reluctantly printed it at the second attempt as the statement of 'the best-known representative of the SDKPiL'.¹

But Radek now got strong support from an unexpected quarter. The person who replied to Rosa Luxemburg was not one of those contemptuously referred to as a ruin, but none other than Lenin. He sent a blistering letter to *Vorwärts* entitled 'Rosa Luxemburg and the Polish "Central Committee" in Martov's footsteps', which the paper did not print but which remained to gather dust in the *Vorwärts* archives.² Though he made a point of not enthusing too openly about the merits of Radek's case, he compared the Central Committee's action to the underhand revengefulness of Martov's public 'exposures'. The suggestion that the SDKPiL were no better than the Mensheviks was harnessed to repeated assertions that both were empty shells, without revolutionary guts or for that matter any following; the intended audience for these dramatics was, of course, the SPD leadership. From then onwards Lenin became Radek's strongest supporter outside Polish Socialism and the Central Committee's most vituperative opponent.

The extent of Lenin's responsibility for the Polish split is an intriguing question which can only partially be solved from the available evidence. His attempts to draw the Poles individually into his orbit in Paris have already been discussed. When the split came he failed with some, succeeded with others. But even his closest allies among the Poles were never merely his creatures; for one thing he found the *rosłamowcy* just as adamant on the national question as Rosa Luxemburg. In 1914 Lenin openly admitted this disagreement, and even engaged in public polemics with Radek on the subject during the war.³ The split in the Polish party was at least partially connected with the break-up of the Russian party. Having out-manceuvred Jogiches and his conciliator supporters, Lenin moved to the offensive in his opponent's territory—he was not the man to let Jogiches polemicize against him without retort. In the summer of 1912 he moved his headquarters to Cracow and, as his wife charmingly puts it, 'Vladimir Ilyich had there the opportunity of coming into closer contact with the Polish Social

¹ *Vorwärts*, 14 September 1912.

² For translation and fuller discussion of the circumstances see J. P. Nettl, 'An unpublished Lenin article from September 1912', *International Review of Social History*, Vol. IX (1964), Part 3, pp. 470–82.

³ Lenin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XX, p. 417, note 1. See below, p. 596.

Democrats and of studying their point of view on the national question.¹ The move to Cracow had long ago been suggested by Dzierżyński, but now it was the *rosłamowcy* who welcomed him.² 'Since the Warsaw Committee [of the opposition] demanded that the Polish party take up a more definite position in the internal party affairs of the RSDRP, Vladimir Ilyich took the side of the Warsaw committee. . . . He could not remain an onlooker . . . to an important part of the general struggle within the party which was so acute at the time.'³

Outside the RSDRP the most obvious assistance which Lenin could give the rebels was on the international plane. Like Rosa he was a member of the International Socialist Bureau. It was as one of the RSDRP representatives—Plekhanov was the other—that he replied to the Central Committee's announcement with one of his own. Rosa Luxemburg had written on 8 July that

a splinter group has established itself in Warsaw . . . and a small group of organized members have committed a series of severe violations against the statutes, discipline and unity of the [Polish] party and would not submit to the proceedings of party justice against two of their representatives. [This is not the result of any] political differences of opinion but merely the fruit of indiscipline and disorganization by a few individuals and . . . *agents provocateurs*. They have been formally excluded both from the Polish Social Democracy and from the RSDRP of which the former is an autonomous member.⁴

Lenin replied on 31 August. He denied the SDKPiL Central Committee's entire version of the split.

1. The Central Committee has no right to decide or to announce who belongs to the RSDRP or not. The [Polish] Central Committee has no connection with and does not belong to our party, whose Central Committee I represent.

2. The split has already been in existence since Hanecki *was excluded* from the Polish Central Committee in 1910.⁵

The organ of the dissidents printed this statement with gleeful comments.⁶

¹ Nadezhda Krupskaya, *Memories of Lenin*, p. 175.

² *Ibid.*, p. 176.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 179. Dare one detect here a slight touch of bad conscience about such obvious fishing in other people's troubled waters?

⁴ Central Committee to International Bureau, 8 July 1912, Henke papers, SPD Archives, Bonn.

⁵ Lenin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XVIII, pp. 252-3. My italics. Hanecki actually resigned.

⁶ *Gazeta Robotnicza*, No. 19, November 1912.

Lenin offered Radek collaboration on *Sotsial-Demokrat* and a limited amount of financial support—but the matter of Radek's personal affairs was soon lost in the welter of polemics. Lenin now threw the whole weight of his attack against the Central Committee, which he described as 'a committee without a party'.¹ The split in Polish Social Democracy was entirely the Central Committee's fault, a 'directly criminal act'.² Jogiches and Rosa Luxemburg, faithful supporters of the Bolsheviki for so long, were speedily promoted from conciliators to liquidators—the blockbuster accusation of the immediate pre-war period.³ Lenin now harked back to the proceedings of the 1908 Polish congress and claimed to find evidence even then of advanced decay, both political and moral, in the Polish party. The final insult was that 'even Kautsky has finally come to the conclusion that Rosa Luxemburg and Tyshka's group do not represent the Polish Social-Democratic workers and that he must take into account [the views of] the Warsaw and Łódź organizations.'⁴ Naturally Jogiches replied in kind, with a whole batch of pamphlets denouncing Lenin's splitting tactics in the Russian party and his iniquitous influence on the Poles. Having bombarded Kautsky with letters in favour of his Technical Commission in the summer of 1911—Rosa's activities were not decisive enough—he now berated him for not being financially firm enough with Lenin. The dispute blared its way across 1912 and 1913, deafening those whose ears were attuned to Russian or Polish, with even a number of assiduous translations into German. For the Central Committee Lenin was the particular enemy. But the latter was not content with beating Tyshka alone: as we have seen, Rosa Luxemburg's defence of the Polish action against Radek brought her into the field of Lenin's fire—and once in, she remained. But while Radek had no hesitation in blaming Jogiches and Rosa Luxemburg equally and looked to Lenin for protection against both, Lenin did Rosa Luxemburg the courtesy of extending his polemics with her to matters of principle—an implied compliment to the status of his opponent.⁵

¹ Lenin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XVIII, p. 383.

² *Sotsial-Demokrat*, 25 January 1913.

³ For the history of the term, and its justification, see Schapiro, *The CPSU*, Chapters 6 and 7.

⁴ Lenin, *O Polsce i polskim ruchu robotniczym*, Warsaw 1955, pp. 224-5.

⁵ 'No Tyshka and no Luxemburg can prevent me from writing for the Russian press . . . for they have now been thrown out of the Russian Social Democracy. . . . The authority of Lenin and Akselrod carries more weight with us [in Polish Social Democracy] than Tyshka's.' (Radek to Henke, 26

It should therefore not be wholly surprising to find that in 1912 personal contact between Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin still existed. At the end of February of that year Lenin came to Berlin personally to succeed where Poletaev had failed, and carried out an assault on Kautsky for further payments of the trustee moneys. He took the opportunity of calling upon Rosa Luxemburg several times in two days. 'Lenin was here yesterday and has been back four times today. I like talking to him, he is clever and educated—I like seeing his ugly mug. . . . He found Mimi [Rosa's cat, whose approval of visitors was an essential preliminary to her mistress's sympathy] very imposing, a *barskii kot* [a lordly cat].' It was not until the row in the International Bureau at the end of 1913 that personal animosity really grew between them. One should never take Lenin's polemics as an automatic guide to his personal attitudes. Russian habits were the exact opposite of German, *c'était la musique qui faisait le ton*.

There is evidence, too, of the present distance between Rosa and Jogiches. We need see no opposition in Rosa's attitude, but only indifference to the vengeful policy of the Central Committee leadership. In meeting Lenin, Rosa was following a personal inclination rather than official policy. But, equally, a few discussions with Lenin—his annoyance with Kautsky was in Rosa's eyes already a good mark—and the odd introduction are not significant evidence of anything except that alignments over issues are never as simple or as conclusive as they appear.

The break, and the opportunity for a Polish counter-attack, came when Lenin carried out the final split in the Russian party by insisting on a division, not only of the respective party organizations, but of the Social-Democratic representation in the 4th Duma. The RSDRP Duma representatives, though divided into Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, were loosely controlled by the respective group leaders, and in the course of 1912 developed an institutional pull of their own towards unity. It was the old dichotomy between local activists, legal or illegal, and foreign leaders. Throughout 1913 Lenin planned to split 'his' parliamentary

June 1914, in Henke papers, SPD Archives.) Lenin dealt with Jogiches much more personally than with Rosa. His attacks on the Central Committee referred continually to the 'Tyshka clique', while he polemicized with Rosa in a different though specific context and in quite a different style. See below, pp. 596, 853-7.

delegates off completely. It was only a matter of waiting for a favourable opportunity. This, with suitable manoeuvres for blame-throwing, came in October 1913.¹ The Russian Social-Democratic parliamentary group was now split formally in two—six Bolsheviks and seven Mensheviks.² Whatever the mysteries of the internal struggle, which even Rosa Luxemburg confessed ‘made her head swim’, this was a public act of disunity for all to see. The dismay was universal.

Towards the end of 1913 the reluctant International Bureau had the Russian question on its agenda once more. At the meeting in London in mid-December—the last occasion on which Rosa Luxemburg visited that city—plans for reunification were to be discussed. The formal motion for including the Russian split was Rosa Luxemburg’s. She cited the split in the Duma delegation as ‘the last act in two years of compromising the growing labour movement in Russia . . . on the part of Lenin’s group’. As a special sideswipe at Lenin, the motion emphasized ‘the irregularity of Russian representation in the International Bureau, one of whose two representatives merely represents a splinter group created by himself’. Rosa Luxemburg called for ‘steps . . . to bring about unity . . . failing which the . . . problem [was] to be submitted to the . . . International congress in Vienna [in 1914], in the same way that French reunification had been dealt with at the 1904 Amsterdam congress’.³

Lenin replied by getting some of his *rosłamowcy* supporters to write to the Bureau and urge priority for the question of the Polish split, but Rosa was able to prevent this from being adopted for the agenda.

At the meeting of the Bureau even Plekhanov, who had been an unexpected but redoubtable ally of Lenin’s for the last two years,

¹ See A. Badaev, *Bolsheviki v gosudarstvennoi dume. Vospominaniya*, Moscow 1954.

² Hence the crucial importance of the Jagiello election in Warsaw in 1913. To Rosa’s sardonic amusement, both Warszawski and Marchlewski tried to get Kautsky to publish articles in *Neue Zeit*. But the editor had had enough of Poles and Russians, and politely told them so—‘at the risk of contemptuous remarks about my opportunism and lack of character’. (Karl Kautsky to Adolf Warszawski, 22 January 1913, C. 756, IISH.)

³ *Vorwärts*, 21 November 1913, 1st Supplement (‘Aus der Partei’).

⁴ *Supplement to Bulletin ISB*, No. 11. Meeting of ISB London, 13–14 December 1913. The text of the letter is not given or the authorship disclosed. For Lenin’s correspondence with the secretary of ISB in trying to ward off that body’s interference in Russian affairs, see *Correspondance entre Lénine et Camille Huysmans 1905–1914*, Paris/The Hague 1963, pp. 100 ff., 119 ff. Cf. also below, p. 595.

now deserted him, and resigned his mandate (the second RSDRP mandate) to the Bureau, who gave it to an orthodox Menshevik. Unfortunately Kautsky, though he was heartily sick of Russian affairs after his experience as trustee, still made it his business to oppose Rosa's formula. Where she proposed that only those parties represented in the Bureau and who were members of the RSDRP should be called upon to get together to prepare for a general conference on reunification, Kautsky called for a broader base of 'all interested parties who consider themselves Social Democrats . . . we must avoid any judgements about the past and concentrate only on the future.'¹

On the face of it this was a repetition of Lenin's and Martov's tight and loose versions of Socialist membership at the famous second RSDRP congress in 1903. But in reality Rosa's rather obstinate defence of her tighter definition had another purpose. Her formula was meant to exclude the *rosłamowcy*, who were not represented in the International Bureau, while Kautsky's plan would have included them. Though probably Kautsky's motives were in the main a sincere desire for unity and not any great interest in pre-judging contending groups, the sharp exchange between him and Rosa Luxemburg showed clearly that the personal element between them was still smouldering. Kautsky reported with glee to Victor Adler afterwards that he had been able 'to spike her guns'. But in fact a compromise was reached. Without being impeded from eventually dealing with anyone it pleased, the Bureau was to take soundings from those 'parties affiliated to the International before a more general conference is called'. As Rosa Luxemburg specially emphasized in one of her perpetual 'corrections' to the press, the principle was to reunite an existing party, not to found a new one.² The main issue, involvement of the International in the affairs of the RSDRP, had been achieved.

Meantime she made every effort to seal off Lenin's influence on the German party in preparation for the next round of talks in the International. In this respect Rosa assured Jogiches that Radek was a poor ambassador for Lenin. 'The Germans think of him only with irony . . . and the German executive will certainly take no great notice of what Lenin says either.'³

But it was circumstances more than any effective action by

¹ Ibid., p. 4. See also *Vorwärts*, 18 December 1913.

² *Vorwärts*, 23 December 1913 ('Aus der Partei').

³ Jogiches letters, 1913 (?), IML (M).

Rosa which aligned opinions in the International Bureau when the problem of Russian unity next came up for discussion in July 1914. Early in that year Vandervelde, chairman of the Bureau, had visited Russia on its behalf and had discussed the problem of unity with all factions.¹ He carried out his functions with impartiality, even though his personal sympathies were with the Mensheviks. None the less, his report inevitably showed that the main obstacle to unity was Bolshevik intransigence. The meeting in July was called to consider it, and the next steps to be taken. It took the form of an enlarged conference of all interested groups in accordance with the Bureau resolution of December 1913. Apart from the two Russian groups—once more including Plekhanov—the *Bund*, the Letts, and both sections of Polish Social Democracy, as well as the PPS-Left, were represented. Unfortunately, no official record of the discussions and speeches exists, except for the reports of Russian police informers who attended under their respective Bolshevik and Menshevik disguises, and a part of the Bureau Secretary's handwritten notes.² Though a member of the Bureau, Lenin did not himself attend. He sent his trusted supporter and close personal friend, Inessa Armand, with an enormous and detailed memorandum which instructed her to block every effort at unity and to meet all persuasion with the now familiar '*niet*'.³

Inessa Armand found herself almost completely alone. Plekhanov, who never did anything in moderation, now turned against the Bolsheviks as incontinently as he had recently supported them, and indulged his sharp tongue to such an extent that the chairman had to call him to order. Rosa Luxemburg also spoke. She represented not only the view of the Polish Central Committee, but carried all the authority of a long-standing protagonist of Russian unity with acknowledged expertise in this difficult ques-

¹ E. Vandervelde, *Three Aspects of the Russian Revolution*, London 1918, p. 19.

² M. A. Tsyavlovskii, *Bolsheviki. Dokumenty . . . okhrannogo . . .*, pp. 146-8; cf. below, p. 595, note 1.

³ Lenin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XX, pp. 463-94 (official report and instructions of the Central Committee), pp. 495-502 (for Lenin's private instructions and tactical guide lines). It is interesting to compare this latter document with Rosa Luxemburg's instructions to Warszawski at the second Russian congress in 1903 (above, pp. 277-80). Though Lenin's style was harder and more abrupt, both met a somewhat similar diplomatic problem in a very similar way—and both were determined to lay down not only policy but the precise manner of its execution. For some recently published documents on how Bolshevik policy was formulated and carried out on this occasion, see *Istoricheski Arkhiv*, No. 4 (1959), pp. 9-38 (particularly M. Litvinov's letter which incidentally identified Rosa Luxemburg as the prime mover in forcing the meeting on the Russians).

tion. It was her insistence which prevailed upon the conference to submit the report of the meeting to the forthcoming International Socialist congress due to meet in Vienna in August 1914. This would make continued Bolshevik refusal to agree to the conditions of unity proposed by the conference nothing less than open defiance of the entire International.¹

Rosa could be well satisfied with the achievements of the conference.² The long-standing Polish desire for unity had received the official stamp of International approval—even the *rosłamowcy* representatives voted for the resolution and against the Bolsheviks; Russian unity was as much their policy as the Central Committee's, provided that it did not involve their own diminution. Rosa's activities for Russian reunification could not but raise the prestige of the SDKPiL Central Committee in the eyes of the International. Moreover, the question of the Polish split had once more been kept off the official agenda in spite of Lenin's strenuous efforts to focus attention on it (to many outsiders the whole purpose of the meeting had been to discuss 'the present situation of Social Democracy in Russia and Poland'). Jogiches had been prepared to denounce the proposal for the conference in Brussels if it meant a participation of the *rosłamowcy*, but Rosa dissuaded him: 'I am for this conference even if it does bring difficulties with it and I would be in favour of admitting them [*rosłamowcy*] under clearly defined conditions. And finally, Lenin had been exposed as the single obstacle to unity.'³

¹ Rosa Luxemburg's remarks have to be deduced from scattered references in her correspondence at the time, particularly in her letters to Jogiches; also from the notes relating to the discussion taken down by hand, still preserved in M. Huysmans's private papers. The conditions for unity were fivefold: acceptance of the party programme, recognition of majority decisions, acceptance of the need for secrecy in party organization (this was against Menshevik wishes), prohibition of all formation of parliamentary blocs with bourgeois parties, and agreement to participate in a general unification congress (O. H. Gankin and H. H. Fisher, *The Bolsheviks and the World War*, pp. 131-2). The official resolution of the meeting was published in *Le Peuple* (Brussels), 20 July 1914, No. 201, p. 1.

² To Kautsky's unexpected pleasure, he found himself in full agreement with Rosa for the first time for four years—and the last. Both agreed on the policy for reunification against Bolshevik intransigence. Kautsky acknowledged the pleasant fact gracefully ('Karl Liebknecht und Rosa Luxemburg zum Gedächtnis', *Der Sozialist*, 24 January 1919, Vol. V, No. 4, p. 56)—the Bolsheviks later used this single identity of views as heavy ammunition against her.

³ For a different (but I think naïve) interpretation of Lenin as committed to some form of Social-Democratic unity right up to the time of the allied intervention in Russia after the war, see Rudolf Schlesinger, 'Lenin as a Member of the International Socialist Bureau', *Soviet Studies*, Vol. XVI, No. 4 (April 1965), pp. 448-58, especially p. 451.

He himself was well aware that the moving spirit was Rosa's. Now he no longer bothered with Jogiches; the polemics of 1914 on the national question were directed entirely against Rosa Luxemburg. Throughout 1914 Lenin fulminated against the Polish view with substantial animus. At first sight the far-reaching and general implications of the arguments might induce their later reader to suppose that this was some contemporary issue, or at least an old issue recently warmed up by events. But no. The *text* against which Lenin was polemicizing was Rosa's article in the Polish review six years earlier. The *people* he was thundering against were third-rank 'liquidators' of no great consequence—to start with. He was kind enough to admit that 'one must not bring Rosa Luxemburg down to such a level but the fact that she has such people clinging to her is a measure of the extent of her descent into opportunism'.¹ Undoubtedly he was enraged. Even his collaborators in the preparation of the Zimmerwald conference of 1915 were well aware of the 'temperature of his animosity against Rosa Luxemburg'.² But behind the immediate targets of early 1914 more formidable opponents rose up against Lenin. After the outbreak of war, when Rosa Luxemburg was unable and unconcerned to engage in this polemic, some of the *roslamowcy*, close associates of Lenin at Zimmerwald and elsewhere, took up the traditional Polish cudgels. For on this one national issue Central Committee and Opposition were as one. Radek, Broński, and Stein in *Gazeta Robotnicza* were every bit as uncompromising over self-determination as Rosa had ever been.³

When war broke out the Polish leaders in Germany were automatically cut off from contact with the organizations in Russian Poland. By strenuous efforts Jogiches managed to retain a limited amount of contact during these early years via Scandinavia, the classic secret route by which Russian émigrés kept in touch with their homeland.⁴ In any case the labour movement in Poland as well as in Russia had fallen into a parlous state by 1914, which not

¹ Lenin, 'Concerning the right of nations to self-determination', *Prosveshchenie*, No. 6, 1914; *Sochineniya*, Vol. XX, p. 420.

² Letter from Angelica Balabanoff to the executive of the SPD of November 1952, discussing the authenticity of the Lenin manuscript mentioned above, p. 588, note 2.

³ See also *Vorbote*, January and April 1916. Lenin's reply, *ibid.*, April 1916, No. 2; *Sbornik Sotsialdemokrata*, October 1916; *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXII, pp. 306-44.

⁴ For a graphic analysis of these routes, see Michael Futrell, *Northern Underground*, London 1962.

even the sudden wave of massive strikes in the summer of 1914 could revive. The declaration of war anyhow pole-axed this rally completely. For a brief moment all Polish and *Bund* Socialist groups decided to collaborate but the attempt did not last long; soon organized Socialism broke once more into its inimical constituent parts. Piłsudski backed the Central Powers to the hilt. Not until the German offensive of 1915 overflowed the greater part of Poland was it possible for the émigré leadership of the SDKPiL and PPS-Left to re-establish contact with local organizations. In this respect, the *rosłamowcy*, most of whom were in Switzerland, were better off than the Central Committee in Berlin, limited by the severe restrictions on all Socialist activity in war-time. Rosa Luxemburg anyhow had her hands more than full with the birth-pains of an effective Left opposition in the SPD, while Jogiches increasingly took over the vacant role of organizer for the *Spartakusbund*.

But the bleak issues of the war had irrevocably made nonsense of the largely personal differences between the two Polish groups. It fell to Warszawski in Switzerland to undertake reunification, a task close to his heart. He travelled to Warsaw in the summer of 1916 and by November of that year the local organizations of the SDKPiL were once more merged into one.¹ For Warszawski it was only a preliminary step to the more difficult task of bringing together the SDKPiL and the PPS-Left, though he only achieved this when the Communist Party was formed at the end of the war. Warszawski was known to favour this strongly—and had to pay the usual Communist penalty for enthusiasm when he failed to be elected to the first central committee of the new Polish party because he was considered to have been too soft in the negotiations with the PPS-Left. But he had Rosa's approval.² The programme of the new Communist Party of Poland was sent post-haste and under difficult conditions to Berlin and obtained the approval of the two great leaders. Fittingly, this last act of Jogiches and Rosa Luxemburg for Polish Socialism was one of unity and approval. Rosa Luxemburg had other things to think about in November 1918, but

¹ See the documents in O. B. Szmidi, *Dokumenty*, Vol. III, pp. 169-71; also *Czerwony Sztandar*, June 1917, No. 191.

² See below, p. 716-17. For Warszawski, see his article in *Nasza Trybuna*, No. 5, 13 December 1918, which talked about a merger instead of a capitulation. In general see Józef Kowalski, *Zarys Historii polskiego ruchu robotniczego 1918-1938*, Vol. I (1918-1928), Warsaw 1962, p. 110. This is an official party history.

we may assume that this great achievement, particularly the acceptance by the PPS-Left of all that the SDKPiL had stood for, caused her satisfaction.

By the time the curtains parted at the end of the war, most of the actors had emerged in new and different roles. Many were attracted by the magnet of the Russian revolution. Marchlewski had been bailed out by the Bolsheviks after the peace of Brest-Litovsk and joined the Russian party, though he still continued to speak with authority on Polish affairs. Dzierżyński, too, was released from prison by the revolution of March 1917 and henceforward devoted his fierce talents and loyalties entirely to the Russian Bolshevik party. Hanecki was Lenin's secret confidential agent in Stockholm. But none made such a dramatic reappearance on the scene as Karl Radek, who travelled to Germany illegally in December 1918 as the representative of the Bolshevik party, wearing the mantle of enormous prestige which membership of Lenin's entourage now commanded. It was a moment of mixed feelings for Jogiches and Rosa Luxemburg. The momentary resuscitation of their old political community, and the somewhat nostalgic atmosphere in which the brilliant post-revolutionary careers of so many friends and comrades were discussed, provide their own ironic contribution to the end of Rosa Luxemburg's story.¹

It is clear that from 1909 onwards Rosa Luxemburg's influence and interest in the Polish movement began to decline. The blind alley into which Jogiches' personality and policy was leading, and her inability to do much about it, produced an almost unconscious disengagement easily absorbed in the new welter of activities in the German movement. Were it not for our knowledge of Polish affairs from documents and, particularly, from her letters to Jogiches, we might well suppose that there simply was not enough time for her to devote herself to both parties. But previously Rosa had always combined full participation in the SPD with a full complement of work in the Polish movement. Until 1910 she was certainly writing as much for Poland as for Germany. The real choice was not between Germany and Poland so much as a subtle shift of emphasis from the internal miseries of the SDKPiL to the more rewarding affairs of the International.

¹ See below, p. 747.

Her participation in the work of the International Socialist Bureau was not, of course, confined to the Russian question and her efforts to keep the Polish question off the agenda. The task of the Bureau was to review all disputes; it acted as an unofficial supreme court for most of the affiliated parties. Like any judge, Rosa, together with her colleagues, dealt with these affairs on a factual basis; the tedious disputes between Czech and Austrian trade unions, the mandates of Hungarian delegates, the seating of American representatives from different parties, did not call for much exposition of Socialist principles. But at the same time there was an undercurrent of disillusion with the International itself which any conscientious biographer must note—however little it fits in with the extreme international position which Rosa Luxemburg was to take after the outbreak of war. Her comments in private letters about the Copenhagen congress in 1910 and the extraordinary congress in Basle in 1912—she reluctantly attended both—were not complimentary. There was much hysterical effusion about war and much corresponding euphoria at the magnificence of so many Socialists gathered under one roof; but resolutions with the sharp bite of the Stuttgart declaration of 1907 were noticeably lacking.

Rosa's legacy to Polish Socialism was thus very different from, though not less than, that to German Socialism. She was directly associated with the left wing in Germany until her death. As we shall see, the creation of the German Communist Party was in large measure due to her and its policies were shaped for many years by her ideas. In Poland, on the other hand, there was a break. The creation of the Polish Communist Party had nothing to do with her; many of the personalities associated with the party after the war did not even know her personally; even though her influence in the creation of the SDKPiL and the emergence of its mature policy was acknowledged to be great, it was that of an historical figure. Thus in the report of the meeting of the organizing committee of the new Communist Party of Poland in December 1918 no mention is made either of Jogiches or Rosa Luxemburg.¹ But, at Warszawski's instigation, a man called Ciszewski—a member of the PPS-Left—travelled to Berlin before the congress and

¹ *Sprawozdanie ze zjazdu organizacyjnego KPRP (Zjednoczonych SDKPiL i Lewicy PPS)*, Warsaw 1919. The minutes of the founding congress have not survived; possibly there were speeches of tribute to the two great leaders.

submitted the unity proposals to Rosa and Jogiches, who approved them with few alterations. Even if it was a mere formality, the new Polish Communist Party therefore had the official blessing of Rosa Luxemburg—while she in turn had the satisfaction of seeing it created even before the German party, a product of fusion with the PPS-Left and not of separation like the KPD.¹

Polish Socialism divided sharply into the periods before and after the war; to connect the two is the task of historians and political philosophers, not of contemporary politicians. The sense of a clean start in 1918 was far greater in Polish than in German Communism. The Stalinist assault on the pre-war Left did not therefore touch the Polish past—or Rosa Luxemburg—as directly as in Germany, and after the death of Stalin the Poles took out her reputation almost unaltered from the casket in which it had been stored for the duration. All that was needed was interest enough to polish and brighten it with research, and this has now been amply forthcoming.

In Germany, however, she was, and still is, a disputed figure, not only historically but in terms of present policies. The continuity of her influence, the fact that she was indisputably linked with modern German Communism, makes any discussion of Rosa Luxemburg both controversial and dangerous. Hence the flood of Polish publications and the limited and highly selective treatment of Rosa Luxemburg in East Germany.² But Russian acknowledgement of a contribution to the RSDRP in general, or to the Bolsheviks in particular, has yet to appear.

¹ See J. Ciszewski, 'Wspomnienia z roku 1918', *Z Pola Walki*, Moscow 1928, Nos. 7/8; also *Z Pola Walki*, 1958, No. 4, pp. 39-63.

² For an elaboration of her influence in both countries after her death, see below, pp. 820-7.

XIV

THE WAR

IN the Marxist calendar 4 August 1914 is a watershed date, and later history, instead of flattening the divide, has done everything to make it sharper. The cathartic events of that day could naturally not be foreseen, yet immediately afterwards they began to seem inevitable—a relief or a disaster, depending on the point of view. For a decade one had only to mention the 4th of August in German Socialist circles and everyone knew what was meant: not the declaration of war so much as the SPD's official support for it. While everyone later agreed that this was not the outcome of a sudden shock but a natural reaction (or in hostile eyes the culmination of a long process of decay), we must not be dazzled by hindsight. At the time the vote of the SPD *Reichstag* delegation for the war credits was a momentous decision, and a shock to all but the immediate participants. As with most profound innovations, inevitability was a plea of immediate psychological defence. 'We couldn't help it', is the classic cry of all conservatives who carry out a revolution.

The first real confrontation of the European Socialist leaders with their own impotence was at a meeting of the Bureau of the Socialist International in Brussels on 29 July 1914. Rosa Luxemburg was present as usual on behalf of the SDKPiL; she had been in Brussels since mid-July in search of the perennial but elusive panacea for unifying the centrifugal Russian party, and only knew what was going on in Berlin at second hand. The newspapers, however, spoke clearly, and the German delegation was able to complete the picture when the members arrived in the course of 28 July. And the other national delegations told the same story, from Vienna and from Paris. It was a distinguished but very gloomy meeting. The tone of the resolution adopted was familiar enough. 'The International Socialist Bureau charges proletarians of all nations concerned not only to pursue but even to intensify their

demonstrations against war. . . .¹ But most of the speeches in private session were cold and much more realistic. Victor Adler declared his party's complete helplessness. He implied that the only choice was between the destruction of organized Socialism or alignment to the furore of the Vienna crowds; all his hearers were struck by the ghastly realism of his resignation, which none the less bore the usual stamp of his authority. 'In retrospect Jean Jaurès and Rosa Luxemburg seem to me the only delegates who, like Adler, realized fully the inevitability of the world war and the horrors it entailed. Jaurès gave the impression of a man who, having lost all hope of a normal solution of the crisis, relied upon a miracle.'² But most of the delegates would not accept the full implication of his words. The meeting considered a change of locale for the coming International congress, due to take place in Vienna in August; this city, heaving with popular nationalism, was obviously unsuitable for a peace meeting. Rosa Luxemburg and Jean Jaurès pressed the alternative claims of Paris; there the congress would be accompanied by monster demonstrations against war.³ All the hopes of the delegates now focused on this congress. It was the last, indeed the only, time that Jaurès, the great French humanitarian, and the sharp and mobile Marxist were to collaborate whole-heartedly. But the result was useless and ironic. Two days later Jaurès was to be assassinated in Paris.

That evening a representative group of participants spoke to a huge crowd in the Cirque Royal, which 'literally shook at the end of Jaurès's magnificent speech'.⁴ No record of the speeches exists, but in the echoing fervour of their own passionate denunciation of war the speakers may have found both strength and hope, however short-lived. The Brussels gathering was the epitome of all that was best and most hopeless in the Second International, the belief

¹ Translated from the French from A. Zévaes, *Jaurès*, Paris 1951, p. 245. The full text of the resolutions is reprinted in Carl Grünberg, 'Die Internationale und der Weltkrieg', *Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und der Arbeiterbewegung*, Vol. I (1916), p. 405.

² Angelica Balabanoff, *My Life as a Rebel*, London 1938, p. 132. She attended as the Italian delegate. Frölich (p. 230) quotes without reference a different comment by Balabanoff (*Erinnerungen und Erlebnisse*, Berlin 1927): 'Only for a while did the meeting awaken—when Rosa Luxemburg took the floor', which seems to me less probable. A brief résumé of the speeches at this meeting is in *Compte Rendu de la Réunion du BSI tenue à Bruxelles le 29-30 juillet 1914*, in M. Huysmans's private papers.

³ Carl Grünberg, loc. cit.

⁴ Angelica Balabanoff, op. cit., p. 134. According to her, Rosa also spoke; Grünberg does not mention her.

that idealism, public opinion, popular goodwill could be summoned at will by the leaders and would engulf or at least divert the course of history. Rosa was exhausted by her Russian negotiations and by the apparent hopelessness of the last meeting of the International Bureau.¹ She took no part in the desultory small talk of the delegates, but sat silent and withdrawn. None the less, the occasion was charged with drama—private as well as public.

For ten years we [Huysmans and I] were both members of the International Bureau and for ten years we hated one another. Why? Hard to say. Perhaps he could not abide politically active women; as for me, his impertinent Flemish face probably got on my nerves. . . . The whole time at the restaurant Huysmans looked at me silently and the ten-year-old hatred was transformed into a glowing friendship within the hour. Laughable, in a way. I suppose he finally saw me in a moment of weakness.²

The Brussels meeting was distinguished not only by those who participated but by those who did not come. Significantly, some of the 'realists' kept away; the right wing of the PPS could see nothing but good for Poland in a war between Russia and the Central Powers, while the Bolsheviks too had no interest in powerless public squawks about unity and war. The revolutionary forces had recently been growing and fermenting in Russia, and the prospect of war was almost too good to expect. 'Franz Josef and Nikolasha won't do us the favour', Lenin commented, with an optimistic glint in his eye; he had gone climbing in the Slovakian Tatra to mark his contempt for the International Bureau's unity meeting.³

Haase, Rosa Luxemburg, and the other German delegates returned to Berlin on 31 July. There, too, the speed of events had obliterated realistic perceptions. In a manifesto of 25 July the SPD executive almost pre-empted the call of the International; all the weakness and hesitation of 1911 seemed to have disappeared. 'The class-conscious German proletariat . . . raises a flaming protest against the criminal machinations of the warmongers. . . . Not a

¹ 'Rosa semblait fort fatiguée a la réunion du B.I.S.' Camille Huysmans to Benedikt Kautsky, 11 March 1949, in *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 116.

² Rosa Luxemburg to Hans Diefenbach, 23 June 1917, in *Briefe an Freunde*, pp. 114-15. Huysmans's own rather colourless comments on the occasion are given in his letter to Benedikt Kautsky (*ibid.*, p. 116). By the time the two participants wrote down their comments, the incident seemed ridiculous and each 'blamed' the other for being friendly. An interesting but all too common reaction.

³ In a letter to Maxim Gorky, quoted in Bertram D. Wolfe, *Three who made a Revolution*, p. 608.

drop of any German soldier's blood must be sacrificed to the power hunger of the Austrian ruling clique, to the Imperialist profiteers.¹ Similar denunciations followed daily, but in less than a week the senior members of the executive had returned from the last holiday of peace and decided jointly and severally that there was precisely nothing that the SPD could do against war. The automatic phrases of defiance pumped out by their juniors under Haase's influence—no holiday for this busy lawyer—had lost all point, for war abroad and military government at home loomed certain and imminent; indeed, they could only do harm to the SPD. The executive issued a new manifesto, apologetic and quietist in tone, whose urgent message was—no risks!² At the same time, with a furtive backward glance at history, one of its members was sent to Paris to talk to the French; 'it will not have been for want of trying'. The crucial question of voting for the inevitable war credits in the *Reichstag* was already being discussed, as yet inconclusively.³ Some sections of the party press were still faithfully echoing the anti-militarist sentiments so painfully hammered out during the years of Socialist self-sufficiency, with *Vorwärts* in the van.⁴ For a while the press ran on in its well-accustomed grooves—it knew after all no other language—while the leaders hesitated. All depended on the hope that the German government would not back the madmen in Vienna.

But it did. And once Germany was in, the whole perspective changed. On the one hand was fear: fear of isolation from the masses, Bebel's old fear of the all-powerful military dictatorship—the party had had a glimpse in 1910 of what the military commanders were simply longing to do to Social Democracy;⁵ also the knowledge of complete impotence in case of war, which Bebel had also foreseen

¹ Reprinted in Carl Grünberg, op. cit., p. 423. The phraseology directly echoes Bismarck's famous remark about the Balkans not being worth the bones of a single Pomeranian grenadier, which had already been quoted *verbatim* in a resolution of the party executive dated 15 October 1912. The SPD was always highly receptive to slogans from any source and went on repeating them faithfully; during the last ten years of its pre-war existence it had become a 'slogan' party.

² Grünberg, op. cit., pp. 435–6, dated 31 July.

³ Karl Liebknecht, *Klassenkampf gegen den Krieg*, Berlin 1919, p. 11.

⁴ *Vorwärts*, 30 July 1914. 'The Socialist proletariat refuses all responsibility for the events which are being conjured up by a ruling class blinded to the point of madness. . . .' This was still the moderately radical *Vorwärts* created after November 1905, of which Rosa Luxemburg had been an editor for a few weeks.

⁵ *Protokoll . . . 1910*, p. 430. An appeal by the same General von Bissing referring to his confidence in 'our so reliable working class'—a confidence that 'must not be shaken in any way'—appeared in *Vorwärts*, 17 August 1914, with the editorial comment that 'with this latest proclamation Herr von Bissing has placed himself beyond all criticism'.

in private four years earlier.¹ On the other side was the practical legacy of so many years of isolation, firmly established after the victory over the revisionists. In its present need society stretched out its hand and Social Democracy seized it. For some it was a catharsis, the end of a dark period of useless penance; as in France, a small group of left-wing radicals now became the most vociferous supporters of the war.² For most of the others it was a welcome by-product of an unhappy situation. The ruling classes, it turned out, were not blood-thirsty monsters, they were merely people with a rather different background and views, but one could work with them. 'No reader of Scheidemann can miss the genuine pleasure which he felt in being invited to discuss matters on an equal footing with the ministers of state.'³ Noske was even more blatant. The same sentiment, a little better disguised, appears also in the memoirs of Ebert and Keil, the Württemberg leader.⁴ But it would be unfair to see all these men as merely Social Democrats *faute de mieux*. There were two crucial new factors in their life: a war which they had opposed but could not prevent; and, more important still, a defensive war against the old bogeyman of progressive Europe, 'Tsarist Russia. With a queer mixture of arrogance and historical conservatism they suddenly saw themselves as helping a relatively progressive Germany to destroy Tsarism. We now know that this was a more predictable reaction than it seemed at the time; recent documentary evidence suggests that the German chancellor's hesitation in ordering full-scale mobilization was merely a manoeuvre to precipitate the Russians into mobilizing first and thus ensure the patriotic support of the SPD.⁵

The last of the defiance of 30 July, when Ebert and Otto Braun were sent to Zürich with the party chest as a precaution against

¹ For a curious glimpse of this side of Bebel from an English point of view, see letter of Sir Henry Angst to William Braithwaite, 22 October 1910, in W. J. Braithwaite, *Lloyd George's Ambulance Wagon*, London 1957, pp. 65-66.

² For Konrad Haenisch's conversion see his personal statement in Eugen Prager, *Geschichte der USPD*, Berlin 1922, p. 34; also his more 'political' reasoning in *Hamburger Echo*, 1 December 1914, No. 280.

³ Schorske, *German Social Democracy*, p. 292. There was also the incident at an Imperial reception when an over-carefully briefed Kaiser leapt to welcome a guest whom he mistakenly believed to be Scheidemann.

⁴ Gustav Noske, *Erlebtes aus Aufstieg und Niedergang einer Demokratie*, Offenbach 1947, pp. 39, 43, 55. Friedrich Ebert, *Kämpfe und Ziele*, Dresden, no date [1924?]. Wilhelm Keil, *Erlebnisse eines Sozialdemokraten*, Stuttgart 1947, Vol. I, p. 306.

⁵ See Imanuel Geiss (ed.), *Julikrise und Kriegsausbruch 1914*, a collection of documents, Vol. II, Hanover, 1965.

outlawry, had already dissolved by 3 August. The *Reichstag* debate on the war credits was imminent; how would the 110 members of the SPD vote? Considering what later proved to have been at stake—the whole future of twentieth-century Socialism—the discussion was flat and brief. The perspectives of the majority had narrowed. For them, ‘it was now exclusively a matter of deciding whether at a time when the enemy had already entered the country and [that enemy] anyhow was Russia, a party representing a full third of the German people could deny the means of defence and protection to those called upon to defend them and their families. . . . Impossible.’ As against that, a small minority, ‘between a sixth and a seventh’, felt doubts—not an opposing certainty, but doubts. ‘Could one envisage the vote for war credits, when the information as to the events was one-sided, and anyhow came from the side of the enemies of Social Democracy . . . ? It would be in contradiction with itself, would make the worst impression on the workers of other countries and create confusion in the Socialist International.’¹ Thus the majority were sure of their duty while the minority were not. The twenty strongest supporters of voting for war credits later declared that they would have voted for them, if necessary, against the party, while the fourteen opponents could not bring themselves to break the long tradition of discipline, especially since the party had already resolved to speak and vote unanimously in the *Reichstag* next day, one way or the other.² At the caucus meeting of the opposition, some suggested abstention, with the precedent of Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht in 1870; others—including the grand old man’s son Karl—wanted a loud negative vote. But finally it was decided to support the government. Ironically Hugo Haase, an opponent of the affirmative vote, was chosen to deliver the SPD declaration in the *Reichstag*—in his role of first chairman of the party. He did it in the spirit of the large majority, not his own. And the bourgeois deputies loudly applauded him.

Today we are no longer surprised, for the decision was the inexorable consequence of twenty years of party history. The

¹ Eduard Bernstein, in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, II, Kriegsheft 1915, pp. 19–20. There are other accounts, including an apologia by Kautsky in *Neue Zeit* (1915/1916, Vol. I, p. 322), the veracity of which was questioned by Mehring (*Die Internationale*, April 1915, editorial comment, p. 10). Bernstein, a pacifist but not a radical, gives the most sober and least egocentric account.

² *Die Internationale*, April 1915, p. 49; Karl Liebknecht, *Klassenkampf gegen den Krieg*, Berlin 1919, p. 55.

threads of inevitability have been drawn two ways, by objective historians who could evaluate material knowing how the story ended—and therefore emphasize what was ‘real’ and show up what was ‘false’—and by the Communists searching for ever earlier evidence of a great betrayal. With their different objectives and techniques both came to similar conclusions: the vote for war credits was the end of a long process, not the beginning; a logical consequence of past actions, not a brutal aberration. But contemporaries did not see it like that. Those most affected saw a temporary wavering which would, indeed must, soon be corrected. Lenin in Switzerland, which he reached a few weeks after his release from custody in Austrian Cracow, could hardly believe it. For the German party was the jewel of the International; however unreliable the other parties might be, with their history of splits and wavering, the SPD had so often declared its solid hatred of the imperial state and imperial military policy, its determination to prevent or abort any war. Any moment now the executive, the *Reichstag* caucus, would call for action. But no. Since twenty years of history in which they had participated could not just be a lie, the minority of revolutionary Socialists everywhere began to feel that the German Socialist leaders had betrayed the cause. Nothing else could explain it. Now they must be garrotted with their own string of words.

We must not let hindsight, or the Communists’ tactical hammering on the fatal date, rob us of one of history’s hard-earned dramatic effects. The real drama was not the vote itself—all dramatic emphasis is necessarily a form of simplification. It was buried in the motivation, the explanations, in the actions that followed. Where previously radicals and majority had communicated through a mist, but recognizably, there was now to be a sound-proof barrier; the action of the other group was no longer mistaken but utterly incomprehensible. There was little contact, no communication. Words ceased to have the same meaning. There were totally different channels of responsibility. And in the middle, around Kautsky, Ledebour, and Haase, a group emerged who hoped and believed that the obstacles were temporary, who elevated the truism that war was generically different from peace into a whole doctrine, and who exhorted both sides to leave their extreme positions and move inwards, so that communication with each other and—more important—with the real oracle of Socialism could be re-established. But meantime the vacuum of silence was

filled by each side impugning the other's motives, and in the worst possible way. Martial law, censorship, the full pressure of conformity or silence all helped to make the misunderstandings complete.

The executive instinctively knew that it was on parole with the government, for its own good behaviour and for that of the party membership. The party-truce (*Burgfrieden*) meant in effect suspending all worth-while opposition for the duration, except for such minor concessions as could be negotiated amicably. Chief beneficiary of these concessions was not the party, but the unions. But at least the party and its organizations were allowed to exist unmolested; members were able to speak in the *Reichstag*, however minute the chances of influencing the government. In return the SPD had to prove that its continued existence kept labour aligned to the war effort. The discipline which the executive had once exercised for the benefit of Socialist isolation was now wielded on behalf of the war cabinet, and had a twofold role: to quell opposition to itself and to the *Burgfrieden* (which became synonymous in all Socialist eyes), and to plead the cause of minor, inadvertent offenders with the military; a dual responsibility to party and to state.¹ On 4 August 1914 the SPD became, like the other parties in imperial Germany, a pressure group which articulated special interests (though mutely in war-time) but without hope of taking or wielding power in the state.²

Not that everything divided and at once fell neatly into place. Whatever some of the local papers might say—they always tended to be extreme in either direction—the main leaders of the SPD were neither joyful revisionists nor chauvinists. They sincerely believed that they had done what they could, that it had failed, but they had to go on living in a situation that was not of their own making. The fact that good might come out of it was incidental.³ After all, war and the threat of invasion were realities; most of the boys at the front were also working men. The leaders shouldered their responsibility as they saw it. They believed that everyone would soon come round to their point of view. Almost all the papers soon did so, with occasional lapses. The censorship

¹ On 27 September 1914 the SPD executive met and decided on measures to enforce uniformity in the party (*Protokoll . . . 1917*, p. 29). Already on 5 August the coming party congress at Würzburg, fixed only a week earlier, had been postponed *sine die* (*Vorwärts*, 6 August 1914).

² For a fuller account of this technical transformation, see J. P. Nettl, 'The German Social Democratic Party', *Past and Present*, loc. cit.

³ See Schorske, p. 294, n. 26.

twice suspended publication of *Vorwärts* during September. *Sozialdemokratische Korrespondenz* was one of the censor's favourite clients. Scheidemann reported that 'every single day we had to plead for one newspaper or another'.¹

For the first few weeks the main feeling among the Centre and the Left was unease and shame, a knowledge that things had not gone as they should, yet without any clear notion of what more could have been done. Kautsky again took to his pen, producing historical apologias for his own position and incidentally a special war-time philosophy for the SPD that was to be truly Socialist and yet conformist as well.² Both Rosa Luxemburg and Clara Zetkin suffered nervous prostration, and were at one moment near to suicide.³ Together they still tried, on 2 and 3 August, to plan an agitation against war; they contacted twenty SPD members of the *Reichstag* with known radical views, but got the support of only Liebknecht and Mehring.⁴ Rosa herself naturally did not admit to despair as easily as Clara Zetkin, but she too could only emphasize her isolation and the difficulties of making an impact on a party 'besotted with war. . . . The party life of the masses is completely stifled.'⁵

¹ Philipp Scheidemann, *Memoiren eines Sozialdemokraten*, Dresden 1928, Vol. I, p. 271.

² Karl Kautsky, *Der politische Massenstreik*, Berlin 1914; 'Die Sozialdemokratie im Weltkrieg', *NZ*, 1915/1916, Vol. I, p. 322; 'Der Krieg', *NZ*, 1913/1914, Vol. II, p. 843.

³ Clara Zetkin, letter to Helen Ankersmit dated 3 December 1914, in *Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften*, Vol. I, p. 639. This letter is a dramatic account, perhaps excessively so, of the personal tragedy in the collapse of a hitherto secure Socialist world. For Rosa Luxemburg's feelings, as reported by Luise Kautsky, see Maurice Berger, *La nouvelle Allemagne*, Paris 1919, p. 262: 'Le 4 août, j'ai voulu m'enlever la vie, mes amis m'en ont empêchés.'

⁴ Clara Zetkin, *Reden und Schriften*, Vol. II, p. 129. Clara Zetkin first told this story in a speech in the provincial constituent assembly for Württemberg on 14 April 1919, in which she represented the KPD. Her opponents laughed: 'If you had joined with Rosa Luxemburg to meet the French [armies] they would certainly have run away once they had seen you two.' Parliamentary gallantry was one of the courtesies that did not survive the war.

⁵ See letter to Karl Moor in Switzerland, 12 October 1914, first printed in *Niedersächsische Arbeiterzeitung*, 7 August 1926; reprinted in *Germanskoe rabochee dvizhenie v novoe vremya* (The German Labour Movement in recent times), Moscow 1962, pp. 402-4. This reprint of extracts from various Luxemburg letters is interesting, since the letter to Karl Moor is given as being to 'an unknown addressee in Switzerland'. Moor, a Swiss Socialist whom Rosa had met in Brussels in July 1914 where he represented the Swiss party in the Bureau, became an ardent supporter of Lenin and the Bolsheviks and went to Russia after the revolution. Later, Lenin's reservations proved justified: the German Foreign Office documents revealed him as a German and—on the quiet—an Austrian agent as well. He is now an 'unperson'—hence the unknown addressee. The original of the letter is in IML (M).

Now the first task was to dissociate themselves from the *Reichstag* vote, both in the eyes of the 'masses outside in the country' and of foreign comrades. Rosa at once called a conference of her close friends at her flat on the evening of 4 August, as soon as the news of the vote was out. Present were Mehring, Julian Marchlewski—still under close police surveillance—Ernst Meyer, Hermann Duncker and his sister Käthe, and Wilhelm Pieck. Rosa sent 300 telegrams to local officials who were thought to be oppositional, asking for their attitude to the vote and inviting them to Berlin for an urgent conference. The results were pitiful. 'Clara Zetkin was the only one who immediately and unreservedly cabled her support. The others—those who even bothered to send an answer—did so with stupid or lazy excuses.'¹ The first public disclaimer of official SPD policy appeared in September 1914 in the form of a bald notice to the effect that there *was* an opposition in Germany, no more and no less.

Comrades Dr. Südekum and Richard Fischer have made an attempt in the party press abroad [in Sweden, Italy and Switzerland] to present the attitude of German Social Democracy during the present war in the light of their own conceptions. We therefore find it necessary to assure foreign comrades that we, and certainly many other German Social Democrats, regard the war, its origins, its character, as well as the role of Social Democracy in the present situation from an entirely different standpoint, and one which does not correspond to that of Comrades Südekum and Fischer. Martial law presently makes it impossible for us to enlarge upon our point of view publicly. Signed—Karl Liebknecht, Dr. Franz Mehring, Dr. Rosa Luxemburg, Clara Zetkin.²

The idea of sending the letter, and its mild tone—in the vain hope of attracting further signatories—were particularly Rosa Luxem-

¹ Hugo Eberlein, *Die Revolution*, 1924, No. 2. This is the best account of the meeting and subsequent action taken. This issue of *Die Revolution* celebrated the 10-year jubilee of the foundation of the *Spartakusbund*. The article is anonymous but can probably be attributed to Eberlein who was the confidential agent of the radical leadership since he was a relatively obscure figure and therefore not marked within the SPD (see *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 137, to Marta Rosenbaum, dated 5 January 1915). See also Ernst Meyer, *Spartakus im Kriege*, Berlin 1928, p. 6.

² *Dokumente und Materialien zur Geschichte der Deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, Berlin 1958, Series 2, Vol. I, p. 31. The letter appeared in two Swiss papers; I do not know whether it was reprinted in Italy or in Sweden. Its appearance in Switzerland was duly noted by Lenin (*Sochineniya*, Vol. XXI, pp. 16–17). This declaration was later picked out as the first concrete step in the creation of a separate Communist party (*Bericht über den Gründungsparteitag der KPD Spartakusbund*, Welcome Speech by Ernst Meyer, Berlin 1919, p. 1).

burg's; it was she who persuaded Clara Zetkin to sign during a short visit to Stuttgart in September, and also approached Mehring and Liebkecht for permission to use their names. 'Would you authorize us', Rosa wrote to Mehring, 'to append your signature? You are so well known abroad that it would be of great moral value and a well-earned slap in the face [*Ohrfeige*] for the infamous protestations by the party executive. In the near future Karl L[iebkecht] will be coming here and I hope he will sign as well. Please reply by cable immediately on receipt of these lines.'¹

In private Rosa gave full vent to the frustrations of getting the motley group of oppositionists together for any concerted and effective action. For their cohesion was a negative one, dislike of the attitude of the party, without any compensatory agreement on what to do instead. It was a rocking boat in which the foursome sailed into the official wind, and Rosa had her work cut out at the helm.

I want to undertake the sharpest possible action against the activities of the [*Reichstag*] delegates. Unfortunately I get little co-operation from my [collection of] incoherent personalities . . . Karl [Liebkecht] can't ever be got hold of, since he dashes about like a cloud in the sky; Franz [Mehring] has little sympathy for any but literary campaigns, [Clara Zetkin's] reaction is hysteria and the blackest despair. But in spite of all this I intend to try to see what can be achieved.²

The extent to which Rosa was the focal point of the opposition had been acknowledged by her opponents all along. Ebert had written of the effect of 'war . . . on the "Rosa group" which would inspire the latter to all kinds of "new plans"'.³ In November 1914 Kautsky, writing to his friend Victor Adler, characterized the situation like this:

. . . [Karl Liebkecht's intended vote against the budget in the *Reichstag*] certainly does not mean a split [in the party] right now. The only result could be that the unhappy boy Karl will not make himself a terror but a laughing stock. It could however be the beginning of a split.

I am not in any contact with the far left camp. But from various indications I assume that Rosa is feverishly busy trying to split the

¹ Rosa Luxemburg to Franz Mehring, 13 September 1914, from Stuttgart, IML (M), Fund 201, No. 857.

² Letter to Konstantin Zetkin, end of 1914.

³ Friedrich Ebert, *Schriften, Aufzeichnungen, Reden*, Dresden 1926, Vol. I, p. 309.

party. She too prefers to be the first in the village rather than the second in Rome. If she cannot rule the big party, she wants a small one which swears by her. Soon she will have to serve her sentence and apparently wants to carry out the split before then. She is probably afraid that once she is behind bars, the present critical phase of the war will pass without a split and when she comes out she will once more be faced with the solid and united class party of peace-time in which there won't be any room for her.

How far the splitting tactics will be successful it is hard to say. Up to the present Rosa's following is very small. . . . The group of David, Südekum, Heine, and the trade unions are working for her, though unintentionally. . . . If the 'Marxist centre' appears as the ally of this group then quite a few workers will go over to the Luxemburg group. If, however, we oppose the right wing openly, then they will in turn denounce us to the masses as '*Rosaurier*', as Ledebour puts it; people who only differ from Rosa in our lack of guts.¹

There was at this stage little to choose between the official party view and that of the Centre in their view of the Left, at least as far as ascription of motives was concerned. Among the many ligaments torn by the war was the benefit of doubt which Socialists had always accorded to each other's motivations. In any case neither the German government nor the SPD had any doubts that Rosa Luxemburg was the intellectual centre of gravity behind the radical opposition. It has been the privilege of Stalinist historians to question the primacy of her role at this time.²

It was also decided to make personal contact with anti-war groups in other countries; at the suggestion of the British Independent Labour Party, Franz Mehring, Karl Liebknecht, and Rosa Luxemburg in December 1914 each wrote somewhat stiff, formal greetings to the newspaper *Labour Leader* in London.

With joy and yet deep sorrow every German Social Democrat who has remained faithful to the Proletarian International must take the opportunity to send comrades abroad a brotherly Socialist greeting. Under the murderous blows of Imperialist world war our pride and our hope, the working-class International, has shamefully collapsed and its leading section, the German section of the International, most shamefully of all. . . . An International which accepts its present terrible

¹ Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel*, pp. 606-7, dated 28 November 1914.

² Foreword (anonymous) by Central Committee of SED, to Clara Zetkin, *Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften*, Vol. I. This was written in 1951. More recent historical writing has viewed Rosa's role more favourably.

failure as normal practice . . . cannot be anything but a caricature of Socialism, a product of hypocrisy exactly like the diplomacy of bourgeois states with their alliances and their treaties based on 'public law'.¹

In addition to the disastrous situation in Germany itself, the havoc caused by the war within the International had to be taken into account. Every party had voted for its belligerent government except two lonely Serbians and the Bolshevik caucus in the Russian Duma.² But at least the Independent Labour Party was coming out against the war in England, if only for a time, and the neutrals in Switzerland and Italy were strongly in favour of the old International's opposition to war. It was vital for someone to raise the same flag in Germany.

These protests, subdued and careful as they were, crystallized for the first time a sentiment that was to distinguish the left-wing opposition in Germany from this time onwards—a growing hatred of organized German Social Democracy, of the symbol SPD, which in time became far more virulent than the original opposition to capitalism and to the capitalist state. To some extent it was the violence of juxtaposition, which had made the SDKPiL hate the neighbouring PPS most of all; which made the SPD concentrate its electoral fire on the Liberals. Hatred, though blind, still sees enough to concentrate on the known, whether apparent or real. But there was also a strong personal element in it: the eternal, ill-suppressed impatience and frustration of émigrés like Rosa Luxemburg with the ponderous and 'official' Germans. Not only émigrés, however: the same frustration motivated Karl Liebknecht and, dammed up by the grey negation of war, quickly turned to hatred. They were all of them strong and sincere haters in their different ways—Rosa, Karl Liebknecht, and Mehring. Only Clara Zetkin turned to Communism from loyalty and love. Their reaction was all the greater for the obvious manifestations of party self-satisfaction in public. Yet why should they, who had so often in the last few years thundered against the decay of revolutionary ideals in the SPD, have been astonished now? Was it that, used to systematic exaggeration for political purposes, they had never taken their own warnings too seriously? Or did they think that

¹ *Dokumente und Materialien*, Vol. I, pp. 78–79; also Drahn und Leonhard, *Unterirdische Literatur* . . . , p. 15. The letters were smuggled out via Holland.

² The Serbian Social Democracy obtained a golden place of honour in Soviet historiography as a result, and much modern research. For instance see I. D. Ochak in *Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, 1956, No. 5, pp. 207–9.

they were dealing only with a few misguided or wrong-headed leaders, while the masses—those fabulous, sensitive, incorruptible working classes—would still know what to do when the time came? The ‘masses’ (a word which had always served largely as a synonym for action) were now projected into something concrete and real. Myths are sometimes harder to explode than realities or even the ideology in which realities are mirrored—and so the myths remain when all else is shattered. The violent reaction of the Russian Bolsheviks is easier to understand, for they were always ignorant about realities in the SPD and merely had to overcome in a short time their many years of admiration and deference. Even today the dispute as to the correct interpretation of SPD history—the classification of groups and their relationship with each other—still agitates party historians. For the German Left, the war released a flood of pent-up resentment. It became a matter of honour to hate one’s own traitors the most; in each country the task of those faithful to the old principles of international Socialism was to fight the enemy at home—as a dialectical reply to all those eager to find salvation by fighting the enemy abroad. In an illegal handbill issued by the *Spartakusbund* in the summer of 1916, entitled ‘A Policy for Dogs’ (*Hundepolitik*), Rosa Luxemburg took up the remarks of Dr. David—an old revisionist—who characterized Liebknecht’s attitude as that of a dog who barks but does not bite.

A dog is someone who licks the boots of his master for serving him out kicks for many years.

A dog is someone who gaily wags his tail in the muzzle of martial law and faithfully gazes up to his masters, the military dictators, quietly whining for mercy.

A dog is someone who barks at a person—particularly in his absence—and who fetches and carries for his immediate masters.

A dog is someone who, on the orders of the governments, covers the entire sacred history of a party with slime and kicks it in the dirt.

Dogs are and always were the Davids, Landsbergs and comrades and they will get their well-earned kick from the German working classes when the day of reckoning comes.¹

Similar comments flowed from the pen of Karl Liebknecht, in his writings for the *Spartakus* letters and particularly in his notes

¹ *Selected Works*, Vol. II, p. 561.

written during his imprisonment at Luckau.¹ The Left strove to love internationally and hate on home ground. Eventually this culminated in the Liebknecht formulation: 'The main enemy is at home'.

There was therefore some basis for the accusation that the German radicals were hoping for the defeat of Germany, just as the Bolsheviks specifically counted on the defeat of Tsarist Russia.² With the breakdown of the International, each party—or oppositional group within it—had the special responsibility of taking on the enemy at home. From this to revolutionary defeatism was a small step; Lenin sitting in Switzerland was easily able to take it. The Germans never quite took the final step. What prevented Rosa Luxemburg from openly celebrating the hopes of a German disaster was her immense and often repeated concern with the human loss involved. She was torn between two conflicting desires: the defeat of German imperialism as the most evil manifestation of all; but equally the ending of the war as quickly as possible to save further bloodshed, above all the slaughter of soldiers who were nothing but proletarians temporarily dressed in field grey.³ What prevented the German radicals from the cheerful adoption of Bolshevik revolutionary defeatism was precisely the legacy of optimism of a mass party in a highly developed capitalist country. The reaction from optimism is not pessimism but despair; the destruction of society by war not progress but barbarism.

¹ Karl Liebknecht, *Politische Aufzeichnungen aus seinem Nachlass*, Berlin 1921. See for instance pp. 9–11, entitled 'Warning to the proletariat of the entente', where Karl Liebknecht characterizes both the general and the special failure of German Social Democracy.

² One of Rosa's personal enemies, Georg Ledebour, himself a radical, even accused her of Russian patriotism, of wishing a Tsarist victory over Germany. Karl Kautsky to Victor Adler, 28 November 1914, in *Briefwechsel*, pp. 606–7.

³ Occasionally in *Die Krise der Sozialdemokratie*, Zürich 1916, she remarked that 'a nation that capitulates before the external enemy has no dignity' (p. 68), and 'the Social Democrats have an obligation to defend their country in a great historical crisis' (p. 80). These statements have been pulled wholly out of context to suggest that Rosa Luxemburg gave qualified support to a war of national defence. Since the whole pamphlet is concerned to show that the First World War was not such a war as far as Germany was concerned, these remarks are meaningless as evidence for such a view. See below, p. 823, note 3.

Rosa Luxemburg's argument against war, as costing mainly proletarian lives, was later contrasted contemptuously by Communist party historians under Stalin with Lenin's revolutionary defeatism (Lenin himself never listed this argument among her faults). Curiously, Khrushchev used exactly the same argument against the Chinese Communists in 1963: '. . . in time of war the working classes die most of all. [The need for war] has nothing to do with Marxism-Leninism' (speech in Moscow, 23 May 1963, reported in the [*Manchester*] *Guardian*, 24 May, p. 13).

The main effort thus lay at home. After initial hesitation—not what to do but how to do it—and a desperate if ineffective search for weapons, Karl Liebknecht determined to use his position as a deputy of both the Prussian diet and the *Reichstag*. This gave him a better means of focusing opposition in his person than Rosa's relative isolation. He was not so much the obvious choice, the clearly destined leader—like Lenin or even Hitler; he was inevitable by being all alone. He had not been a disciple, much less a colleague, of Rosa's; in the last seven years they had clashed almost as often as they had agreed, and Rosa's opinion of him, if tolerant, was never flattering. In January 1915, a month after his lonely protest in the *Reichstag*, she wrote, 'He is an excellent chap, but. . . .'¹ This fiercely opinionated lawyer, with his good heart and his passion for drama, had for years bombarded party personalities with heavily underlined good advice as to the line to be taken.² The party leadership had clashed with him over his radical proposals for a youth policy from 1904 to 1907, and had never taken him seriously; they considered him an unbalanced and unworthy successor to his great father.

To this apparently unqualified man now fell the public representation of his group, and he accepted the challenge wholeheartedly. He was apparently not present at the first meeting in Rosa Luxemburg's flat, nor did he stand out in the *Reichstag* caucus debate on 3 August.³ But he signed the declaration of 10 September 1914 together with Rosa Luxemburg, Franz Mehring, and Clara Zetkin, and a tour to the Western Front as a *Reichstag* deputy in October seems to have decided him finally that a few cautious letters of protest were no longer sufficient. 'As far as Karl Liebknecht was concerned he came in October 1914 to Liège . . . we clarified the situation for him with which he was not familiar and I accompanied him next day into the provinces, particularly to Wavre where the damage was considerable. . . . On leaving he shook my hand and said: "Now I know what has happened, I shall do my duty."'⁴

In November he began his bombardment of the SPD *Reichstag*

¹ Letter to Konstantin Zetkin, January 1915.

² For instance, letters to Karl Kautsky from 1907 onwards in IISH, D XV.

³ Frölich, p. 232. *Spartakusbriefe*, Introduction, p. x.

⁴ Camille Huysmans to Benedikt Kautsky, 11 March 1949, in *Briefe an Freunde*, pp. 69-70.

delegates for a negative vote in the next budget debate. He followed this with a personal campaign the week before the debate itself.¹ But in the end he was the only one who broke party discipline, the *Burgfrieden*—a complete break, just as he had wished; he voted alone against the credits. His name instantly became the symbol of the things and people he stood for, to his enemies and to the watchers abroad for a break in the thick German mists. His written explanation to the Speaker of the *Reichstag*, which the latter refused to have entered in the written record, was distributed illegally and became the forerunner of the *Spartakus* letters. At first these were part of the information circulars distributed to sympathetic party functionaries through the good offices of the local party organization in Niederbarnim, an electoral district of Berlin controlled by the radicals. Here Rosa Luxemburg had often spoken in the past; here she now used all her magnetic charm and persuasion to build up a nucleus of protest. Its influence was at first confined to the capital, but gradually spread to other cities, with better distribution of material and more contacts. There were other radical centres in Germany, in Bremen, Stuttgart, Brunswick, Leipzig.

Rosa Luxemburg was also working feverishly in her own field. In December 1914 she went into hospital for a short while; the long isolation and the disaster of the war were too much for her. She had violent changes of mood; at the beginning of November she had written to Hans Diefenbach that 'my first despair has quite changed. Not that things are rosier, quite the contrary. But one gets used to a hailstorm of blows better than a single one . . . precisely the growing dimensions of the disaster . . . call for objective judgement.'² The prison sentence passed on her in Frankfurt at the beginning of the year became due in December, but was postponed to 31 March 1915 on account of her illness.³ None the less, she knew that time was short. The *Sozialdemokratische Korrespondenz* had almost outlived its purpose; it could no longer whip up support in other papers since these were all censored, even if they had wanted to take material. What was needed was a broader, more theoretical paper, a central organ for the

¹ Drahn und Leonhard, *Unterirdische Literatur*, p. 13.

² *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 71, 1 November 1914.

³ Above, pp. 481-2. The appeal against the verdict had been rejected by the Court of Appeal (*Reichsgericht*) on 20 October.

faithful, which could get by the censorship and yet announce as widely as possible the basis on which the party must meet the new challenge of war and the actions of a wrong-headed if not yet treacherous leadership. Under Rosa's particular guidance *Die Internationale* was prepared, with the collaboration of Franz Mehring and Julian Marchlewski. Everything had to be found from scratch, money scraped together, a printer found—this proved very difficult, and with reason: contributors, publisher, and printer were all later indicted.¹ Even after her arrest Rosa was able, through the visits of her secretary Mathilde Jacob, to keep abreast of the last-minute rush to get *Die Internationale* out. Carefully coded verbal communications took place via Mathilde Jacob between Rosa and Leo Jogiches—the latter, as usual, the practical hand behind the scenes, shuttling between authors, publishers, and printers, arranging for the distribution, and all the while keeping Rosa informed on how things were going.² It is even possible that Rosa received assistance from one of the staff at the Barnimstrasse prison called Schrick, who was known among the *Spartakus* leaders to be well disposed towards the prisoner.³ The fact that the conception and form were essentially Rosa's work was acknowledged by Mehring in the introduction when the one and only issue appeared in April 1915; the censor immediately confiscated all copies he could find and prohibited further issues.⁴ By that time she had already been in prison for two months.

In early March she had planned to accompany Clara Zetkin to an international women's conference in Holland—even a women's conference was now no longer to be despised. But on 18 February she was suddenly arrested and taken to the women's prison in the Barnimstrasse. The arrest was entirely unexpected, and carried

¹ On 20 July 1915 an indictment was laid against the authors and the publishers of the journal—Rosa Luxemburg, Franz Mehring, and Clara Zetkin as authors, Bertin and Pfeiffer as publishers. The indictment was made out against the 'authoress Rosa Luxemburg and comrades', and was based on the High Treason paragraph 9C of the Emergency Regulations. However, the office of the Reich prosecutors advised against proceedings as it was not likely that an indictment for high treason could be made to stick. The hearing, originally planned for 22 March 1916, was adjourned *sine die* and proceedings stopped. The state prosecutor's files in the matter are in IML (M), Fund 209, No. 1356.

² Leo Jogiches to Mathilde Jacob, 2 April 1915, in *International Review of Social History*, Vol. VIII, 1963, part 1, p. 100.

³ Letters from this woman to Mathilde Jacob still exist in the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, California.

⁴ *Die Internationale*, 15 April 1915, p. 10.

out by the criminal police department, not the state prosecutor's office. The *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, with good official connections, reported that the arrest was due to the fact that Rosa Luxemburg—'the red Prima Donna'—had organized meetings in Niederbarnim.¹ Karl Liebknecht spoke in the Prussian *Landtag* in support of his 'close party friend'. 'It shows the nature of our *Burgfrieden*, the peace on the home front. [But] we don't even bother to complain that this highly political—in a party political sense—sentence imposed in peace-time should suddenly be carried out in spite of the *Burgfrieden*. . . . I know that my friend Luxemburg can only feel honoured by this execution of judgement, just as I do. . . .'² Liebknecht's great one-man propaganda campaign had begun; for the first time speeches in the *Reichstag* and *Landtag* were really being made 'through the window', not to convince the listeners in the room but the readers and listeners outside. The role which the old SPD caucus had publicly acknowledged but never in practice accepted was now carried out by one man, with a lonely and thorough obstinacy of which the Earl of Strafford would have been proud. With Rosa Luxemburg behind bars, his main intellectual stimulus had gone. He was now more alone than ever.

However much she may have told her personal friends that she wanted time to write and think, it was a most unfortunate moment from a political point of view to be immured in prison. 'Half a year ago I was looking forward to it, now the honour falls on me much as an Iron Cross would fall on you.'³ Rosa's attitude to the practical aspects of political life was always somewhat equivocal; she disliked the physical pressure of meetings and multitudes, yet at the same time these were a concrete manifestation of her fundamental political beliefs—democracy, the people in action. But at this moment her removal from the political scene was too great a blow to the opposition to be supported with her usual equanimity. Still, *Die Internationale* was ready; now in prison would come 'the study of the war' which she 'naturally' wanted to

¹ See *Vorwärts*, 20 February 1915.

² *Berichte über die Verhandlungen des Preussischen Haus der Abgeordneten*, XXII Legislative Period, II Session 1914-1915, Berlin 1916, Vol. VII, column 8754.

³ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 74, letter to Hans Diefenbach, 1 November 1914.

write, and at last perhaps the outline of the book on economics from her school lecture notes.¹ The study of the war became *The Crisis of Social Democracy*, known more generally as the *Junius-brochüre* because of the pseudonym Junius. She also wrote an answer to the critics of her *Accumulation of Capital*—another job that had had to be left for an unexpected period of peace and quiet in the midst of war.²

Rosa always loosened up in prison, as though her political personality were normally held together only by the pressure of life. It was almost as if everything now had to grow to fill the political vacuum, and the component parts of her personality became separated from each other in the process. Rosa the recluse, the thinker, the botanist, and the literary critic emerged and floated away as extensions of Rosa the woman. There was a sudden upsurge of letters to friends, all carefully tailored to suit the personality of the recipient. To her housekeeper, Gertrud Zlottko, Rosa wrote roughly in unsentimental peasant tones: 'Your resigned tone really doesn't go down with me. . . . Pfui, Gertrud, no point in that! I like my people to be gay. Work is the order of the day; do your bit and for the rest don't take things to heart. . . . Keep your spirits up.'³ To Luise Kautsky she was 'a perpetually serious person from whom people always expected something

¹ Ibid. She never did the latter; only the outline remained and was published with a few comments and additions by Paul Levi in 1925 (*Einführung in die Nationalökonomie*). See below, pp. 828–9.

² In a letter to Dietz, the party publisher, written after her return to prison for the second time in July 1916, she outlined her literary plans for the duration of the war as:

'1. A complete work on economics with the title *Akkumulation des Kapitals* consisting of the original work together with an appendix, *Eine Antikritik* [a reply to criticisms], and

2. A series of entirely popular essays under the collective title, *Zur Einführung in die Nationalökonomie* [Introduction to Political Economy], and

3. I am in the process of translating the Russian book by Korolenko, *Die Geschichte meines Zeitgenossen* [History of my Contemporary] into German.'

(Rosa Luxemburg to J. Dietz, 28 July 1916, from the Barnimstrasse prison.) The letter is marked as 'answered on 14.8.16'; from other evidence we know that Dietz turned down all her suggestions. The letter was printed as an appendix to Max Hochdorf, *Rosa Luxemburg*, Berlin, n.d.

The Korolenko translation was published elsewhere during the war, but both the 'Antikritik' and the 'Introduction to Political Economy' had to wait until after Rosa's death. The 'Antikritik' first appeared as an appendix to a new edition of the *Accumulation of Capital*. (See *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, pp. 177–8, E. Wurm to Frau Dr. Luxemburg dated 6 January 1916, turning down her offer in the form of an article for *Neue Zeit*.)

³ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 185, dated 25 May 1915. To help keep these spirits high, Rosa drew funny pictures for her on the tops of her letters and encouraged the other woman to do the same.

clever—worse luck . . . I have to have *someone* who believes me when I say that I am only in the maelstrom of world history by accident, in fact I was really born to look after a chicken farm. You have to believe it, do you hear?’¹

Not a line of her letters was wasted. Even the normal routine letters from prison include a factual account of her life (especially factual in this letter which was smuggled out, again through Mathilde Jacob):

. . . After two weeks I got my books and permission to work—they didn’t have to tell me twice. My health will have to get used to the somewhat peculiar diet, the main thing is that it doesn’t prevent me working. Imagine, I get up every day at 5.40! Of course by nine at night I have to be in ‘bed’, if the instrument which I jack up and down every day deserves the name.

But political pepper was freely strewn about too. ‘You’re probably delighted by Haase, for whom you always had a soft spot . . . he’d never have found that tone if Karl L[iebknecht] hadn’t given him a dig in the ribs, which shows that it can be done.’² Already the octopus grip of Rosa’s personality made itself felt in her letters. Rosa’s feeling for and hold over her friends was to grow prodigiously during the isolation of the long months behind bars.

But there was always another important aspect to her activities: her practical contact with the struggle outside. Following the effort of the previous months, this was at its lowest ebb during the first nine months of 1915. Germany seemed to be winning the war, and a number of SPD members began to feel the itch of Germany’s civilizing mission in French revolutionary terms, as something to be carried forward on bayonets. At the same time the SPD executive inevitably mounted a counter-attack against the party opposition—what remained of the old, and what had begun to manifest itself of the new. In Württemberg the *Land* organization had simply taken over the opposition *Schwäbische Tagwacht* as

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 172, dated 18 September 1915.

² *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 140, letter to Marta Rosenbaum dated 12 March 1915. The latter was one of those people all too rare in the SPD—endlessly kind yet without any obsessive or contentious political views of her own to regulate and get in the way of friendship. Rosa herself later referred to her correspondent as ‘my dear Marta with the golden heart’ (*ibid.*, p. 169, 4 January 1919). Out of the agreeable and helpful acquaintance of 1915 there grew within a year a very close friend for whom Rosa even found time in the hectic last weeks of her life, and whom she trusted absolutely. See also Benedikt Kautsky’s introduction, pp. 17–19.

early as November 1914 and, in view of the success of the coup, the Reich executive supported it gladly.¹ Elsewhere, too, the last embers of independence on the part of local papers were stamped out as far as possible. *Vorwärts* was harder to tackle. The party's arbitration tribunal, the Control Commission, was well left of centre; its senior member was still Clara Zetkin and 'it was no use appealing from the devil to the devil's own grandmother . . .'.² But the executive merely bided its time before launching a coup against the remaining recalcitrants on the paper; restraint in publication was no longer enough, the government wanted genuine and enthusiastic support for official policy. The French and English examples of Socialist partnership in war-time government, which the SPD executive quoted with so much envy, were unfortunately misleading. No real share of power, at local or central level, was ever offered by the German government, only verbiage and trappings; but in the absence of spontaneous enthusiasm for the government the need for disciplined labour support was all the greater.

Against the monolithic majority the opposition could only muster individual protest, the impact of private conscience; to start with, a whole opposition group was a rare accident in any locality. Between Luxemburg and Liebknecht on the one hand and the executive majority on the other, stood the 'Centre'. These men were unhappy about the majority's unanimous certainties but they were also repelled by the violence, the doctrinaire intransigence, of the Left which seemed to them to ignore all war-time reality. They too were by no means a homogeneous group.³ Some, like Bernstein and Eisner, opposed the executive only because they were convinced, English-type pacifists. Others were more revolutionary but they felt they must wait for conditions to approximate once more to their beliefs. All were deeply attached to party unity. In March 1915 came a still more severe test of loyalty versus orthodoxy than in August or December 1914; for the first time the *Reichstag* was now voting, not the special war credits but the normal annual budget, the obstacle at which the SPD had always balked as a matter of

¹ W. Keil, *Erlebnisse*, Vol. I, pp. 306-7; also Ossip K. Flechtheim, *Die Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands in der Weimarer Republik*, Offenbach 1948, p. 13.

² Scheidemann, *Memoiren*, Vol. I, p. 268.

³ For a contemporary account see Eugen Prager, *Die Geschichte der USPD*, Berlin 1922.

course. War or no war, this was the occasion for the traditionalists to speak their mind. Liebknecht was joined by Otto Rühle in his negative vote, but thirty others now abstained. A special amendment to the old rule of unanimity had been accepted by a reluctant executive on 3 February 1915, to avoid further defections to Liebknecht. Most of the centrists still saw Liebknecht as a cantankerous crank, of the same lurid hue as Rosa Luxemburg in her fight with Kautsky in 1910. Opposition there might yet have to be, they argued, but not this way; not deliberate provocation to which there could be only one effective reply. In August 1915 once more there was the same grouping over the same vote, except that Rühle now abstained instead of voting with Liebknecht; the latter was alone again.

In April *Die Internationale* came out; a philosophy to clothe the action. In the strongest tone Rosa Luxemburg's leader 'Der Wiederaufbau der Internationalen' (The Rebuilding of the International) laid down what would have to be done, and not done.

The new version of historical imperialism [as amended by the leadership of the SPD] produces an either/or. Either the class struggle is the all-powerful *raison d'être* for the proletariat even during the war, and the proclamation of class harmony by the party authorities is blasphemy against the very life interest of the working classes. Or the class struggle even in peace-time is blasphemy against the 'national interests' and the 'security of the fatherland'. . . . Either Social Democracy will get up before the bourgeoisie of the fatherland and say 'Father, I have sinned' and change its whole tactic and principles in peace-time as well. . . . Or it will stand before the national working-class movement and say 'Father, I have sinned' and will adapt its present war-time attitude to the normal requirements of peace. . . . Either Bethmann-Hollweg [the German Chancellor] or Liebknecht, either imperialism or Socialism as Marx understood it. . . . The International will not be revived by bringing out the old grind [*die alte Leier*] after the war. . . . Only through a cruel and thorough mockery of our own half-heartedness and weaknesses, of our own moral collapse since 4 August, can the recreation of the International begin and the first step in this direction can only be the rapid termination of the war.¹

August the 4th could no longer be forgotten or forgiven; it must be burnt out from the party, along with those responsible. As a functioning organism of Social Democracy the Second Inter-

¹ *Die Internationale*, April 1915, pp. 6-7.

national was dead; its leaders had betrayed it. But the idea was alive as long as there were a few people who maintained its principles untarnished.

The genuine International as well as a peace which really corresponds to the interests of the proletariat can only come from the self-criticism of that same proletarian conscience, by the conscious exercise of its own power and of its historic role. . . . The way to power of this sort—not paper resolutions—is simultaneously the way to peace and to the rebuilding of the International.¹

It was here that Rosa Luxemburg differed from Lenin. He saw the collapse not only in terms of a few treacherous leaders—though that too²—but because the whole loose federal structure of the International had contributed to its undoing. The passion for size, for unity at all costs, had destroyed the real unity of discipline and of thorough adherence to revolutionary principles. There could be no question of reconstituting the old International under new leaders; a *different* International was required, containing only those who accepted its tight organization as well as its new ideals.³

Lenin's view was simpler, less sophisticated, than Rosa Luxemburg's complicated cataclysm. In his own mind he had long equated opportunism in matters of principle with opportunism in organizational questions; the failure of the SPD and of the International was simply due to a particularly virulent strain of the old, old disease of opportunism. Although shattered at first by the events of 4 August, he quickly recovered. Unlike Rosa Luxemburg, who groped for new and deeper causes hitherto unknown for a moral and political cataclysm on a unique scale, the mere understanding of which taxed her great powers to the full, Lenin was merely preoccupied by the *size* of the problem; its nature was familiar enough. He made his diagnosis and through it passed on to the remedy—a split, a new organization; his old precepts for organizational integrity had been triumphantly vindicated. It was satisfying to have been proved right so completely. Thus, while Rosa Luxemburg

¹ Ibid., pp. 9–10.

² ' . . . the claim that the masses of proletarians turned away from Socialism is a lie; the masses *were never asked*, the masses were misled, frightened, split, held down by the state of emergency. *Only* the leaders could vote freely and they voted *for* the bourgeoisie and *against* the proletariat.' (Lenin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXI, p. 405.)

³ See Lenin's report on the Zimmerwald Conference, 5–8 September 1915, in *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXI, pp. 350–5; also *Sozialdemokrat*, Geneva, Nos. 45/46, 11 October 1915.

suffered acutely, Lenin was cheerful and relaxed. Perceptively he commented on the *Juniusbroschüre*—of whose authorship he was not then aware:

One senses the outsider who, like a lone wolf, has no comrades linked to him in an illegal organization, accustomed to thinking through revolutionary solutions right to the end and to educating the masses in that spirit. But these shortcomings—and it would be entirely wrong to forget it—are not personal failures in Junius but the result of the weakness of the *entire* German Left, hemmed in on all sides by the infamous net of Kautskyite hypocrisy, pedantry, and all the ‘goodwill’ of the opportunists.¹

Blandly he assumed that Junius’s violent rejection of official SPD policy must inevitably lead to his own conception of revolutionary civil war.

Junius nearly gets the right answer to the question and the right solution—civil war *against* the bourgeoisie and *for* Socialism; however, at the same time he turns *back once more* to the fantasy of a ‘national’ war in the years 1914, 1915 and 1916 as though he were afraid to speak the truth right through to the end. . . . To have proclaimed the programme of a republic, or a legislature in continuous session, the election of officers by the people etc. would have meant *in practice*—to ‘proclaim’ the *revolution*—[even though] with an *incorrect* revolutionary programme.

In the same place Junius states quite correctly that you cannot ‘make’ a revolution. Yet the revolution was on the programme [of history] in the years 1914–1916. It is contained in this womb of the war, it would have *emerged* from the war. This should have been *proclaimed* in the name of the revolutionary classes; *their* programme should have been fearlessly developed. . . .²

As though Junius’s scream of anguish were no more than an interesting formulation of some highly theoretical problems of Marxism in the pre-war *Neue Zeit*, Lenin produced a leisurely and unconcerned review of the pamphlet, praising its violent rejection of social patriotism but attacking its blanket rejection of all nationalist aspirations. None the less, Lenin recognized the Junius pamphlet for what it was, the first lengthy and coherent reckoning—in a revolutionary sense—with the policy of the SPD.

In one respect Lenin was bound to acknowledge Rosa Luxemburg’s superior and earlier perception. In a letter to Shlyapnikov in October 1914 he admitted: ‘Rosa Luxemburg was right. She

¹ Lenin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXII, p. 305.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 302–3.

realized long ago that Kautsky was a time-serving theorist, serving the majority of the party, serving opportunism in short.¹ It was a curious admission, for Kautsky had so long been Lenin's weak spot. Both he and Trotsky had admired him greatly. The latter had frequented his house for some years after 1907, and had written him flattering letters of support; Lenin too had appreciated his support in the matter of the Schmidt inheritance, though this had not prevented him from threatening Kautsky with legal action when his interests demanded it. Both had found Rosa's quarrel with him absolutely unjustified at the time.² Now they too discovered what Rosa had long known, that Kautsky used Marxism like plasticine, to soften the contours of an imperialist war. Lenin turned violently and very personally against him, and thereby exaggerated his importance all over again.³ When Clara Zetkin was in Moscow in 1920 they had trouble with the lift in Lenin's apartment which instantly induced him to exclaim angrily: '[It is] just like Kautsky, perfect in theory but lets you down as soon as it comes to the point.'⁴ Even after the revolution, Lenin still went on writing Kautsky out of his system.

Rosa, on the other hand, soon realized the isolation and declining importance of her former friend. In *Die Internationale*, under the pseudonym 'Mortimer'—she was a good historian—there was a review of Kautsky's latest book, under the heading, 'Perspektiven und Projekte'.⁵ Where she had attacked him violently in her leading article for differentiating between Socialist policies in peace and war, her review was much less personal and finical.⁶ With brief

¹ *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXXV, p. 120; also Frölich, p. 236.

² See above, p. 433.

³ Lenin's later polemics against Kautsky—which are by implication polemics against his own earlier adulation—are many and bitter. Everything Lenin hated in the USPD was turned into a personal indictment of Kautsky. Perhaps the best description (with which Lenin would no doubt have agreed) of Kautsky's Marxism was by Parvus: 'Marx's ideas, Kautsky's style, and the whole thing brought down to the level . . . of popular description, all the wholesome guts knocked out of it. Out of Marx's good raw dough, Kautsky made *matzes*.' (*Die Glocke*, Vol. I (1915), p. 20.)

⁴ Clara Zetkin, *Reminiscences of Lenin*, London 1929, p. 13.

⁵ *Die Internationale*, pp. 70–75. The book reviewed was Karl Kautsky, *Nationalstaat, Imperialistischer Staat und Staatenbund*, Nürnberg, 1914.

⁶ Karl Kautsky, 'Die Internationalität und der Krieg', *NZ*, 1914/1915, Vol. I, p. 248. This was the article in which Kautsky had first announced the proposition that the Socialist International was a suitable instrument for peacetime but could not as a matter of principle function satisfactorily in war-time; this argument more than any other earned him the undying hatred of the Left even though he had done no more than he always did, which was to state and observe the obvious as a general proposition of Marxism.

contempt, she summarized his views—such hardy annuals as his praise for national states and democracy, and his resuscitation of the idea of a European union. She pilloried his distinction between nice and nasty capitalism, between Switzerland and Germany.¹ Twenty years of Kautsky's theoretical elaboration were paraded in quick, mocking review, as though she and Kautsky had never met, as though there was no war going on; it was as remote an argument as their first polemic over Poland in 1896. Their public relationship ended as it had begun, impersonally, over matters of abstract theory. With the exception of a few fleeting references in future articles and in her private correspondence with Luise Kautsky, she never bothered with him again. Her political fire was concentrated elsewhere. The real leaders of the centrist opposition were not Kautsky, Eisner, and Bernstein, but Haase, Dittmann, and Ledebour, a fact which Lenin did not realize until the end of 1917.

If Lenin's views, as expressed in his articles at the time and in the policy statements of the Zimmerwald Left, are mentioned here at some length, it is an admitted piece of hindsight. The history of the German Left since the beginning of the First World War has been so firmly in the grip of Bolshevik party history (and still is) that a factual Lenin-Luxemburg confrontation becomes essential. One can either ignore Communist party historiography or correct it. Ignoring it means to accept the flood of polemics from Russia after 1918 as a sudden act of God, without historical cause. Yet it must be said that until 1917 the opinions of the Bolsheviks on the war had practically no influence on Rosa Luxemburg and her friends; for purely physical reasons they were probably unaware of what was being said in Switzerland. The only personal contact was with Radek's friend Knief in Bremen, which first found some local expression in the pages of the *Bremer Bürgerzeitung* and from June 1916 in the weekly *Arbeiterpolitik*. Then there were the two meetings, at Zimmerwald near Bern in September 1915 and at Kienthal at Easter 1916. At the first conference there were ten German delegates, six from the centre under Ledebour and Hoffmann, three from Rosa's and Liebknecht's group which took the name of the defunct paper, 'Internationale', and Julian Borchardt, representing a minute splinter group and its paper *Lichtstrahlen*. Lenin proposed a new International and the thesis: 'Turn the

¹ *Die Internationale*, pp. 74-75

imperialist war into civil war'. For this he got seven votes against thirty, and among the Germans only Borchardt supported him. He gave way under the pressure of his friends, and a compromise resolution was issued calling in general terms for class war against an annexationist peace and condemning those Social Democrats who supported the war. But Lenin went on trying behind the scenes; the Zimmerwald Left was a potential splinter group. The importance attached to its views in Germany can best be judged by the fact that the *Spartakus* letter of November 1915 which reported the conference, devoted precisely one sentence to Lenin and the Bolsheviks.¹

At Kienthal the next year Lenin was prepared to break up the conference if the German centrist delegates again insisted that they could not be bound in their actions at home by any conference resolutions. Hoffmann proposed that the International Socialist Bureau, which had now moved from Brussels to The Hague, be called upon to meet, but this proposal was lost, with the two *Spartakus* delegates, Bertha Thalheimer and Ernst Meyer, also voting against it.² In the end a compromise was found which specifically called upon 'the representatives of Socialist parties' at once to abandon the support of all belligerent governments and specifically to vote against war credits. In the course of the debate the German delegate from Bremen, Paul Frölich, criticized both the centrist group in the *Reichstag* and the 'Internationale' opposition for their continued refusal to make a clean organizational break with the SPD.

The later Communist claim that the radicals had moved significantly towards the Bolsheviks by April 1916 is true only in part.³ They never joined the Zimmerwald Left, and the idea of a new

¹ *Spartakusbriefe*, p. 81. See also Arthur Rosenberg, *Geschichte des Bolschewismus von Marx bis zur Gegenwart*, Berlin 1932, p. 81. The Zimmerwald literature is vast; for a recent summary see F. Tych, 'La participation des partis ouvriers polonais au mouvement de Zimmerwald', *Annali dell'Istituto Giangiacomo Feltrinelli*, year IV, 1961, p. 90. See also O. H. Gankin and H. H. Fisher (eds.), *The Bolsheviks and the World War. The Origins of the Third International*, Stanford/London 1940, especially the bibliography.

² See Ernst Meyer, Introduction to *Spartakusbriefe* (first edition), Berlin 1926, Vol. I, p. 7. Bertha Thalheimer was the sister of Rosa's old protégé August Thalheimer (see letter to Konrad Haenisch, 24 April 1910, in *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 25).

³ See Ernst Meyer, *loc. cit.* The claim became increasingly emphatic in later German and Russian works, till in 1930 Stalin ordered a reversal and the systematic denigration of the role of the non-Bolshevik Left in Europe. See below, pp. 810 ff.

splinter International, however pure, repelled them. In November 1914 Rosa Luxemburg could still write to Camille Huysmans: 'I congratulate you on the solution which you found for the Ex- [ecutive] Committee [to move to Holland]. I beg you to keep at it and to stay at your post in spite of all attempts which might be made to take away your powers or to persuade you to give them up.'¹ By 1915 she had accepted the collapse of the old International. In her polemics against Kautsky in the *Juniusbroschüre* she specifically mocked the hope of simply forgiving and forgetting. She called for a clean reconstructed International in the *Juniusbroschüre*, one from which the old elements had been purged. The difference was between the expulsion of undesirables from a tarnished but still essential organization and the creation of a totally new one. Even at the end of the war she still could not face the creation of a new International under the auspices of the victorious Bolsheviks. Probably the question belongs to that large undefined area of problems which only the real, the physical revolution could and would solve.² Meantime organizational wire-pulling was so much irresponsible self-deception.

In such a situation the individual opinions of delegates mattered more than in a disciplined party with a defined policy; at Zimmerwald and Kienthal the German delegates voted according to their consciences rather than any briefs; and Rosa's conception of the radical conscience mainly consisted in having no truck with either official SPD or centrist policies. In collaboration with Liebknecht, she had worked out some guiding principles to be submitted to the first conference at Zimmerwald. They did not in fact reach the conference, either officially or privately; the last-minute arrangements for the meeting, the need for secrecy, above all the difficulty of communicating from prison, prevented the draft from being completed in time, which annoyed Rosa considerably. They were later printed as an illegal handbill, and first appeared as an appendix to the *Juniusbroschüre* in 1916.³ As might have been expected, the outline was not a programme or even a recommendation for specific policies, but a declaratory statement of principles—an international Socialist's Bill of Rights. As such, they served as a

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 67, dated 10 November 1914 (in French). None the less, she opposed any attempt to call a meeting of the Bureau. Letter to Karl Moor, above, p. 609, note 5.

² See below, pp. 782-3, note 2. ³ See below, p. 631, note 1.

masthead to the *Spartakus* letters, and provided, if not a platform, at least an affirmation of faith round which the Left opposition could rally.

If they seem to be vague statements of principles rather than specific slogans or demands, and to avoid anything which might resemble a Bolshevik platform around which to assemble supporters, Rosa Luxemburg, who did all the drafting, had nevertheless to fight for such specific points as there were. Liebknecht wrote that her draft contained 'altogether too much mention of discipline, not enough spontaneity'; it was 'too mechanical and centralistic'. Rosa accepted many of his minor suggestions for rewording, but on the question of international discipline—her own version was anything but harsh even by contemporary standards—she remained adamant.¹

The correspondence between Rosa in prison and Karl at the front illustrates the nature of their relationship, and that of the whole *Spartakus* leadership; much more like the old SDKPiL than the SPD. Once more Rosa emerges if not as the leader at least as the main inspirer of the Left opposition and of its ideas. The quality of intellectual self-discipline, of commitment rather than control, unmistakably bears her stamp. It was she who coaxed Liebknecht, not to act, which he could do on his own, but to think and formulate, she who flattered Mehring and soothed Clara Zetkin. After approval by Liebknecht and Mehring, Jogiches got the theses printed and they were adopted by the meeting of *Spartakus* members on 1 January 1916.

Rosa Luxemburg had completed the *Juniusbroschüre* in prison by the end of April 1915 and succeeded in smuggling it out, though owing to the difficulties of finding a printer, it could not be published until early the following year. 'On her release from prison early in 1916 she found the manuscript still untouched on her desk.'² It took her three more months to bring it out. At first she insisted on using her own name but was dissuaded; the pseudonym finally chosen was meant to illustrate an historical parallel with the English eighteenth century. The pamphlet reflected the atmosphere of early 1915, when revolutionary Socialists were in a vacuum of despair and self-abasement, as yet unfilled by any alternative

¹ Ernst Meyer, 'Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Juniusthesen', *Unter dem Banner des Marxismus*, Year I, 1925/1926, No. 2, p. 423.

² Frölich, p. 245.

policy. Its title predicted its content, the history of a disaster.¹ But apart from her historical stalking of the origins of the war—Rosa carefully dissected the claim that Germany was fighting a defensive war—she also examined the causes of Socialist failure. The *Juniusbrochüre* is a curious mixture of scholarship and passion, unusual for Rosa Luxemburg in that it is almost entirely *negative*. Where she used to slash the surrounding jungle to make room for the construction of her own ideas we now get—nothing; only an epitaph sufficient unto itself. To this extent it is not ‘history’; her evidence never builds up to a case but comes and goes as required like witnesses on subpoena. At the same time Rosa had the magic touch of making her material come alive; it sings and shouts and convinces because of the author’s passion and historical self-confidence. Like the later essay on the Russian revolution, it was a private purgative as much as a political tract. We must not forget that both were written in prison.

This pamphlet also contains one of Rosa’s clearest and most heartfelt statements of proletarian ethics. She never set out deliberately, like Plekhanov or Kautsky or even Lenin, to discuss one subject today, another tomorrow—the ant-heap approach to Marxism. The whole point of Luxemburgism—if there is such a thing—is not this or that variation from Bolshevism or any other neo-Marxist doctrine, but the totality of its approach at all times.² Ethics are very much part of this totality, but unconscious ethics, not lectures about how to behave. The *Juniusbrochüre* positively bristles with an indictment of imperialist ethics: brutal, hypocritical, in which lives are the cheapest and most expendable commodity of all, especially proletarian lives.

The railway trains full with reservists are no longer accompanied by the loud acclamations of the young ladies, the soldiers no longer smile at the populace out of their carriage windows; instead they slink silently through the streets, their packs in their hands, while the public follows its daily preoccupation with sour faces. In the sober atmosphere of the

¹ Junius, *Die Krise der Sozialdemokratie*, Zürich 1916, reprinted in 1920 with an introduction by Clara Zetkin. Quotations are taken from the original edition. The work has also been reprinted in Rosa Luxemburg, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, pp. 258–399. When *Die Krise der Sozialdemokratie* came out in 1916 there were appended to it 11 propositions and 6 policy headings which had all been adopted as a programme by the ‘Gruppe Internationale’ on New Year’s Day 1916; above, p. 630.

² As Georg Lukács has so perceptively stated in *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, Berlin 1923. See below, pp. 794–5.

morning after, another chorus takes the stage: the hoarse cries of the vultures and hyenas which appear on every battlefield: ten thousand tents guaranteed to specification! A hundred tons of bacon, cocoa, coffee substitute, instant delivery but cash only, hand grenades, tools, ammunition belts, marriage brokers for the widows of the fallen, agencies for government supply—only serious offers considered! The cannon fodder inflated with patriotism and carried off in August and September 1914 now rots in Belgium, in the Vosges, in the Masurian swamps, creating fertile plains of death on which profits can grow. Hurry, for the rich harvest must be gathered into the granaries—a thousand greedy hands stretch across the ocean to help.¹

The Junius pamphlet welds the general to the particular. In Rosa Luxemburg's persuasive historical style the reader is helped over the small steps of historical fact and hustled at one and the same time over much larger assumptions. Having exposed the lie of the defensive war, Rosa Luxemburg went on to state a general proposition: 'In the era of imperialism there can be no more [justified] national wars' since 'there is complete harmony between the patriotic interests and the class interests of the proletarian International, in war as well as in peace; both demand the most energetic development of the class struggle and the most emphatic pursuit of the Social-Democratic programme.'² In the last resort it was a matter of personal commitment to the world around her. There is no tragedy without commitment; no negation, even, without it. The opposite of love—and hate—is indifference, abstraction. Lenin, disengaged, sat in Switzerland and shrank Rosa's general propositions to their particular context and relevance—and then attacked them in that context. And not for the first time: in their polemics two years earlier Lenin had attacked her views on the national question by treating it, not as a universal proposition, but in the context of the constitution and tactics of his party. It is unprofitable to ask whether Rosa's negation of any wars of national defence did or did not apply to emergent colonial nations in Africa and India, since the pamphlet was not written with these in mind. The denial of all national wars at this stage was intended to prevent any more attempts to prove that Germany was engaged in a war of defence; to kill the argument not with denials, but by destroying the foundations on which it rested. Just as Polish self-determination was wrong because all self-determination was wrong, so the

¹ *Die Krise der Sozialdemokratie*, p. 3.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 82, 97.

war was not a German war of patriotic defence because such things no longer existed. An excessive claim? Perhaps, but Rosa Luxemburg always put up the maximum stake. Lenin enlarged tactics into a philosophy, while Rosa reduced philosophy to a tactic.

The Junius pamphlet was the last item Rosa was able to smuggle out of prison for some months. She probably had the assistance of an unknown member of the staff, and was later to have help again at the Wronke fortress. 'Perhaps her treatment now became more severe as a result of an encounter that she had with an insolent detective who came to examine her. What actually happened is not quite clear but Rosa Luxemburg put an end to the interview by throwing a book at his head and for this she received further punishment.'¹ In November 1915 the newly-labelled *Politische Briefe* (Political Letters) put out by the 'Gruppe Internationale' once more contained a piece which, though of necessity anonymous, came unmistakably from Rosa's pen.² It was a farewell to yet another former friend, Parvus, who had gone to Turkey in 1910 and had now returned as a mysterious millionaire, settling first in Denmark and then in Berlin. There he appeared once more on the political scene with his own newspaper, *Die Glocke*. The interesting thing—which made him particularly suspect to his former friends—was that he succeeded in collecting round him a group of former left-wing journalists who had all become patriots during the war—Cunow from *Vorwärts*, Lensch from *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, and Konrad Haenisch, a particular admirer of Parvus and later to become his biographer. Revolution in Russia and hatred of Tsarism, which had always moved him strongly, now became an almost exclusive mania; he may not have liked the Prussians, but they seemed sent by history to fulfil his personal ambition. His contemptuous indifference to means, his unorthodox appearance and morals, had by now made him incomprehensible to the majority of Socialists, some of whom had long suspected that he might be mad. Through his money and his newly-found entrée to the German Foreign Office, he made at

¹ Frölich, p. 242. It is safe to assume that Frölich heard of these incidents from Rosa Luxemburg herself. However, since an almost identical incident took place on 22 September 1916 (see below, p. 651, and note 3), to which Frölich does not refer, it may be that he mixed up the two.

² The attribution is mine. The later *Spartakusbriege* are attributed to their various authors by Ernst Meyer in his edition, and following him by the editors of the new edition, *Spartakusbriege*, Berlin (East) 1958.

least Scheidemann take his views seriously. With Kautsky, whom he despised as mealy-mouthed, he immediately fell into a literary duel. In prison Rosa read his plan for aborting the Russian problem through revolution and devoted a special article to it, even though space in the illegal publications of *Spartakus* was precious.¹

Rosa, perforce, totally rejected the conception of German militarism as midwife to a Russian revolution for two reasons. One was ethical—no good could come from evil, and this war was evil on a hitherto unmatched scale. It was the same negation as in the *Internationale* and the *Juniusbröchiire*. Moreover, the dictates of morality applied particularly to newly-hatched millionaires.

Since Parvus presses himself on everyone's notice with his [revolutionary personality] we will say this to him: whoever regards war against Russia as the sacred duty of the proletariat would be taken seriously if he were in the trenches. But first to make a fortune during a war in which many thousand German and Russian proletarians are being killed, and then to sit in the safety of Klampenborg in Denmark and run from there a limited company for the exploitation of the [dialectic] connection between these two national proletariats—for this superior revolutionary role we have little understanding.²

The other reason was perhaps more interesting. To the trained expert the recognizable dialectic process of history does not permit accidents. Instead of Parvus's conception of a Russian revolution born out of a defeat by German arms—not far off Lenin's notion, and perfectly justified as events would prove—Rosa foresaw two alternative consequences of such defeat, neither of them revolutionary. One was that the Germans would let the Russians off lightly and return to the old concept of a Triple Alliance (*Dreikaiserbund*). The second alternative was a real defeat, pushing Russia out of Europe and towards the East, a solution bound to be

¹ 'Die Parvusiade', *Spartakusbriefe*, p. 68. My interpretation of Parvus is based on Winfried Scharlau, *Parvus als Theoretiker*, and Z. A. B. Zeman and W. B. Scharlau, *The Merchant of Revolution*, London 1965, a full-length biography of this important *condottiere* figure in German and Russian revolutionary Socialism. In the spring of 1918, Parvus sent a message to Lenin via Radek in Stockholm, offering to come to revolutionary Russia but, according to Radek, Lenin refused: 'We need not only good brains but clean hands.' (Though there is no impeccable source for this story, it became accepted tradition in post-war left-wing circles; see M. Beer, *Fifty Years of International Socialism*, London 1937, p. 197.) Certainly Parvus played a considerable, and only recently documented, part in obtaining German facilities and money for the Bolsheviks in the summer of 1917.

² *Spartakusbriefe*, p. 72.

followed by a new revanchist war some years later, with proletarian energy meanwhile diverted into the licking of national wounds.

Now both these theses were historically valid, as well as perfectly possible. But for the victory of the Bolsheviks, either one might well have resulted. But in the event she was wrong, while Parvus, who had a curious elemental feel for the realities of power and weakness but no political ability to focus them on to any sustained policy, was proved absolutely right. And yet, as in 1898 and in 1905, his disdainful prophesies of history's later commonplaces made him politically impossible. For Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht *realpolitik* was the personal and theoretical willingness to accept the full consequences of any situation; clarity and thoroughness were their respective mottoes; but for Parvus even more than Lenin the word meant a complete subordination of means to end—and a much wider perspective of means than those classically reserved to the proletariat, including bourgeois means, criminal means, sexual means, any means. Lenin could not swallow Parvus either, but he might have said to him in 1915 what Auer had said to Bernstein more than fifteen years earlier: 'One doesn't say such things, one simply does them.'¹ Even words by themselves can have the force of deeds, as Lenin knew, and not only if they are carried out in action.

The tone of Rosa's article shows curious restraint, the sarcasm much milder than that reserved for Kautsky or for Haase. Even five months later, when Parvus finally returned to Berlin with an official fanfare of welcome, Rosa wrote to Clara Zetkin, more in amazement than in anger: 'Imagine, a Russian twice evicted from Prussia, once each from Saxony and Hamburg, gets citizenship in the middle of the war with the vociferous support of the police. Most odd. The bastard [*Lump*] has registered as a childless bachelor!'² Did some of the old amused affection for 'Fatty' linger still? Rosa had now lost many old political friends; Parvus, Kautsky, Lensch, Haenisch, Dittmann, Stadthagen, Wurm—all had become opponents. From her foreign friends she was cut off. This left Jogiches and Marchlewski in Berlin. The latter was arrested in January 1916 before Rosa herself came out of prison.³

¹ Above, p. 156.

² Rosa Luxemburg to Clara Zetkin, 30 April 1916, IML (M), Fund 209, photocopy IML (B), NL2/20, p. 131.

³ He was released early in 1918 under the exchange arrangements of the Brest-Litovsk treaty, and went to Russia, where he joined the Bolsheviks.

Clara Zetkin had been taken into custody in June 1915 and was only released early in 1916 on account of severe ill health. She spent some time with Rosa in Berlin during the first months of 1916, the last time the two friends were to see each other. The second echelon of the new Left consisted of a younger generation to whom Rosa was never personally close. Mehring, now 70, was an old, if delicate, friend. Rosa's relations with Liebknecht were politically close and destined to become closer still, but they were never personal friends. She admired his courage and despised his slapdash existence. To Hans Diefenbach, before whom no political pretence was necessary, she described the war-time Liebknecht:

You probably know the manner of his existence for many years: entirely wrapped up in parliament, meetings, commissions, discussions; in haste, in hurry, everlastingly jumping from the underground into the tram and from the tram into a car. Every pocket stuffed with notebooks, his arms full of the latest newspapers which he will never find time to read, body and soul covered with street dust and yet always with a kind and cheerful smile on his face.¹

But his courage—which was undoubted—contained an element of recklessness which made her and many of his friends apprehensive. At the end of October 1915 she asked a comrade who was acting as intermediary between her and Liebknecht to have a tactful word with him on this subject. As a result of a 'mysterious misunderstanding', some of Liebknecht's comments on the political situation, written from the Russian front, had appeared in her mail. 'I consider it most dangerous for Karl to develop these literary activities at this distance and you would be doing him a good turn if you could find a suitable way of advising him against it.'²

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, pp. 93–94, letter to Hans Diefenbach dated 30 March 1917. Rosa wrote an identical characterization to Luise Kautsky at about the same time (*Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, pp. 199–200). In the latter case the description continues: '. . . in his heart of hearts he is of a poetical nature as few people are, and can take an almost childish delight in almost every little flower'. This is the most obvious instance of a phenomenon that strikes the careful reader of Rosa Luxemburg's letters: not only the continued use of certain phrases throughout her correspondence but the thrifty hoarding of descriptions and incidents. Spontaneity? Cf. below, pp. 689, note 3.

² Rosa Luxemburg to Fanny Jeziarska, probably end of October 1915, in IISH Archives, Amsterdam. Radek also advised Liebknecht from Switzerland in 1915 not to take unnecessary risks. Karl Radek, *Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Leo Jogiches*, Hamburg 1921, p. 33. Karl Liebknecht wrote to Fanny Jeziarska on 18 October 1915: 'I don't know what to do, and count on you . . . I know you have plenty to do yourself but I don't know who else to turn to; 5 o'clock in the morning, half an hour's sleep . . . I am dead. I cannot leave my [real] work in spite of all the literary duties, so I never get a rest.'

Friends there were, but private ones, mostly women; and political admirers and disciples, like Hugo Eberlein, the Duncckers, the Thalheimers, Pieck (her former student at the party school), and Paul Levi, who had defended her in court and was one day to succeed to her double position as leader of the party and later its most severe critic.¹

It was from a trough of personal loneliness that *Die Parvusiade* was written: *tempi passati*, as she herself had long ago taunted Jaurès in happier, more forward-looking days. Without appreciating the personal as well as the political vacuum of those war years it is not possible to understand Rosa in prison, and especially not the Rosa of the last hectic months after her release in 1918. Soon things were to look up, however, as the *Spartakusbund* became better organized and extended the range and quality of its appeal; and Rosa's friends rallied round closely to lighten the mental and physical burden of her second long imprisonment.

On 29 December 1915 twenty SPD deputies finally voted against new war credits, while another twenty-two abstained. Articulate opposition to the executive was growing. Loyalty to pre-war principles rotted the war-time discipline. Why? The war was no quick walkover; and nothing fails like failure. As long as the German government was imprisoned by the idea of a decisive victory, the war might continue for ever. All this gave stifled doubts a chance to reassert themselves. The SPD leadership's commitment to the war now looked like an option, no longer a necessity. The opposition thought it could feel the disillusion among the rank and file—precisely that same rank and file whose acceptance of patriotic unanimity had so far kept the opposition quiet. The main feature of the centrists, the later USPD, was their essentially democratic base; they were never willing, then or later, to lose contact with mass reality by moving into heroic isolation. The Left's idea of creating mass support with a revolutionary gesture was repugnant to them. They too were a revolutionary party, but only if the masses shouted their desire for revolution.

¹ Eberlein was mentioned by Rosa as 'completely devoted to us' in a letter to Marta Rosenbaum, 5 January 1915, *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 137. Before the war Rosa had recommended Pieck for a job with the following comment, especially interesting in view of his political career and eminent capacity for survival: 'He is energetic, possesses initiative, idealism, and great enthusiasm, and he is a diligent reader' (*Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 166, dated 9 January 1913).

On the left, the 'Gruppe Internationale' began to exercise a pull. As their influence grew, there was a real danger that they would run away with the support on which the Centre relied. As one of their most sensible members, and a former friend of Rosa's, had written in April 1915:

The editors of *Neue Zeit*, especially you [Kautsky], none the less have a duty to answer the attacks of the group I[nternationale]; silence will be taken as abandonment of the position [*Verstummen*] . . . the fact remains that the I[nternationale] is now being distributed throughout Germany; thanks to the devoted work of Rosa's friends [*Rosisten*] it was being handed out at all the local meetings [*Zahlabende*] in Greater Berlin last Tuesday. The masses are restive about the war and especially over the rising cost of living, they have no one on whom to vent their rage and since they can't get at the government the party becomes the scapegoat. That is the 'action' which Rosa is screaming for. . . .¹

Some centrists went into opposition willingly, others with a heavy sigh. There was no unanimity about motives. The first abstention in the credit vote, in March 1915, had been justified by one of the leaders, not as opposition to the war effort, but as a means of avoiding a direct vote of confidence in the government.²

Thus the break between Centre and majority led first to the eviction of the recusants from the party caucus on 24 March 1916, and finally in January 1917 to the formation of a new, oppositional Socialist party, the USPD.³ The organizational break was a long and difficult process. Those who voted against the credits from March 1915 onwards believed that they were exercising the undeniable demands of their conscience; they had no wish to break with the SPD. It was the majority who gradually drove them out; from informal consultations as early as the summer of 1915, from official membership of the *Reichstag* delegation in March the following year. Had there been any party congress, a move might well have been made to expel them from the party altogether. The creation of an opposition bloc in the *Reichstag*, and later of a new party, was not what the dissenters wanted but the consequence of majority intolerance—as the Left gleefully pointed out. And inci-

¹ Emmanuel Wurm to Karl Kautsky, 21 April 1915. IISH Archives, D XXIII, 259.

² Hugo Haase to Friedrich Ebert, 5 March 1915, in Ernst Haase, *Hugo Haase, sein Leben und Wirken*, Berlin n.d. [1929?], p. 105.

³ For the Centre's declaration on their vote against the budget, and the withdrawal of the whip, see Prager, *USPD*, pp. 94–96.

dentally it is significant that the emergence of articulate opposition in the SPD was from the top downwards—not the expression of local dissent against the Centre, masses against authority; nor was it even a party phenomenon—everything sprang from the bosom of the *Reichstag* caucus, which officially had no constitutional significance whatever in the SPD.

None of this narrowed the gap between the Left—the ‘thorough’ (*entschieden*) opposition as Meyer called it—and the Centre, the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*, as the loose association of expelled in the *Reichstag* came to be known.¹ On the contrary, it became wider. The Left had the same fear of the Centre as the latter had of the Left—the stealing of each other’s mass support, or, to use the combat phrase, the confusion of the masses. Liebknecht sharply attacked the ‘December men of 1915’ with historical echoes of the Russian Decembrists. Never had historical analogy been harder worked than by the German Left, a sure sign of intellectual doubt and stress.²

Hitherto the Centre’s doings and sayings had merely been quoted in the letters without much comment. But since Liebknecht had been evicted from the caucus on 12 January 1916, the Left had become more confident and better organized. In spite of decimation—Mehring, Marchlewski, Clara Zetkin arrested by the beginning of 1916; Meyer, Eberlein, Westmeyer, and Pieck arrested or drafted—they now had their own network of agents, established at a secret conference in March 1915, largely to arrange distribution of *Die Internationale*.³ On 1 January 1916 an important meeting took place at Liebknecht’s law office. Delegates arrived in great secrecy, in twos and threes.⁴ This was the real moment of decision for the Left, and they agreed to maintain a nucleus of opposition to the party executive as well as to the newly-created *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*, but also to work within the party for as long as possible. As a programme this conference adopted the 12 declarations and 6 propositions which Rosa Luxemburg had evolved for Zimmerwald and smuggled out of prison in December 1915. They read as follows:

¹ ‘Ad hoc working group’ would be the most accurate translation. For Meyer, see *Spartakus im Kriege*, Berlin 1928.

² ‘Die Dezembermänner von 1915’, *Spartakusbriefe*, p. 86.

³ Introduction, *Spartakusbriefe*, p. xiii.

⁴ *Dokumente und Materialien*, Vol. I, p. 283. Report from memory by Rudolf Lindau, one of the participants, in *Neues Deutschland*, No. 1, 1 January 1956.

1. The World War has destroyed the result of 40 years of work of European Socialism. . . . It has destroyed the revolutionary working class as a political instrument of power. . . . It has destroyed the proletarian international and has . . . chained the hopes and wishes of the broad masses to the chariot of imperialism.
2. By voting for war credits and by proclaiming the *Burgfrieden* the official leaders of the Socialist parties in Germany, France, and England (with the exception of the Independent Labour Party) have strengthened imperialism and have . . . taken over the responsibility for the war and its consequences.
3. This tactic is treason against the most elementary lessons of international Socialism. . . . As a result, Socialist policy has been condemned to impotence even in those countries where the party leaders have remained faithful to their duty; in Russia, Serbia, Italy and—with one exception—Bulgaria.
4. By giving up the class struggle during the war official Social Democracy has given the ruling class in each country the chance to strengthen its position enormously at the expense of the proletariat in the economic, political, and military spheres.
5. The World War serves neither national defence nor the economic or political interests of the masses anywhere; it is merely an outcrop of imperialist rivalry between capitalist classes of different countries for the attainment of world domination and for a monopoly to exploit countries not yet developed by capital.¹ In the present era of unabashed imperialism national wars are no longer possible. National interests serve only as deception, to make the working classes the tool of their deadly enemy, imperialism.
6. From the policy of imperialist states and from this imperialist war no subject nation can possibly obtain independence and freedom.
7. The present World War, whether it brings victory or defeat for anyone, can only mean the defeat of Socialism and democracy. Whatever its end—excepting revolutionary intervention of the international proletariat—it can only lead to the strengthening of militarism, to the sharpening of international contradictions, and to world economic rivalries. Today's World War thus develops simultaneously with the pre-conditions for new wars.²
8. World peace cannot be assured through apparently utopian but basically reactionary plans, such as international arbitration by capitalist

¹ It is curious to note that with this sentence Rosa Luxemburg in fact got the approval of the entire German Left for the particular thesis of her *Accumulation of Capital*, although at the time no prominent Marxists were willing to subscribe to her analysis of capitalism and its collapse. See below, p. 834, note 1.

² This is as complete a contradiction of Lenin's thesis regarding the revolutionary potential of the First World War as can be found in German left-wing literature of the time.

diplomats, diplomatic arrangements about 'disarmament', 'freedom of the seas' . . . 'European communities' [*Staatenbünde*], 'Central European customs unions', 'national buffer states' and the like. The only means . . . of ensuring world peace is the political capacity for action and the revolutionary will of the international proletariat to throw its weight into the scales.

9. Imperialism as the last phase of the political world power of capitalism is the common enemy of the working classes of all countries, but it shares the same fate as previous phases of capitalism in that its own development increases the strength of its enemy *pro rata*. . . . Against imperialism the worker's class struggle must be intensified in peace as in war. This struggle is . . . both the proletariat's struggle for political power as well as the final confrontation between Socialism and capitalism.

10. In this connection the main task of Socialism today is to bring together the proletariat of all countries into a living revolutionary force. . . .

11. The Second International has been destroyed by the war. Its decrepitude has been proved by its inability to act as an effective barrier against the splintering nationalism during the war, and by its inability to carry out jointly a general tactic and action with the working classes of all countries.

12. In view of the betrayal of aims and interests of the working classes by their official representatives . . . it has become a vital necessity for Socialism to create a new workers' International which will take over the leadership and co-ordination of the revolutionary classes' war against imperialism everywhere.¹

Propositions:

1. The class war within bourgeois states against the ruling classes and the international solidarity of proletarians of all countries are two indivisible and vital rules for the working classes in their struggle for liberation. There is no Socialism outside the international solidarity of the proletariat and there is no Socialism without class war. Neither in time of war nor peace can the Socialist proletariat renounce class war or international solidarity without at the same time committing suicide.

2. The class action of the proletariat of all countries must have as its main object the struggle against imperialism and the prevention of wars. Parliamentary action, trade-union action, indeed the entire activity of working-class movements must be made subject to the sharpest confrontation in every country against its national bourgeoisie.

3. The centre of gravity of class organization is in the International. In peace-time the International decide the tactic of the national sections

¹ Cf. above, p. 629.

in questions of militarism, colonial policy, economic policy, the May Day celebrations—as well as the tactic to be followed in case of war.

4. The duty to carry out the resolutions of the International precedes all other organizational duties. National sections which go against these resolutions automatically place themselves outside the International.

5. In the struggle against imperialism and war, the decisive effort can only be made by the compact masses of the proletariat. The main task of the tactic of the national sections, therefore, must tend to educate the broad masses to take a determined initiative in political action. It must also ensure the cohesion of mass action, must develop political and trade-union organization in such a way that rapid co-operation of all sections will be ensured, and that the will of the International be transformed into the action of the working masses in all countries.

6. The next task of Socialism is the spiritual liberation of the proletariat from the tutelage of the bourgeoisie which makes its influence felt through its nationalist ideology. The national sections must develop their agitation in parliament and in the press towards the denunciation of the out-of-date phraseology of nationalism which is merely a means of bourgeois domination. The only real defence of genuine national freedom today is the revolutionary class struggle against imperialism. The fatherland of all proletarians is the Socialist International, and defence of this must take priority over everything else.¹

All the stress was on internationalism, against national sentiment. Rosa placed her faith in this against the fallible vagaries of national parties; a shift of emphasis rather than a new tactic. It was perhaps the high-water mark of the international ideal among the *Spartakus* group. Probably no one but Rosa Luxemburg would have envisaged an organizational structure in which national parties were made truly subservient to the International. 'National' parties in this context was a pejorative term, and also a piece of loose thinking—the result of being dominated by the recent German experience. The RSDRP for instance, as Rosa well knew, did not consider itself a 'national' party, neither did the Austrian Social-Democratic Party. In any case the intellectual and extreme international emphasis proved transient; from then on the Liebknecht tactic that 'the main enemy is at home' increasingly dominated, with its positive revolutionary tinge.² The difference between

¹ *Dokumente und Materialien*, Vol. I, pp. 279–82. Henceforward each of the *Spartakusbrieife* was headed by extracts from one or several of these propositions.

² 'Der Hauptfeind steht im eigenen Land', illegal handbill of May 1915, printed in Drahn und Leonhard, op. cit., pp. 24–27.

Rosa Luxemburg and Liebknecht was admittedly one of emphasis rather than of policy, but it is noticeable all the same. The fact that her conception was adopted shows again how powerful was her influence on *Spartakus* thinking in the first two years of the war.

But there was complete agreement between her and Liebknecht on sharpening the issues between *Spartakus* and *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*. The conference of 1 January 1916 decided to drive forward relentlessly with the 'clarification process' of attacking the centrist leaders in order to steal their mass support. Rosa wrote her own comment on the 'men of December', more personal and also more profound than Liebknecht's; these men had all at one time been her collaborators and friends. 'I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would that thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.'¹

Rosa was released from prison on 22 January 1916, though the public prosecutor was still mulling over the leading article of *Die Internationale* with a view to an indictment. On the day of her release she had to shake hundreds of well-wishers' hands. 'I have returned to "freedom" with a tremendous appetite for work.'² Karl Liebknecht was on extended leave from his regiment to attend the *Reichstag* session; much as the High Command and police authorities would have liked to lock him up, they could not touch him—yet.³ He was making use of parliamentary question time, the only chance for private members to make a nuisance of themselves; each question was designed to needle the government and to reiterate his thesis of imperialist and aggressive war. The right-wing and liberal deputies even tried physical assault on him;

¹ Revelation, iii. 15-16. From 'Entweder-Oder' (Either-Or), in *Selected Works*, II, p. 533. The piece was circulated as an illegal handbill in typewritten form. It was cited in the testimony to the *Reichstag* commission which sat from 1925-1929 to examine the causes of Germany's defeat. *Untersuchungskommission des Reichstages, Vierte Reihe; Die Ursachen des deutschen Zusammenbruchs im Jahre 1918, Der innere Zusammenbruch* (The Internal Collapse), Vol. IV, pp. 102-3.

² Rosa Luxemburg to Regina Ruben, dated 25 February 1916, IML (B). See also *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 196: 'You have no idea of the torture it was having to receive 80 (literally 80) people [in my flat] on the very first day and say a few words to each one of them after a year in the Barnimstrasse.' (Undated—probably early 1917.)

³ *Dokumente und Materialien*, Vol. I, p. 336. (Confidential report from the Berlin police president to the Prussian Minister of the Interior, dated 31 March 1916.) See also p. 355 (Chancellor's telegram to the Emperor's Privy Council, dated 9 April 1916).

they thought that he had gone literally out of his mind.¹ There were insistent demands in the *Reichstag* and press that an end be put to his treacherous performance and to the machinations of his friends. The police reports of the time bristle with material about *Spartakus*, predicting the perpetual imminence of a revolutionary outbreak; though based on real information, it is clear that the conclusions the agents wrote up were those which their superiors wanted to hear. To the authorities *Spartakus* looked much more menacing than it really was, and it was good politics to keep it so.²

It was a period of intense activity for Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. In moments snatched from meetings and editorial work they walked throughout the spring on the outskirts of Berlin, light-hearted with the pleasure of action. Karl was emotionally less stable; it was he who did handsprings and unpredictably burst into song, while Rosa watched tolerantly, though herself unable to join in such transports.³ The friendship between Rosa and Karl's young Russian wife Sonia grew into an intense protective relationship. Later, when Karl was in the penitentiary and Rosa herself immured in a fortress, she bombarded Sonia with letters intended to cauterize the young woman's pain at the separation. As with others, Rosa undertook not only the moral protection but also the education of her friend, though these efforts did not always succeed as she hoped; the effect this correspond-

¹ See report of *Reichstag* debate, during which Karl Liebknecht was constantly interrupted by shouts of 'nonsense!' 'madness!' 'lunatic asylum!' (*Reichstagsverhandlungen*, 13th legislative period, 2nd session, Berlin 1916, Vol. CCCVII, Column 952/953). History does have a habit of repeating itself, at least in its minutiae. Karl Liebknecht's solitary stand, the tone of his speech and the attitude of his opponents, were almost an exact repetition of the occasion when Janko Sakasoff made an anti-war speech on behalf of the Bulgarian Social Democrats in the *Sobranje*, 8 October 1912 (see *Bulletin Périodique*, International Socialist Bureau, Brussels, 1913, 2nd Supplement to Vol. 3, No. 9, p. 7).

² See the extracts of the secret police reports and instructions published in *Dokumente und Materialien*, Vol. I. For 1917 onwards see Leo Stern, *Der Einfluss der grossen sozialistischen Oktoberrevolution auf Deutschland und die deutsche Arbeiterbewegung*, Berlin (East) 1958. A detailed discussion of this subject hardly belongs here. The East German historians have found this material useful for proving the significance of 'mass' opposition to the war as well as to the official party organizations; but the wish is father to the proof. See also below, pp. 823-4.

³ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 94, letter to Hans Diefenbach dated 30 March 1917. See also *Letters from Prison*, Berlin 1923. This is a translation of Rosa Luxemburg's collected letters to Sonia Liebknecht, published as *Briefe aus dem Gefängnis*, Berlin 1920. References to quotations are from the English edition, though frequently I have retranslated the original German.

ence had on Rosa herself was often that of a 'cracked glass'.¹ She saw all her friends, including Hans Diefenbach, now serving as a doctor on the eastern front. These six months were the last time in her life that Rosa was able to lead anything like a normal existence.

But it would not have been normal if it had not also been crammed with political activity. Between the government and *Spartakus* stood two shock-absorbers, which cushioned the necessary and ardently desired class struggle; these were the first obstacles to be removed. First, there was the majority SPD and its executive. The latter had taken the offensive; now that the opposition was prepared to come out into the open there could no longer, in Ebert's and Scheidemann's minds, be any reason for half measures. Besides, the increasing pressure of the government and the military on the majority Socialists—press censorship, restriction of 'discussable' subjects on public platforms, in some cases prohibition of SPD meetings altogether—in turn made the executive press harder on the opposition whom it blamed for its troubles.² Doubtful district organizations were simply taken over by suitable nominees from the centre, and the silencing of oppositional party papers culminated in the executive's physical seizure of *Vorwärts* in October 1916, after various attempts to regulate its policy. This was a theft which the Berlin party organization, which regarded *Vorwärts* traditionally as its own, never forgave.

By March 1916 the irreconcilable hatred of *Spartakus* for the SPD executive was self-evident; it hardly needed repeating. Were these really the people with whom Rosa had once shared a party card, a common society superior to all tactical polemics? There were not only the old enemies—Heine, Südekum, Fischer, and trade unionists like Hué and Legien—but the officials, the

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 188. 'Sonia sent a whole packet of literature for me to read—all hopeless.' (*Briefe an Freunde*, p. 128, letter to Hans Diefenbach dated 13 August 1917.) Sonia Liebkecht is still living in East Berlin, and recently emerged from a long silence to threaten the West German government with legal proceedings for whitewashing one of her husband's murderers. See below, p. 773, note 1. Sonia Liebkecht may have appeared more naïve than she was. She herself was a university graduate; a recent writer has described her as 'attractive, apparently ingenuous, but perfectly capable of delivering important messages for her husband in prison and fully involved in his political activity'. See Okhrana Archives of Russian Secret Police dossiers from 1870 to 1917 in the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, California, quoted in Ralph H. Lutz, 'Rosa Luxemburg's Unpublished Prison Letters 1916-1918', *Journal of Central European Affairs*, October 1963, Vol. XXIII, No. 3, p. 305.

² *Reichstagsverhandlungen*, 1916, Vol. CCCVI, Col. 716; CCCVII, Cols. 943, 1244.

heart of the party organization—Ebert, Scheidemann, Braun, Ernst, Wissell. A few days out of jail, and Rosa took off on a short tour of west Germany, to meet friends and, more important still, supporters. To one of them she put her policy succinctly: ‘The masses? I will not leave them to the executive like so much bankrupt stock.’¹

But the real struggle, the close in-fighting, was with the centrists, themselves by now in opposition to the majority in the party. The *Spartakusbriefe* contained one warning after another against mistaking centrist opposition for ‘real’ opposition, and against confusing tactical manoeuvres with struggle. ‘What the 24th of March [the second centrist vote against the budget] offers in the nature of progress is precisely due to the ruthless criticism by the radicals of all half measures’—halfness, wholeness: Liebknecht’s favourite words—‘it confirms the fruitfulness of this criticism for the *general strengthening of the spirit of opposition*.’² And he concluded: ‘Whoever strays about between armies locked in battle will get shot down in the crossfire, if he doesn’t seek refuge on one side or the other. But then he arrives, not as a hero, but as a refugee.’³

The solution, however, was still not Lenin’s: democracy, not splits; looser and not tighter discipline.

Upwards from below. The broadest masses of comrades in party and trade unions must be reached, in doing battle for the party, *in* the party . . . the handcuffs of the bureaucracy must be cracked open . . . no financial support, no contributions, not a farthing for the executive . . . not splitting or unity, not new party or old party, but *recapture* of the party upwards from below through mass rebellion . . . not words but deeds of rebellion. . . .⁴

Though Rosa Luxemburg attended innumerable committee meetings of the party as well, in which a running battle for control was being fought with the centrists, she did so from loyalty rather than conviction. This was not the struggle she wanted; it was narrow rather than broad—much better to forget about the formal bureaucratic structure and broaden the battle outwards and down

¹ The evidence for this trip and the remark came from Rosi Wolffstein (Frau Frölich), in an interview in Frankfurt.

² *Spartakusbriefe*, p. 130. My italics. Unsigned, but clearly by Liebknecht.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 132–3. This was one of the earliest suggestions of a financial embargo.

to the masses. After a year in prison her patience had anyhow worn thin. 'I cannot attach any importance to this pygmy battle [*Froschmäusekrieg*] within the official bodies . . . our "proletarians" grossly overrate this bureaucratic dogfight', she complained to Clara Zetkin.¹

The activities of the radical opposition were strongest in Berlin. Only here, under the critical eye of the leadership, was it possible to achieve that precise theoretical separation of *Spartakus* from the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* which was supposed to prevent working-class confusion. But any history based on the pronouncements of the leaders is misleading, for at regional and still more at local level *Spartakus* and *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* were largely indistinguishable, and to most local functionaries Rosa Luxemburg's 'either-or' would have been meaningless, as it still was for a time after the war.²

The situation was very confused. It was hard enough to decide between official and opposition members of the SPD outside the *Reichstag*. Even in the Berlin organization there was confusion. On 31 March a general meeting of the Greater Berlin organization reviewed the *Reichstag* events of 24 March, the latest vote against the budget. A resolution was adopted favouring the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*, which appeared in *Vorwärts* next day, fitfully blacked out by the censorship. Rosa Luxemburg, who was present, failed to obtain permission even to bring an amendment to the resolution. Her request to *Vorwärts* to print her criticisms of the resolution was refused—for did it not represent the unanimous view of the opposition? At about the same time the executive made the first attempt to regulate the policy of *Vorwärts*. This time Rosa Luxemburg was able to bring a resolution in the local Press Commission more pointed than the one submitted by the centrist opposition. Her resolution was lost by a small majority—only because it had been submitted by Rosa. Eight days later, however, the executive of the Berlin provincial organization adopted Rosa's same rejected resolution *verbatim*, over the heads of its own Press Commission.³ Each side drew the wrong conclusion

¹ Rosa Luxemburg to Clara Zetkin, 30 April 1916, IML (M), Fund 209, photocopy IML (B), NL2/20, p. 130.

² East German history emphasizes the contrary and claims a clear distinction between Centre and Left at all levels. The point must be made, otherwise *Spartakus* is wrongly seen as a compact, well-defined group behind equally well-defined, articulate leaders—which is nonsense.

³ *Spartakusbriefe*, pp. 149–52. See also *Vorwärts* of relevant dates, 1 April, 7 April, 15 April 1916.

about the disarray in the opposing ranks—the disarray was universal.

On 22 April 1916 Rosa Luxemburg moved to the offensive. She wrote that it was the majority who were tearing the party into shreds, *they* were disobeying the orders of past party congresses. She produced an ingenious if impractical financial proposal:

Subscriptions should not simply be withheld, but paid to the party and destined for their real purpose precisely by keeping them from the destructive, disloyal bureaucrats . . . usurpers . . . the alternatives are: Saving or destroying the party . . . all our strength *for* the party, *for* socialism. But not a man, not a farthing for this system; instead, war to the knife.¹

Deeds, not words, was the mounting refrain. It was decided to make a real, visible, tangible gesture: to call a demonstration for 1 May in the centre of Berlin. Even the mildest May Day celebrations had been put away for the duration; May Day in Germany had anyhow never been what it ought to be and was elsewhere—in the wilds of Poland, for instance: a vast proletarian manifestation. All the more reason to make a memorable show now. There were negotiations with the ‘Ledebour group’—it was either the Ledebour group, the Haase group, the Kautsky group, according to choice; these personal attributions were always derogatory and the official title of *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* was rarely used in print. In the end no joint action could be agreed. Madness, said the centrists—there was insufficient evidence of revolutionary feeling among the masses, no evidence at all of a desire for patent suicide; failure could only make the opposition ridiculous.² So Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, with a few supporters, decided to go it alone, after much agitation and advertisement of their intentions.³ This naturally brought the police out in force. ‘At eight o’clock sharp . . . in the middle of the Potsdamerplatz,

¹ *Spartakusbriefe*, p. 157. Unsigned, my attribution. Note the echo of Bebel’s phrase: ‘Not a man, not a farthing for this system’.

² *Spartakusbriefe*, p. 166.

³ She spoke of ‘an imposing demonstration’, ‘a dense crowd’, without giving figures (*ibid.*). According to contemporary eye-witnesses, hostile and friendly, the numbers in the original demonstration seem to have been a few hundred, though some days later news of Liebknecht’s arrest produced rather larger demonstrations (see *Dokumente und Materialien*, Vol. I, p. 379; also the report mentioned but not printed here in *Archiv der Reichskanzlei*, Nr. 8/7, ‘Social Democrats’, Vol. XI, Sheet 189, in IML (B). A facsimile of the illegal proclamation calling for the demonstration is printed in *Dokumente und Materialien*, Vol. I, p. 373.

the sonorous voice of Karl Liebknecht rang out: "Down with the government, down with the war". He was instantly arrested, but apparently the other leaders were not molested. The arrest itself was followed by a larger if quieter demonstration for several hours, though it is never easy on such occasions to distinguish participants from spectators; the very presence of large police reinforcements increased the number of curious onlookers.

Liebknecht was first sentenced to two and a half years' hard labour on 28 June; unexpectedly—for all concerned—this caused the first large political strike of the war. In due course the higher military court (*Oberkriegsgericht*) increased the sentence to four years one month.¹ An appeal to the Reich High Court was disallowed and he began his sentence on 6 December 1916 at Luckau in Saxony. The *Reichstag* had hastened, within a few days of Liebknecht's arrest, to lift his immunity, and a majority of Socialists had voted with the 'class enemy' for this measure. Most of them had not the slightest sympathy with or understanding of his action.²

At least Liebknecht's arrest if not his demonstration brought him the personal support and sympathy of Hugo Haase, the leader of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* and former party chairman. A new effort was made to collaborate with *Spartakus*. In July Haase reported to his wife that there was 'full understanding with the

¹ In Germany sentence to hard labour or penitentiary—as opposed to prison—involved the loss of civil rights, in Karl Liebknecht's case for six years. This meant disbarment from legal practice—he was a lawyer—from voting and of course he could not stand as a candidate for Reich or provincial legislatures.

German military sentences during the war fell into three categories: penitentiary or hard labour for treasonable activity, imprisonment for lesser offences, and administrative custody, often in a fortress—the easiest and most convenient way of dealing with Social Democrats without the expense and trouble of a trial. Fortress was more 'political' and less rigorous than prison. By the standard of today's methods of dealing with war-time sedition, both the sentences imposed on *Spartakus* leaders and the treatment in prison were mild. The vociferous protests of the *Spartakus* group against the arrest and imprisonment of their leaders should not mislead us into believing the contrary.

² 'Gentlemen . . . in Liebknecht we are dealing with a man who wanted, through an appeal to the masses, to force the government to make peace, a government moreover which has repeatedly expressed its sincere desire for peace before the whole world. . . . This war is a war for our very homes . . . how grotesque was this enterprise . . . how can anyone imagine that [Liebknecht] could influence the fate of the world, play at high policy [*hohe Politik machen*] by shoving handbills at people, by creating a demonstration in the Potsdamerplatz. . . . Contrast this pathological instability with our [party's official] clear-headed and sensible calm. . . .'

(*Reichstagsverhandlungen*, loc. cit., Cols. 1027/1028, speech by Landsberg. The remarks about 'high policy' are an interesting example of the official SPD's 'deference' attitude to government.)

Rosa group'. The arrest of Liebknecht had 'pushed all problems of personality into the background'.¹

This did not mean that he would encourage or countenance what he considered further foolishness.

At the general meeting [of the Berlin constituency organizations] Rosa made a very skilful speech . . . with strong effect, the more so as she did not in the end insist on an embargo of membership dues, but her proposal was dangerous [all the same]; it reeked of separatist organizational measures. The party executive would have risen to this at once, and therefore I fought against it with such success that only a handful [of people] remained with Rosa in the end. How right I was in practice became clear at once. The executive proved unable to attack the adopted resolution . . . I agree with you, the unity of the opposition in the country must be strengthened.²

But Rosa Luxemburg and her friends were not prepared to seize the proffered hand with conditions of 'sensible' behaviour. On the contrary, the original refusal to collaborate on 1 May made the present offers of unity and reconciliation 'the height of creepy shamelessness' as far as Rosa herself was concerned. She administered 'a well deserved kick in the pants', and *Spartakus* continued to draw the sharpest lines of distinction between the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* and itself.

In the two months of liberty that were left to Rosa she continued to battle against the party authorities, particularly in the oppositional districts of Berlin. She appeared at all possible meetings and bombarded them with lively resolutions—everything to turn the centrists' common sense into something more positive. Politically Rosa was almost alone. Only a few Left leaders were at liberty and this meant all the more work for her. Jogiches was there, unobtrusive and efficient; the technical processes of duplicating, distribution, and control of the *Spartakus* literature were almost entirely in his hands. After the arrest of Ernst Meyer in August 1916 he took over the formal leadership of *Spartakus* under

¹ Ernst Haase, *Haase*, pp. 120, 125.

² Ibid. The full report of Rosa's speech and Haase's reply at the meeting on 25 June 1916, in which the Left opposition and the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* met head on, is in *Vorwärts*, 27 June 1916. A statement of correction by Rosa Luxemburg regarding the press reports of this meeting appeared in *Vorwärts*, 2 July 1916. Rosa denied the suggestion (also made by Haase in the letter to his wife) that her resolutions had in fact advocated any practical embargo on the membership dues. 'This legend has caused the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* to sing a hymn to the "sensible behaviour", "political cleverness", and similar virtues of the Berlin opposition under the leadership of Haase-Hoffmann-Ledebour for resisting the danger of the "Liebknecht-Luxemburg" tendency.'



(a) Józef Unszlicht



(b) Jakub Hanecki (Firstenberg)
(probably during the First World
War)

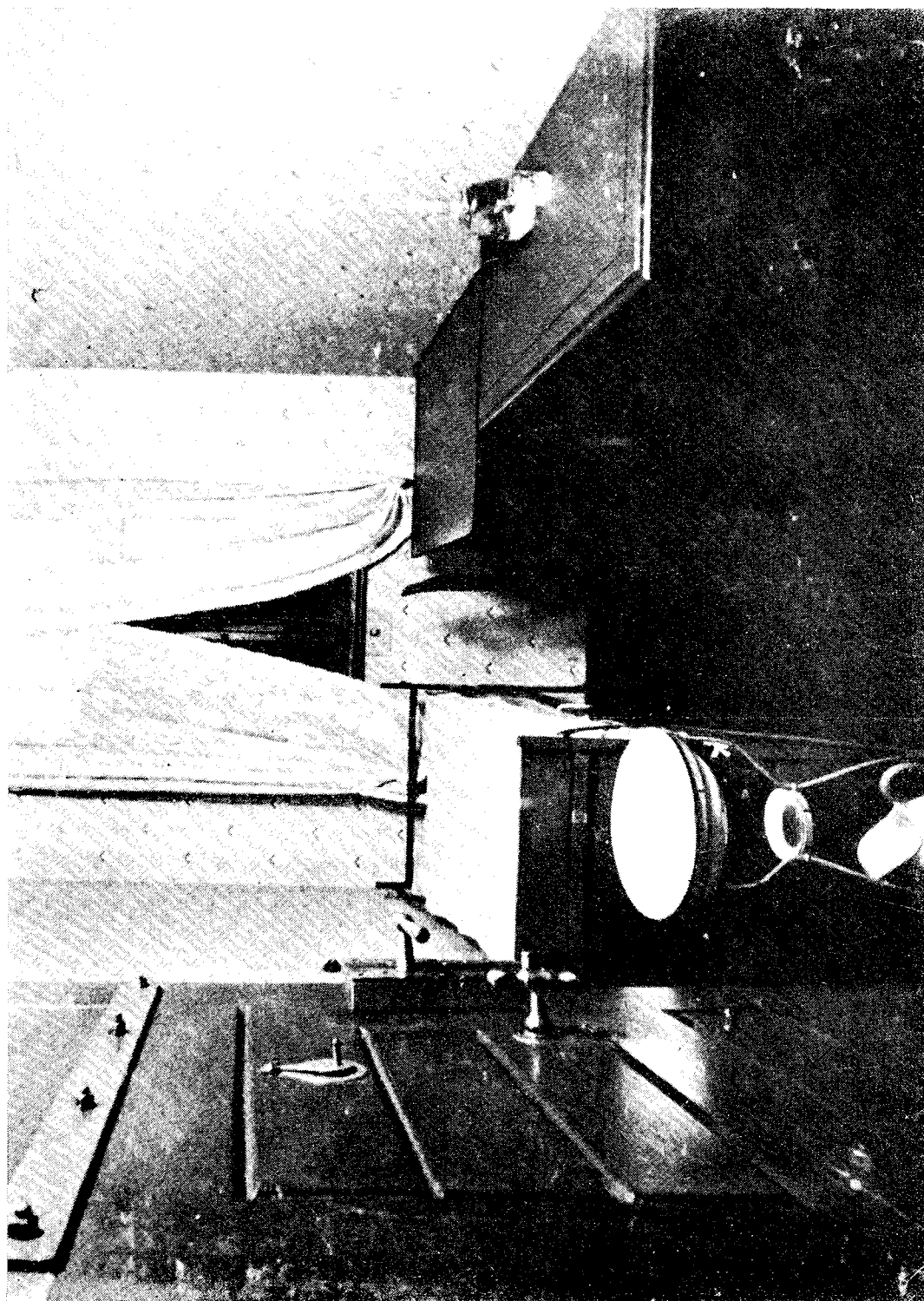


(c) Zdzisław Leder
(Władysław Feinstein)



(d) Adolf Warszawski (Warski)

SDKPiL Leaders



Rosa Luxemburg's cell at Wronke, 1916-1917

the pseudonym of W. Kraft. From August 1916 onwards he was able at last to make printing arrangements for the group; henceforth the letters were no longer hectographed. A few of his circulars exist—laconic, matter-of-fact, unemotional, without any of the charisma of Luxemburg or Liebknecht; flatter even in German than in Polish.¹ But effective. He had never in the past taken any interest in German affairs except in so far as they impinged on the SDKPiL; other than as Rosa's friend and *éminence grise* he was completely unknown in the SPD. None the less it was he who did all the work of clandestine organization, and emerged in 1916 as the effective manager of the Left opposition—a remarkable achievement which has not yet been documented. Without him there would have been no *Spartakusbund*; the scintillating figures associated with the intellectual leadership of the Left were none of them capable of performing the dour conspiratorial work of building a vehicle for their policies.

On 10 July Rosa was suddenly rearrested.² She spent the first weeks at the women's prison in the Barnimstrasse where she had been before, but was then transferred to the interrogation cells at police headquarters in the Alexanderplatz—the famous 'Alex' of Berlin satire and of grimmer memory under the Third Reich. Perhaps this transfer to harsher conditions was due to an incident in which she threw an inkpot at a detective and told him 'you are just a common spy and *Schweinhund*; get out of here [the visitor's room]'.³

¹ See below, p. 655; *Spartakusbriefe*, p. 206. In this circular he proposed a conference to discuss the extent of co-operation with the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* who were finally in the throes of founding a separate party. The circular closes baldly: 'For the expenses of the delegation, each individual group of members will have to be responsible since the situation of our finances is presently unfavourable' (p. 210).

² Some sources say 10 June, but wrongly. (Meyer, Introduction, *Spartakusbriefe*, Vol. I, p. viii.) Meyer's wrong dating is all the more surprising since he was present when she was arrested. 'Dr. Ernst Meyer . . . and Eduard Fuchs accompanied her home that Sunday. Mathilde Jacob awaited them with the bad news that two very suspicious men wished to speak to Rosa about some leaflets. The next morning at the crack of dawn the same men reappeared, identified themselves as secret police, placed Rosa under arrest and took her eventually to the women's prison. . . .' Ralph H. Lutz, *Journal of Central European Affairs*, October 1963, Vol. XXIII, No. 3, p. 309. This story is clearly put together from details in some of Mathilde Jacob's correspondence (see below, pp. 677 and 867).

³ Charge against Rosa Luxemburg heard by the Royal District Court, Berlin, Department 136, on 26 January 1917, reference 136D $\frac{565}{11}$ 16, photocopy from IISH Archives. Apparently new regulations reducing the permitted time for conversation with visitors had suddenly been imposed. Rosa, in a highly nervous state since her arrest, reacted strongly. The court took her temper into consider-

At the time the police had still not decided whether to put her on trial or merely to keep her in custody; a decision for the latter course was made some time in the early autumn. The six weeks at the Alexanderplatz were the worst prison experience of Rosa's life. 'The hell-hole at the Alexanderplatz where my cell was exactly 11 cubic metres, no light mornings and nights, squashed in between cold [water tap] (but no hot) and an iron plank.'¹ For a time she was held almost completely incommunicado.²

In October she was at last transferred to the old fortress at Wronke (Wronki) in Posen (Poznań); slothful, comfortable, grass-infested. She had privacy, and the privilege of walking up and down the same battlements as the sentries. Above all, she must have worked out an arrangement with at least one member of the staff; her correspondence, both legal and illicit, reached flood level. She knew that it would be a long while before she would be released; a whole new way of life became necessary. She continued her output of illegal material but, shut off as she was from the struggle outside, there was little development in her thought; for a year her writing was static, even repetitious. Only her temperament and her lively style prevented it from sounding stale.

Within the new circumstances she still found means of giving full rein to her personality. In the many letters written to friends during the next two years her personality reached out of prison like an octopus, wooing, embracing, and scolding her friends, dragging them into the orbit of her intellect and emotions. It did not matter whether she was writing on politics, literature, or life. Prison life, instead of stifling her, in fact enabled her to reach a spiritual and emotional maturity which is remarkable—as are the means which she developed to convey the flow of feelings and ideas. For the next two years the political aspect of her life was bound to cede primacy to the demands of a bursting personality confined in a relatively small space.

ation. She was awarded ten days in prison, a purely formal punishment since she was already in protective custody.

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 45, letter to Mathilde Wurm dated 28 December 1916.

² The *Spartakus* letter of 20 September 1916 contains two—naturally unsigned—contributions by Rosa Luxemburg. The first, 'Der Rhodus' (*Hic Rhodus, hic salta*—the quotation is from Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*), was probably written before her arrest in July (*Spartakusbrieife*, pp. 211–17). The second, 'Liebknecht', deals with the upward revision of the latter's sentence on 23 August and must therefore have been smuggled out of the Barnimstrasse prison through either Mathilde Jacob or Fanny Jezierska (*ibid.*, pp. 217–20).

PRISON IN GERMANY,
REVOLUTION IN RUSSIA

ON the surface of war-time Germany the Liebknecht incident caused hardly a ripple. Neither our own preoccupation with this small group of revolutionaries nor the solemn prolixity of police reports can alter the fact that the great majority of Germans hardly knew that *Spartakus* existed. Though the euphoria of early victories had gone, the need to 'see it through' (*durchhalten*)—the phrase which *Spartakus* echoed with such contempt—was still official SPD policy. The war was now bound to be a long and costly one. It was this realization which brought the first stirring, not yet of opposition, but at least of self-consciousness among the SPD leaders. They bethought themselves of the government's frequent protestations of peaceful and purely defensive intentions, and of their own commitment against a war of conquest. As a stiffener, a Reich conference was held—no properly constituted party congress could be envisaged for the duration—from 21 to 23 September 1916. For the last time representatives of all shades of opinion met together within the old and ample bosom of the SPD, the last occasion that executive, centrists, and *Spartakus* confronted each other in one party.

The *Gruppe Internationale* (as *Spartakus* was to be officially known until the end of 1918) sent Käthe Duncker and Paul Frassek as its representatives. In the restrained language required on public occasions in war-time—the hall was spattered with police—these two tried to put the views of *Spartakus* on the question of war. They marked themselves off so firmly from the centrist *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* that their strictures against the latter often drew laughter and approval from the majority.

We cannot make our attitude to the war and the support of war credits dependent on the military position of the moment, as the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* did in its declaration of 21 December [1915]. If we were in the position of France, if considerable parts of Germany were occupied by

enemy troops, God knows whether we would even have [such a thing as] a Social-Democratic *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*. (Great laughter.)¹

Ebert had no sense of humour, and did not laugh. With almost ghoulish deliberation the chairman of the conference attempted to impose the good old rules of formal politeness. The illusion that nothing had fundamentally changed in the SPD had at all costs to be preserved.

'I must ask the speaker to keep her remarks in the form which has customarily been observed in differences of opinion between party members.'

Ledebour (interrupting): 'You must take Heine as your example, then the chairman will not call you to order!'

Chairman: 'I must ask for quiet. What I have just said applies to all party members and has always been a matter of course in our party congresses.'

Frassek submitted what was to be the opposition's last official declaration within the SPD.

The Reich conference has come together under the throttling conditions of the state of siege. . . . The state of siege and the censorship make every free discussion of policy impossible from the start; the state of siege, in giving every advantage to the supporters of the so-called majority within the party, puts those belonging to the genuine opposition at a particularly heavy disadvantage, decimated as we are by prosecutions, arrests and military service. In any case the election of delegates has not been carried out by the members or delegates of individual constituencies, but through the local committees or executives of the party organization. Under these circumstances it is clear that any resolutions adopted by this conference cannot have the least political or moral value.²

A further declaration by *Spartakus* at this conference, couched in stronger language, was not accepted by the conference chairman, and consequently did not even appear in the *Protokoll*.³

Spartakus could not expect that its speeches and resolutions at the conference would sway the majority of delegates. The real purpose was propaganda. Like all Socialist representatives elected into hostile assemblies, the two *Spartakists* were merely 'speaking through the window' to the—it was assumed—attentive masses

¹ *Protokoll der Reichskonferenz der Sozialdemokratie Deutschlands von 21, 22 und 23 September 1916*, Berlin, no date, p. 85.

² *Ibid.*, p. 14. ³ See *Die Internationale*, 1927, Vol. 12, p. 379–80.

outside. For their purposes the SPD leadership was impugned as a mere stooge of the Reich government. In a circular issued by Leo Jogiches after the conference, copies of the *Spartakus* speeches, together with suggestions for further discussion and propaganda, were distributed illegally.¹ The flat, rubbery, almost impersonal style was typical of the man whom circumstances had now put in charge of *Spartakus*.

Finally to current affairs. By separate mail you will receive the '*Spartakus*' letters, from now on printed. [This bald announcement signified the successful conclusion of two years' frantic efforts to find a printer.] We ask you particularly, once you have given them consideration and discussed the matter with other comrades, to let us know how many copies you will be able to distribute so that we can judge the size of future editions. As resolved by a fairly large meeting of comrades, '*Spartakus*' is to be sold for 10 Pfennig per number. It is hardly necessary to add that the largest circulation to safe comrades is desirable. . . . In view of our growing and already considerable expenditure for printing items, handbills, etc., material support on the part of our comrades in the Reich is urgently necessary if we are to continue to meet all requirements. . . .²

The courtesies of the SPD executive at the Reich conference were more apparent than real. On 17 October 1916 a successful coup against *Vorwärts* was finally carried out; at last that same 'Kosher' editorial board of which Rosa Luxemburg had been a member for a few weeks in 1905 was removed. On 5 December the *Bremer Bürgerzeitung* and on 30 March 1917 the Brunswick *Volksfreund* went the same way. Among the major papers, only the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* remained under centrist control while the Left was confined solely to *Der Kampf*, which they had started in Duisburg on 1 July 1916 as their legal paper.

With the executive counter-attacking strongly on all fronts, there was no point in the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* continuing within the SPD, deprived of all influence. An attempt was afoot to elbow its members out of the party altogether. To forestall this, on 7 January 1917 a Reich conference of the Social-Democratic opposition took place in Berlin. This public defiance led to an open

¹ *Die Internationale*, Vol. XII, 1927, pp. 378-9. The circular was signed 'Krumbügel', one of Jogiches' aliases at the time.

² *Ibid.*, p. 379.

breach; the SPD executive formally decided to cut off all party connection with the conference participants and there was nothing for the latter now but to start their own party. The founding congress of the Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany (USPD) took place in Gotha in the first week of April amid nostalgic thoughts of the founding congress of the old SPD held nearly fifty years earlier in the same town.

Communist historians have strongly reproached *Spartakus* for failing to make an organizational break with the SPD before the war, but especially after 4 August 1914. Here was another obvious opportunity. With historical sleight-of-hand they point to Lenin's coherent yet democratic organization—leaders and members in harmony—which was soon to make possible the capture of an entire state, unilaterally and without official allies. It is true that *Spartakus* gave little or no importance to purely organizational problems. There were strong historical reasons for this—the proud exclusiveness of a powerful mass party before the war, and the oppositional thesis so long advocated by Rosa Luxemburg of the need to maintain contact with the masses at any cost. Disputes within the party—from 1910, opposition to all party authority—were one thing, but contracting out of the organized working class of Germany was another. In Rosa Luxemburg's eyes contact with the masses was emphatically more important even than any mistaken policy. She had strenuously advised her friend Henriette Roland-Holst against such a move in 1908.

A splintering of Marxists (not to be confused with differences of opinion) is fatal. Now that you want to leave the party, I want to hinder you from this with all my might. . . . Your resignation from the SDAP [the Dutch *Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiderspartij*] simply means your resignation from the Social-Democratic movement. This you must not do, none of us must! We cannot stand outside the organization, outside contact with the masses. *The worst working-class party is better than none.*¹

Now, on 6 January 1917, the day before the planned conference of the party opposition, she wrote:

Understandable and praiseworthy as the impatience and bitter anger of our best elements may be . . . flight is flight. For us it is a betrayal of the masses, who will merely be handed over helpless into the stranglehold of a Scheidemann or a Legien . . . into the hands of the bourgeoisie,

¹ Roland-Holst, p. 221, letter dated 11 August [1908].

to struggle but to be strangled in the end. One can 'leave' sects or conventicles when these no longer suit and one can always found new sects and conventicles. But it is nothing but childish fantasy to talk of liberating the whole mass of proletarians from their bitter and terrible fate by simply 'leaving' and in this way setting them a brave example. Throwing away one's party card as a gesture of liberation is nothing but a mad caricature of the illusion that the party card is in itself an instrument of power. Both are nothing but the opposite poles of organizational cretinism, this constitutional disease of the old German Social Democracy. . . .¹

None the less, this heartfelt appeal for remaining in the party and continuing the struggle against the treacherous authorities from within, did not mean that Rosa Luxemburg modified by one jot her criticism of the insincerity of the men who had called the opposition conference.

The sentimental longing of the 'Bog' [the Marxist centre] to return to the party as it was before the war is one of the most childish Utopias to which this terrible war has given birth. Only one other attitude comes close to it in childishness: the heart-rending political naïveté with which the leaders of the 'Bog'—Haase, Ledebour, Dittmann—suppose that they can reawaken the old honourable Social Democracy, which they themselves helped to bury and on whose grave they danced a fandango for a year and a half. . . .²

The sharpest criticism of the centrist leaders and their policy, but no organized split from the existing party: the policy of *Spartakus* towards the new Independent Socialist party was the same as it had always been in the old SPD. In a circular to sympathizers on 25 December 1916 Jogiches made some proposals for the attitude to be adopted by *Spartakus* delegates at the impending opposition conference to which *Spartakus* had been invited. These stressed the need and means of exposing the SPD's policy to the masses by every available means—elections, meetings, handbills, etc.; the emphasis was on mass propaganda not on problems of separate organization.³ And *Spartakus* went to the

¹ *Der Kampf*, No. 31, 6 January 1917. This article, smuggled out from the fortress at Wronke with the assistance of Mathilde Jacob, appeared under the pseudonym Gracchus.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Spartakusbriefe*, pp. 206–10. The letter is signed W. K[raft], another Jogiches alias. His draft proposals formed the basis of the resolutions brought by *Spartakus* at the opposition conference. (*Protokoll . . . Gründungsparteitag der USPD 6–8 April 1917 in Gotha*, Berlin 1921, pp. 98–99.)

conference to wait and see; insistent on maintaining its own political line but without distinct organizational conditions. It accepted the decision of the conference to separate from the SPD and form a new party. All that was required was the maintenance of its own identity. 'If those representing our direction decide on participation in a joint conference [with the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*] then we will of course do so as a separate, independent, and self-sufficient group.'¹ This from the pen of the most professional organizer on the Left outside the ranks of the Bolsheviks. If the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* had not constituted itself an Independent Socialist party—against Rosa's advice—*Spartakus* would have preferred to remain within the SPD—that 'stinking corpse of 4 August 1914'—rather than set up on its own in what might well prove to be a political vacuum.

The only ones to criticize *Spartakus* at the time were the Bremen radicals. This small group, with whom Radek had been associated until the beginning of the war, was alone in calling for a complete organizational break and thus earned the credit of Lenin and later Communist historians.² The dispute between *Spartakus* and the Bremen radicals continued intermittently throughout that year. At the founding congress of the USPD in April 1917 the *Spartakus* representative characterized the opposition as follows:

We are not satisfied with the policy of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*. Rather we base ourselves on the heads of the *Juniusbroschüre*. . . . In many questions our demands exceed those of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*, but under certain conditions we are prepared to work with them. Nor does our attitude correspond entirely to that of the comrades from Bremen either. . . .³

¹ *Spartakusbriefe*, p. 207.

² *Arbeiterpolitik*, Bremen, 20 January 1917. At the time Lenin completely mistook the intentions of *Spartakus*. See 'Open Letter to Boris Souvarine', *La Vérité*, No. 48, 27 January 1918 (first written in the second half of December 1916), *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXIII, p. 190.

'In Germany the split is taking place before the eyes of all . . . and precisely because Liebknecht and Rühle [who had voted with Liebknecht on one occasion against war credits] were not afraid of a split, because they openly propagated its necessity and did not hesitate to carry it out, therefore their activity *in spite of numerical weakness* is of such momentous importance for the proletariat.'

³ The Bremen radicals never forgave *Spartakus*, and refused to join in forming the KPD at the end of December 1918. Johann Knief, their most important leader, told Radek that *Spartakus* was merely a stage before the last, their own. See Radek, *Diary*, p. 135 (below, Ch. xvi, p. 731, note 2). His group only joined the KPD early in 1919 and soon left it again, to found its own splinter group, the KAPD.

Our main condition is this . . . the *Gruppe Internationale* insists that it will not give up the propagation of its views because it considers this to be a political necessity. . . . Further we demand that the attitude of individual local organizations must not be prescribed by the central organization. This would only mean another cartel. It has been stated here that the *Gruppe Internationale* will anyhow leave the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* as soon as the war is over, but this we will only do if its policy doesn't follow the principles of the *Gruppe Internationale*.

Spartakus then enumerated the various aspects of policy where its emphasis differed from that of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*, particularly the relative merits of mass action as against parliamentary efforts.¹

The USPD leaders, and Haase in particular, concentrated the attention of the conference on practical matters instead of first principles. They too wanted a new unity—and public debate of presently unrealizable principles was the best means of dividing the new party right from the start. Everything depended on how events would shape; it was precisely the absurd lip-service to empty principles which in their view had bedevilled the pre-war SPD. The USPD was determined not to tie its hands in advance, and above all not to *Spartakus*. In the end the latter joined the USPD without the clear definition which Jogiches had demanded. But *Spartakus* went on urging its own policy within the USPD, and Rosa Luxemburg continued to ridicule its leaders in public as hitherto.

The relationship between them was uneasy, but less so than the tone of the *Spartakus* polemics might suggest. The fierce denunciations at the top did not penetrate far down into the amorphous Socialist membership. Kautsky still saw the main function of the USPD as an honest David struggling against two Goliaths—the predatory SPD executive on one side and *Spartakus* on the other. Yet the centrist view of *Spartakus* had subtly changed. Instead of talking of the 'Rosa group'—a few arrogant, clever, intransigent Marxists whose ambition drove them to prefer a minute but devoted splinter group to a democratic mass party—the USPD leaders were now faced by a powerful myth—the hero-worship of Karl Liebknecht. His demonstrations in April and May 1916 had not only closed the opposition ranks, but had provided the simplest rallying cry—a name. 'The boy Karl has become a real menace [*fürchterlich*]. If we in the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* had not appeared

¹ *Protokoll . . . USPD 1917*, pp. 19, 22.

and proved that we too exist, the irresistibly growing opposition would simply have gone over to *Spartakus* altogether. If a break has been avoided and *Spartakus* held at bay, that is entirely to our credit. The right-wing has not helped us but has only helped *Spartakus*.¹

Kautsky was right, at least in one respect: Liebknecht had become a byword in the farthest corners of Europe, which *Spartakus* did its utmost to keep alive. Some French soldiers talk in the trenches about the futility of their own part in the war.

‘And yet,’ said one ‘look! There is one person who has risen above the whole beastly war; who stands illuminated with all the beauty and importance of great courage . . . Liebknecht. . .’ Once more Bertrand emerged from his frozen silence. ‘The future, the future. The work of the future will be to wipe out all this . . . as something abominable and shameful.’²

Lenin, too, increasingly identified opposition to the war and the revolutionary movement in Germany with the name of Karl Liebknecht. It became a convenient shorthand which everyone would understand. ‘The future belongs to those who brought forth a Karl Liebknecht, who created the *Spartakus* group, whose point of view is in the *Bremer Arbeiterpolitik*.³ As the embodiment of *Spartakus*, Liebknecht became one of those political bogiewheels on which Lenin’s ideas could move along smoothly and comprehensibly. ‘The revolutionary propaganda of the *Spartakus* group becomes more and more intense, the name Liebknecht becomes more popular in Germany every day.’⁴ This identification of *Spartakus* with the person of Liebknecht was to have important consequences. A dead martyr can be manipulated by his heirs, a living one is apt to drag his colleagues with him to the extremes dictated by the contingent pressures of his martyrdom.

The search of *Spartakus* for its distinct identity, of which Karl Liebknecht became the symbol, was most clearly articulated by

¹ Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel*, pp. 634–5: letter from Karl Kautsky dated 28 February 1917.

² Henri Barbusse, *Le Feu (Journal d’une escouade)*, Paris 1916 (Prix Goncourt), p. 280. Together with Erich Maria Remarque, *Im Westen nichts Neues*, this became one of the most famous anti-war novels of the time.

³ Lenin, ‘Farewell letter to the workers of Switzerland’, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXIII, p. 363.

⁴ Lenin’s speech on 4 November 1917, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXVI, p. 258.

Rosa Luxemburg. It went well beyond 'mere' politics. Between *Spartakus* and the Independents were two concepts of life which differed in their most fundamental aspects. It is impossible to understand Rosa Luxemburg as a political person without accepting her capacity for judging everything in the form of an extreme dichotomy—words or action, hope or desire, living or dying. Mere political differences were mealy-mouthed understatements; what was happening was a miniature private dialectic of her own, the birth of a new world amid the dust and ashes of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*. Everyone had to choose, neutrality was impossible. Rosa's contributions to the *Spartakus* letters were distinguished by this 'either/or' frenzy, infused with all the temperament of which she was capable—but it was only in her private correspondence that this essentially personal parting of the ways could be presented in all its stark relief. The following letter, to the wife of Emmanuel Wurm, speaks more for Rosa Luxemburg than any official document ever could.

Wronke, 28 December 1916.

My dear Tilde,

I want to answer your Christmas letter immediately while I am still in the grip of the rage which it inspired. Yes, your letter made me absolutely wild [*fuchsteufelswild*] because short as it was every line showed clearly the extent to which you are imprisoned within your surroundings [*im Bann deines Milieus stehst*]; this weepy-weepy tone, this lament for the 'disappointments' which you have suffered—allegedly due to others; instead of for once looking in the mirror to see the perfect image of humanity's whole mystery! 'We' in your language now means the other toads of your particular sewer; once upon a time when you were with me it meant my company and me. All right, then I shall deal with you in your desired plural [*dann wart, ich werde Dich per 'Ihr' behandeln*].

You are 'not radical enough' you suggest sadly. 'Not enough' is hardly the word! You aren't radical at all, just spineless. *It is not a matter of degree but of kind*. 'You' are a totally different zoological species from me and never have I hated your miserable, acidulated, cowardly and half-hearted existence as much as I do now. You wouldn't mind being radical, you say, only the trouble is that one gets put inside and can't be of use any longer. You miserable, pettifogging souls, you would be perfectly prepared to offer a modicum of heroism but only against cash, as long as you can see an immediate return on it; a straight

'yes'—the simple words of that honest and straightforward man: 'Here I stand, I can do no other, God help me'—none of it was spoken for you.¹ Lucky that world history to date has not been made by people like you, otherwise there wouldn't have been any reformation and we would still be stuck with feudalism.

As far as I am concerned I was never soft, but in recent months I have become as hard as polished steel and I will not make the slightest concession in future, either politically or in my personal friendships. I have only to conjure up the portrait gallery of your heroes to feel like caterwauling: that sweet Haase, Dittmann with his cultivated beard and those cultivated speeches in the Reichstag, that limping shepherd Kautsky, whom your husband naturally follows through thick and thin, the magnificent Arthur [Stadthagen]—*ah, je n'en finirai!* I swear to you—I would rather sit here for years—I do not even say here, which is approaching paradise, but rather in the hell-hole in the Alexanderplatz where in a minute cell, without light, I recited my favourite poets—than 'fight' your heroes or for that matter have anything to do with them! I would rather have Graf Westarp [the leader of the Conservative party in the *Reichstag*]—not because he once spoke in the Reichstag of my almond-shaped velvet eyes—but because he is a *man*. I swear to you, let me once get out of prison and I shall hunt and disperse your company of singing toads with trumpets, whips and bloodhounds—I wanted to say like Penthesilea, but then by God you are no Achilles.² Had enough of my New Year's greeting? Then see to it that you remain a *human being*. To be human is the main thing, and that means to be strong and clear and *of good cheer* in spite and because of everything, for tears are the preoccupation of weakness. To be human means throwing one's life 'on to the scales of destiny' if need be, to be joyful for every fine day and every beautiful cloud—oh, I can't write you any recipes how to be human, I only know how to *be* human and you too used to know it when we walked for a few hours in the fields outside Berlin and watched the red sunset over the corn. The world is so beautiful in spite of all the misery and would be even more beautiful if there were no half-wits and cowards in it.

Come, you get a kiss after all, because you are basically a good soul. Happy New Year!³

¹ This is, of course, Martin Luther's famous saying. Rosa closed the article in *Der Kampf*, cited above (p. 657, note 1), with the same sentence. Not only the phrase but the whole concept expressed her own view exactly. The present letter is interesting because it was written at the same time and in the same mood as the article in question, yet the one sums up for political restraint, and the other for personal intransigence.

² Penthesilea was a Queen of the Amazons who fought against the Greeks at Troy and was slain by Achilles.

³ *Briefe an Freunde*, pp. 44-46, to Mathilde Wurm. Rosa Luxemburg's italics.

The recipient must have defended herself as stoutly as she knew how, for on 16 February Rosa wrote again:

Never mind, even though you answered me so bravely and even offered trial by combat, I shall always be well disposed towards you. That you want to take me on makes me smile. My dear girl, I sit firmly in the saddle, no one has yet unseated me. I would like to see the one who does it. But I had to smile for another reason; you do not even want to take me on and are much closer to me politically than you are prepared to admit. I shall remain your compass because your honest nature tells you that *I* am the one with the unmistakable judgement—since I do not suffer from the destroying minor symptoms: fearfulness, being in a rut, the parliamentary cretinism which affects the judgement of others. . . . My dear girl, ‘disappointment with the masses’ is always the most lamentable excuse for a political leader. A real leader doesn’t adjust his tactic in accordance with the attitude of the masses, but in accordance with the development of history. He sticks to his tactic in spite of disappointments and waits for history to complete its work. Let us close the debate on this note. I shall be happy to remain your friend. Whether I can remain your teacher too, depends on *you*.¹

These words are the very core of Rosa Luxemburg’s philosophy. Her attachment to the masses was not the formal postulate which in their different ways both Kautsky and Lenin shared. For them, party, leaders, and the masses were theoretical concepts to be manoeuvred into correct juxtaposition. Theoretical analysis would in fact have provided the easy solution; particularly in prison, one would not be called upon to put one’s solution into brutal practice under the eyes of a competent and powerful police. Kautsky in his study at the editorial offices of *Neue Zeit*, Lenin in Cracow or in the libraries of Zürich or Bern, could make their arbitrary reckoning on paper or in the company of a few loyal comrades living near by. In her prison Rosa Luxemburg felt more firmly attached to the realities of political life, however disagreeable and hard, than ever before.² Political life, not politics; an enlargement not a contraction—that was the consequence of her dichotomies. Every act

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 46–47.

² The different effects of prison on revolutionaries would make an interesting study. Parvus felt utterly handicapped in isolation and did nothing but complain. A few cells along, in the Peter-Paul Fortress in 1906, Trotsky immersed himself in fruitful political analysis of a wholly abstract nature; prison provided the peace and quiet he needed for this type of work. Rosa, admittedly ‘in’ for longer, re-created her normal life; like those of a blind man, her remaining faculties for communication—letters—grew larger than life to compensate for the absence of personal contact.

and interest became life writ large, and took its place in the composite but vital business of living. This was the message of optimism which poured out of prison at her friends. Cut off from the collective life of the community, the individual, instead of shrinking, had to grow large enough to speak not only for itself, but for everything. Things had to substitute for people—plants, flowers, animals, large and small. The old fortress of Wronke became a universe with its own laws and purposes, strong enough to reach out into the consciousness of all Rosa's friends. They must have rubbed their eyes over the morning mail and wondered whether they were not the ones cut off from reality.

Rosa Luxemburg remained at Wronke from October 1916 until July 1917. It was an easy-going routine; conditions were spacious, even moderately comfortable. She had the run of the fortress, could walk along its grass-grown walls and give herself completely to the sight and smell of the surrounding countryside.

Today it rained in torrents, none the less I spent two hours wandering round the little garden—as usual without an umbrella, just my old hat and in Grandmother Kautsky's cape [probably the one she had been given when she went to Warsaw at the end of 1905]. It was lovely to think and dream while walking, even though the rain penetrated hat and hair and ran down my neck in rivulets. Even the birds were awake. One of them, with whom I have become chummy, often walks with me, like this: I always walk on two sides of the garden along the wall, and the bird keeps step with me by hopping from bush to bush. Isn't this nice? We both brave every weather and have already walked our daily round in a snowstorm. Today the bird looked so blown about, wet and miserable, I probably too; and yet we both felt very well. All the same in the afternoon it got so stormy that we just daren't go out at all. The bird sits on the bars of my window and tilts its head right and left in order to look in through the glass. I sit at my desk and enjoy the ticking of the clock which makes a comfortable noise in the room and so I work.¹

With vigour she took up again some of the interests which had fascinated her some years earlier.

How happy I am that three years ago I threw myself into botany with my usual intense absorption, with my whole self; so much so that the whole world, the party, and my work disappeared and one sole longing possessed me—to wander about in the spring fields, to stuff my arms

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, pp. 97–98, to Hans Diefenbach, 16 April 1917.

full of plants and then, after sorting them out at home, enter them in my books. I spent the whole spring as in the throes of a fever. How much I suffered when I sat in front of a new plant and for a long time could not recognize it or classify it correctly. I almost fainted with the effort so that Gertrud [Zlottko] used to threaten to take away my plants altogether. But at least I am now at home in this green world. I captured it—by storm and with devotion; for whatever you give yourself to with such intensity takes strong root in you.¹

She was able to regale some of her friends not only with reports of her own collection but good advice as to what they should go out and find in the fields at any particular time.

You see what enjoyment you got out of your visit to the botanical gardens and how enthusiastic you were about it. Why don't you go more often? I assure you that it means a great deal to me when you promptly record your impressions with such spontaneous warmth and colour. Yes, I know those wonderful crimson flowers of the spruce fir . . . these are the female flowers out of which the great cones grow to hang with their points downwards as their weight increases. Besides them, are the far less conspicuous yellow male flowers. . . .²

Immediately after breakfast I go out into my little garden and occupy myself wonderfully: watering my plants. I have had them get me a pretty little watering can with which I have admittedly to run a dozen times to the well until the soil is damp enough. The water spray twinkles in the morning sun and the drops go on shimmering for a long time on the blue and red hyacinths, which are already half open. Why am I sad in spite of this? I almost believe that I have overestimated the strength of the sun in the sky; it can shine all it wants but sometimes it simply doesn't warm me up when there is no warmth in my heart.³

For Sonia Liebknecht particularly, Rosa tried to reveal the relaxation and absorption of botany and zoology.

I know the different kinds of orchids well. I studied them well for several days in the wonderful hot-house in Frankfurt . . . their fantastic, almost unnatural form, always made them seem over-refined and decadent to me. They made the impression of a dainty countess of the powder-and-patch period. The admiration I now feel for them thus had to overcome an internal resistance. By disposition I am the enemy of everything decadent and perverse. A common dandelion gives me far more pleasure.⁴

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 93, to Hans Diefenbach, 30 March 1917.

² *Letters from Prison*, p. 67.

³ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 107, to Hans Diefenbach, 12 May 1917.

⁴ *Letters from Prison*, p. 38, dated 1 June 1917.

You ask what I am reading—mostly natural sciences: I am studying the distribution of plants and animals . . . I feel so much more at home in a garden like this one here and still more in the meadows when the grass is humming with bees than at one of our party congresses. I can say that to you because you will not promptly suspect me of betraying socialism. You know I hope to die at my post, in a street fight or in jail. But the real deep 'me' belongs more to my butterflies than it does to my comrades. This is not because, like so many spiritually bankrupt politicians, I seek refuge and repose in nature. In nature I see so much cruelty at every turn that I suffer greatly.¹

But the war was never far away. It loomed over wasp and watering-can indiscriminately; as soon as one was lulled by the ferocious microcosms of nature the scene was brutally changed to the clangour of men at war.

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 to the army for use. 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 strongly curved back so that their skulls are shaped something like a sheep's skull. They are black and have huge, soft eyes. The buffaloes are war booty from Rumania. The soldier-drivers said that it was very difficult to catch these animals who 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*'. 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, utterly exhausted, stood perfectly still. The

¹ Ibid., pp. 24-25.



(a) Wilhelm Pieck

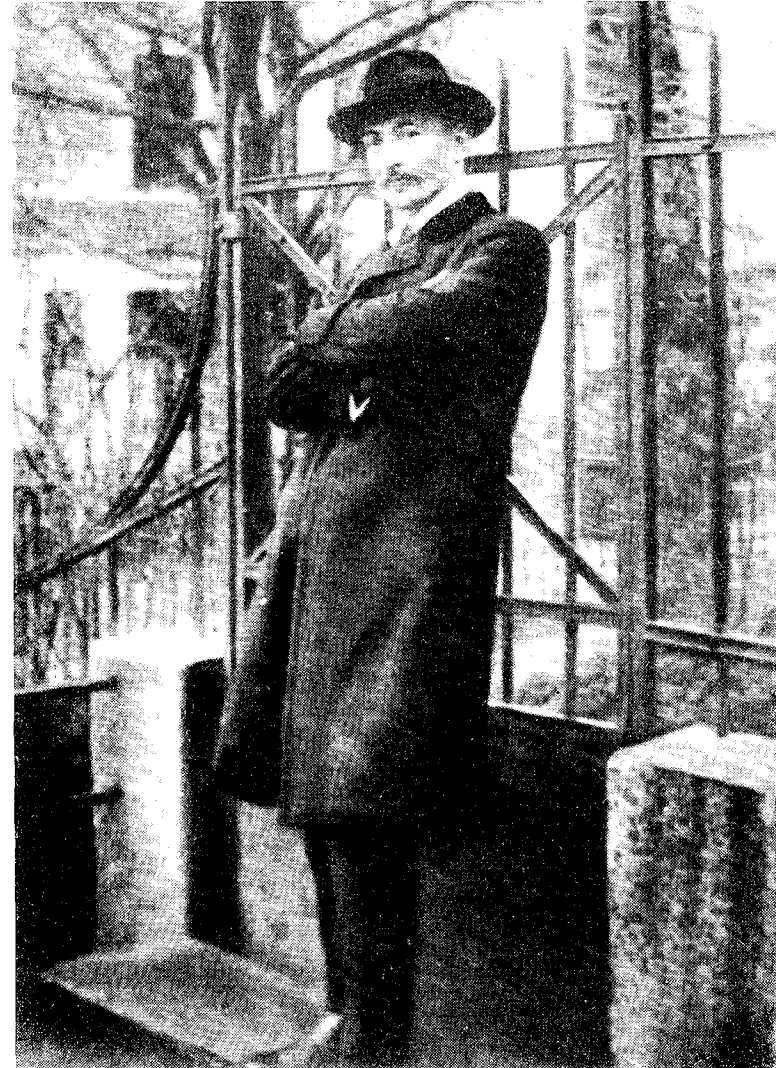


(b) Hans Diefenbach as a
medical officer, about 1916

Military Service in the First World War



(a) Julian Marchlewski (Karski)



(b) Feliks Dzierżyński, between 1909 and 1912

SDKPiL Leaders

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 moved 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 foetid 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! . . .¹

With flowers and plants Rosa still had the professional touch acquired from the studies in Zürich long ago. The equally intense comments on art—literature, music, painting—were those of a gifted amateur. But once again the reverberations of a solitary routine brought to the surface a more intense and systematic involvement with art. Rosa no longer saw or read, she re-absorbed and criticized and analysed, and fed off art like a plant off compost—herself and her friends, who were regaled by her feast. This, too, was part of the foundation of her new self-sufficiency.

As ever, Rosa had distinct preferences. Fulsomeness, excessive decoration, mere skill—indeed any excess—was repugnant to her. She was always attracted by simplicity precisely because social questions were essentially simple:

I have just finished Ricarda Huch's *Wallenstein* . . . in the end the portrayal comes to nought. No complete picture emerges from so much detail and decoration . . . I cannot help it, German thoroughness makes it impossible to create a delicate, living portrait of an age or a person.

¹ *Letters from Prison*, pp. 56–58. Whatever Sonia Liebknecht may have replied, she could not help feeling that Rosa's vicarious sufferings were much less than the more direct ones of her husband, and she unburdened herself feelingly to Mathilde Jacob about the difference in the circumstances of Rosa Luxemburg and her husband, Karl. See Ralph H. Lutz, 'Rosa Luxemburg's . . . letters', *Journal of Central European Affairs*, October 1963, Vol. XXIII, No. 3, p. 310.

. . . She lacks, although she is a woman, the mental *finesse* which should have told her that the pursuit of every detail must ultimately tire and repel any sensitive person. . . .¹

Or on Hebbel:

He has high intelligence and a good style. His characters however do not possess sufficient life and blood, they are merely expressions of super clever, over-refined problems. If you were thinking of sending him to me, could I perhaps swop him for Grillparzer? . . . Pure Shakespeare with his sparseness, the certainty of his deadly aim and his popular humour, add to which a delicate poetical touch which Shakespeare doesn't have. Isn't it a joke that Grillparzer was a stiff-necked civil servant and a thoroughly boring person—see his autobiography which is in almost as bad taste as that of Bebel.²

For artists as well as politicians a close contact with real life was essential.

Your idea that I should write a book about Tolstoy doesn't appeal to me at all. For whom? Why? Everyone can read Tolstoy's books and if they don't get a strong breath of life from them, then they won't get it from any commentary. Can anyone 'explain' what Mozart's music is? Can anyone 'explain' of what the magic of life consists, if the smallest and most matter-of-fact things don't tell him—or better, if he doesn't have this magic in him? . . . Far too many books have already been written; people forget to look into the beautiful world with so much literature all around them.

It was natural that Rosa should prefer to translate a less well-known Russian author than write a commentary on one of the giants. Her interest in the Russian language—'the language of the future'—continued unashamed and undiminished. The choice fell on Vladimir Korolenko's autobiography *History of my Contemporary* (*Istoriya moego sovremennika*). Her correspondence with publishers and with Luise Kautsky clearly shows the desire to help fill a gap in the study of modern Russian writing. But the value of this work was social as well as literary. Her preface to the translation emphasized the link. It placed Korolenko in the majestic tradition of Russian literature—and although Rosa Luxemburg never set up as a literary critic by allocating marks of merit and demerit, she emphatically claimed a high place for him among

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, pp. 102–3.

² *Ibid.*, p. 82.

living writers. In addition she analysed Korolenko's writings in the context of social history. Here her judgements were uninhibited. Writers like Tolstoy and Korolenko himself, who were aware of what *was* and in what way it was changing, earned her approval over those who ran away from social realities into introspective and spiritual absorptions.¹ Within the chosen group of socially conscious writers, Rosa particularly contrasted Gorky and Korolenko. The latter was still interested in the countryside, in peasants, while Gorky,

the devoted follower of German scientific socialism, was already pre-occupied with the town labourer, and his shadow, the Lumpenproletariat . . . Korolenko, like Turgenev—whom he so highly esteemed—had a thoroughly lyrical and receptive nature, he was a man of mood; Gorky, on the other hand, followed the tradition of Dostoievsky—a man with a thoroughly dramatic conception, bulging with energy, bursting for action— . . . if drama is the poetry of action, then [Korolenko's writings were] only half poetry but wholly truth, like everything that is part of life.²

Korolenko combined an unassuming literary style—reportage but deeply felt—with an irrevocable attachment to society around him. These virtues are mirrored in her introduction. There were no blaring assertions, none of the catchwords of Marxism, only joy at the continuous social protest yet individually expressed. Rosa gave a brief biography of Korolenko and the reader feels with her the unbearable necessity of protest and action rather than any rationalized thesis of opposition. Korolenko—and she herself—were no longer dealing with Russians, Poles, or Jews, but with people.

It is one of the necessities of modern society that human society, whenever it gets a bit uncomfortable for one reason or another, should immediately find a scapegoat in members of another nation, or race, or religion, or colour; having stilled its bad temper on them it returns refreshed to its own routine. And it is natural that the only suitable

¹ Comparison with Lukács's scale of approval, based on the extent to which writers like Stendhal and Flaubert reflect the ethical and social realities of their historical 'period', is interesting. Lukács, not concerned with political context but with the thorough application of Marxist determinism to literature, is aiming at an entirely different standard of merit from Rosa Luxemburg's normative search for social protest separate from but in addition to 'purely' literary qualities. (Cf. above, p. 29, note 1.)

² *Die Geschichte meines Zeitgenossen*, Berlin 1919-20, p. 50 (Introduction).

scapegoats are always economically, historically, and socially backward nationalities.¹

Enlarged by Rosa's growing emphasis on wholeness, protest no longer consisted in *doing* but demanded *being*; individual gestures of protest lost their significance and perhaps did more harm than good. 'Was not the obstinate *eppur si muove*—Galileo's pointless and empty gesture—without any practical result other than the revenge of the Holy Office . . . if indeed it ever took place at all.'² But what then of Liebknecht? He too was undergoing his enlargement in prison, though through a process of violent oscillation rather than Rosa's direct and well-proportioned growth. How could anyone imagine that either of these two could ever again fit into the personal and political limits of a pre-war SPD?

Before her close friends Rosa Luxemburg went through a rather elaborate rigmarole of reluctance with regard to her own contribution. 'Kestenberg [the publisher] insists upon his pound of flesh—a preface from me, and I am making a desperate effort to gather the material for it.'³ And no doubt the unwillingness to set up as a literary critic was perfectly genuine. But Rosa Luxemburg's interest in Korolenko accords very well with the whole process of deliberate self-examination to which she subjected herself in prison, turning inward upon herself all her formidable tools of analysis which could not now be deployed upon a society from which she was cut off. Korolenko, too, both as a writer and as a person, at times suffered from the enforced deflection of his outgoing sympathies and understanding back upon himself. 'Korolenko is almost unique in Russian literature—in that arid waste where, as Virginia Woolf says, the writer has to fall back upon "the illumination of the soul and upon the brotherhood of man".'

¹ Ibid., p. 44 (Introduction).

² Ibid., p. 31. This contemptuous dismissal of Galileo, for hundreds of years a symbol of the intellectual revolt against darkness and obscurantism—scientific truth against religious dogma—had no echo at the time, but was both prophetic and fascinating. Modern research (in the West, not in the East) has exposed Galileo as the intransigent dogmatist against a flexible, political, above all responsible church forced to take action, not against the inroads of modern science but the irresponsible disturber of the peace. (See George de Santillana, 'Phases of the Conflict between Totalitarianism and Science' in Carl J. Friedrich (ed.), *Totalitarianism*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1954, pp. 244–62, and his book *The Crime of Galileo*.) It is surprising that the analogy between Galileo and, say, Pasternak from the Soviet point of view as a conflict between spontaneity and discipline has never struck any Soviet theorists. And what price Rosa Luxemburg's spontaneity in view of her dismissal of Galileo's 'pointless and empty gesture'?

³ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 239, 19 December 1917.

For he was what we might call today an integrated personality who saw life steadily if not always whole.¹ Like Rosa Luxemburg, moreover, he was essentially a persuader rather than a describer; he, too, combined an acute social sympathy with a somewhat legalistic manner of argument.² It is no wonder that Rosa Luxemburg found in Korolenko someone who seemed to personify her suppurating dissatisfaction with the aridness of life as viewed from inside a prison.

The translation of Korolenko and her economic writings in prison were a self-imposed discipline. She still pressed hard against the limits of her existence. Occasional visits and letters were the only form of communication with the living world outside. But she was determined to live—perhaps more fully than she had ever lived before; and her friends were turned into delegates, pressed and moulded to live her life for her. Whether encouraging others to be brave and strong; whether insisting on a new closeness with Luise Kautsky or Marta Rosenbaum through an arrangement of symbols on paper which she had probably never sought in the intimacy of speech; whether binding a disciple like Hans Diefenbach close to her by perpetually displaying her scintillating personality for his benefit—it was her life and not theirs that was at stake. The choice of vehicles was so limited—literature, politics, the instant, timeless speck of life minutely observed and captured; broad-based judgements alternating with the ruthlessly critical penetrations of a needle—they follow on each other's heels in a bewildering and complex procession. The present and the past became welded into one flexible whole—where most other prisoners would choose to moan about the contrast. Some minute and fleeting vision in the prison yard was captured, made to conjure up a shared experience of the past. Yet such was Rosa's skill that she breathed life into her correspondents—so that they took on new and

¹ R. F. Christian, 'V. G. Korolenko (1853-1921). A centennial appreciation', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 32 (1953-1954), p. 452. The acute moral sensitiveness which, in Rosa Luxemburg's case, found a somewhat Messianic outlet in preaching to her friends about the beautiful, suffering world of animals and flowers, was characterized by Chekhov with regard to Korolenko by the assertion that he would have written better if he had only gone off occasionally and been unfaithful to his wife. (See I. A. Bunin, *Memories and Portraits* (translation V. Traill and R. Chancellor), London 1951, p. 48.)

² It is interesting that his last published writings relate to a correspondence with Lunacharskii in which he condemned the post-revolutionary atrocities of the Bolsheviks, who he had hitherto supported. The standard modern Russian biography of Korolenko is G. A. Byalyi, *V. G. Korolenko*, Moscow/Leningrad 1949.

sharper dimensions. Luise Kautsky, much the same age as Rosa, needed only a hint, a snap of the finger, to drop everything and join Rosa in spirit at Wronke. In return Rosa could be cold, even brutal; the reader knows or feels that Luise left more of herself in pawn to her friend than she received in return, for friendship is never equal, or for that matter just. In a passage which Luise Kautsky omitted from her edition of Rosa's letters, the latter ironically chided Luise for her sentimental refusal to look the situation in the face and honestly accept her emotional attachment to another man.¹

This passage is revealing because it indicates a facet of Rosa's character which none of her biographers has mentioned—and of which perhaps only Luise Kautsky was aware. Rosa Luxemburg was not interested in any high-principled campaign for women's rights—unlike her friend Clara Zetkin.² Like anti-Semitism, the inferior status of women was a social feature which would be eliminated only by the advent of Socialism; in the meantime there was no point in making any special issue of it. But disinterest in public did not mean private indifference. Since the break-up of her own 'marriage' to Leo Jogiches in 1907, Rosa had undertaken a campaign for the possession of the souls of her women friends, especially against those husbands who were also her political opponents. This subtle enticement had been carried out with Rosa's usual blend of intellect and emotion; a war on two fronts. From prison the campaign moved into high gear, as the letter to Mathilde Wurm shows (above, pp. 661–2). Rosa now gladly committed further reserves of emotion to the battle.³

The same increase of pace is clear from the letters to Hans Diefenbach. This became a very special friendship, and in her letters to the young army doctor during the war Rosa unleashed a many-splendoured offensive, with an emotional skill which she never surpassed. Even today one can still feel her tentacles reaching out from prison like those of a passionate and demanding

¹ This passage occurs in letter No. 93 dated 19 December 1917. All the originals of Rosa's letters to the Kautskys are at IISH. Since it was Luise Kautsky's special wish that this particular aspect of her life should not be made public, I have confined myself to this comment.

² One of Clara Zetkin's favourite themes was a quotation from Engels (*Ursprung der Familie . . .*): 'He is the bourgeois in the family, the woman represents the proletariat.' See for instance Clara Zetkin, *Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften*, Berlin 1957, Vol. I, p. 95.

³ For the beginning of the campaign, see above, p. 411.

octopus. Nowhere is the mixture of emotion, ethics, politics, and aesthetics more skilfully and tidily woven; past, present, and future more dialectically fused, than in these outpourings coming apparently straight from the heart. From the descriptions of contemporaries and from the few letters of his that remain, we know Diefenbach to have been a reserved, somewhat stiff young man who had difficulty in keeping his end up among all his highly verbal and incisive friends.¹ The slightly cannibalistic streak in Rosa's friendships caused her to hammer unmercifully at Diefenbach's dilettantism: 'Hänschen regrettably has more talent than knowledge . . .', she told him, ' . . . and if your temperament is a little too much like over-refined white flour [*semmelblond*] and your perpetually cool hands irritate me at times, I still say: "Blessed are those without temperament as long as this lack of temperament means that they will never trade on the happiness or peace of other people."' And to his sister she wrote after his death:

His weaknesses—naturally he also had these—were those of a child not equipped for life's realities, for the struggle and for the inevitable brutalities; he was always slightly afraid of life. I always feared that he might remain an everlasting dilettante, buffeted by all the storms of life; I tried as far as I could to apply gentle pressure on him so that he might eventually take root in life after all.²

She made a point of bettering each one of his literary comments; what he liked she promptly criticized; what he discovered she had known long before and so—it was implied—should he have; what he did not know she insisted on his learning. Continual competition prevailed for possession of his person, not with a third party but with his own restrained temperament—the power of which, in order to satisfy her enormous talent for battle, she had infinitely to exaggerate. Even in her friendships Rosa could not live without conflict.

What effect did these marvellous letters have on their recipients? In Diefenbach's case we do not know. She always addressed him as 'Sie'—the polite form—but this was the only restraint. For the rest, the letters have an intensely provocative, erotic quality, almost daring this restrained young man to be shocked and to protest. Yet she could not have gone on in this vein if there had not been

¹ See the brief sketch by Benedikt Kautsky, the son of Karl and Luise, in *Briefe an Freunde*, pp. 16–17.

² *Briefe an Freunde*, pp. 77, 78, 134.

some response. 'Good God, if I sense in the slightest that somebody doesn't like me, my very thoughts flee from his presence like those of a scared bird; for me even to look him in the face again seems too much.'¹ Diefenbach's devotion to his volatile and fascinating friend was of long standing, though perhaps tinged with hopelessness, after all the years of Rosa wilfully blowing hot and cold. Then, in 1914, the friendship was suddenly and mysteriously promoted. With Konstantin Zetkin gone and the circle of friends narrowed by political defection, who but the faithful, unromantic, but transparently decent and fastidious Hans Diefenbach, so often the object of amused pity and derision, should now advance to the grail of her close affection, surrounded by a glow of virtue? The need for a single, supreme confidant was greater than ever in the impersonal routine of Wronke fortress. Rosa's friends were all delighted; the marriage of scarlet and alabaster, so suitable for both, became their fond hope for the conclusion of the war.² But there was also nothing naïve about Diefenbach's affection for Rosa Luxemburg. He may not have realized the circumstances of his own promotion, but he did know Rosa's weaknesses as well as her great strengths. With slightly mocking affection he provided for Rosa in his will—a sum of money to be held in strict trust, lest among other things she should spend it 'politically'. 'The money must be managed by some responsible person—e.g. my sister—and the beneficiary shall get the interest annually until the date of her death. I make this disposition because my excellent friend may not prove as great a genius in her personal economy as in her understanding of the economics of a whole society.'³ Despite her great grief, Rosa was annoyed rather than flattered when this came out after his death in action in 1917.⁴

Many of Rosa's letters from prison were published as an act of piety. They were meant to show that the red revolutionary, the enthusiastic propagandist of violence and destruction, was in fact a highly sensitive, easily hurt, kindly woman who suffered with every frozen wasp and had a deep love of life and of living creatures. What Luise Kautsky and her son Benedikt have done is to say to us:

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 77.

² Reported by Blumenberg. But Luise Kautsky's statement that the marriage was an 'understood thing' is, I am sure, an exaggeration—at least as far as Rosa was concerned. Cf. above, p. 371, note 1.

³ *Gedenkbuch*, p. 53.

⁴ Letter to Luise Kautsky, dated 29 May 1918, in *International Review of Social History*, 1963, Vol. VIII, Part 1, pp. 106–7.

choose—between the public and the private Rosa; at least observe the contrast between the two. Rosa herself would probably have laughed at this attempt and poured scorn on such sentimentality. For what is implied is that we must take these letters as evidence of another Rosa, a spontaneous and much more human Rosa, to set against the intensely political being of her public writings. The error is to see her political writings as artefacts, the letters as natural, bursting through in a torrent of temperament. In fact, there was nothing spontaneous about these letters at all. They were written quickly, but writing them was as disciplined and deliberate an activity as any of her political work. Phrases, thoughts, run through them like sudden inspirations—but they are raw material, bait, not ends in themselves. Whatever spontaneity there may be in Luxemburgism, it is not here. Every syllable serves a purpose. The real, the only, spontaneity of which Rosa was ever capable was—silence. When she was really moved she could not communicate at all. But silence cannot be quoted or recorded and so we must rely on her own occasional references to it. Thus after the death of her father Rosa wrote to Minna Kautsky: ‘This blow shook me so deeply that I could not communicate for many months either by letter or word of mouth.’¹ And after one of the worst blows of her life, the death of her devoted Hans Diefenbach: ‘I have just received word that Hans has fallen. For the moment I am unable to write more. Brevity and frankness are the most merciful things, just as with a difficult operation. I am unable to find words.’² This was still the same woman who years before had shyly written of her own compulsive need for self-communion, and wondered if there was something peculiar about her on account of it—as though it were some terrible evidence of failure.³

Last but not least, there was the imperceptible re-creation of *Spartakus*—quite apart from its political purposes—as an ideal peer group, very much like that comfortable if highly sprung sociological mattress—the original SDKPiL. While Kautsky’s accusations of political ambition were absurd, they did make unintended sense in social and intellectual terms. Rosa’s organizational commitment to the big party as late as January 1917 was actually a substantial personal sacrifice.

¹ 30 December 1900. IISH Archives, now printed *ibid.*, p. 97.

² *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 204, 10 and 15 November 1917.

³ Seidel letters, p. 70.

Always and eternally the same elevated personalities around me—Adolf Hoffmann with his characteristic ‘popular’ humour, and those unmentionables (forgive me!) like two collapsing Doric columns; that perpetual brown velvet hat of Papa Pfannkuch. . . . The thought of being surrounded to the end of my life by such phenomena makes me shudder. The world is upside down. ‘Thrones overturned and empires split’—and at the end of it all I never get out from under that perpetual same dozen people—*plus ça change, plus ça reste tout à fait la même chose*.¹

She swore that after the war, whatever happened, she would not go back to the boredom and bureaucratic mincing-machine of the pre-war party—‘no more meetings, no more conventicles. Where great things are in the making, where the wind roars about the ears, that’s where I’ll be in the thick of it, but not the daily treadmill.’² In the meantime Rosa would deal only with real political ‘friends’—friends almost in the English sense of being like-minded; a selection made by circumstances and by herself: no more need for reservations, for tact, for all those political concessions which had disfigured the sociology of the old SPD. The new peer group mustered for Franz Mehring’s 70th birthday. ‘We honoured the old man with speeches, all serious and suitable to the occasion. Quite different from that jamboree with Bebel, do you remember?’³ A peer group imposes personal responsibilities. Even from prison Rosa encouraged the old man with all the means at her disposal, for every member of that small band was immensely valuable.

How wrong you are to think that your bad mood has anything to do with age. What better evidence of youthfulness than your indestructible pleasure in your work, in fighting and laughing, the way you still set about it every day [*Sie noch jeden Tag in die Pfanne hauen*]. You cannot imagine to what extent the example of your wonderful capacity for work, the thought of your mental flexibility and even the hope of earning your approval, egg me on. How I look forward to sitting again in your comfortable study at the small table to talk with you and laugh with you.⁴

Both Mehring and Clara Zetkin spent some time in custody during the war and both were in very poor health. Rosa organized

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 76.

² Rosa Luxemburg to Clara Zetkin, 1 July 1917, photocopy IML (B), NL5iii-A/14.

³ Rosa Luxemburg to Clara Zetkin, 9 March 1916; File 209, No. 494, IML (M).

⁴ *Ibid.*, File 201, No. 858, IML (M).

a complete almoner's service for Clara Zetkin's benefit, nagging her friends to call on her or at least to keep writing; Rosa was not above berating Hans Diefenbach for visiting Stuttgart without making a point of calling on Clara Zetkin.¹ The almoner-in-chief was none other than Mathilde Jacob, Rosa's secretary. Her war-time letters to Clara Zetkin are preserved, and while they contain little of political interest—Mathilde Jacob was not a very political person but *was* devoted to Rosa—they do reflect the stream of instructions, queries, and suggestions which emanated from Wronke and Breslau for the better preservation of Clara Zetkin. The latter was a hypersensitive, often obstinate woman who had to be coaxed—and this, under precise instruction from Rosa, larded with concrete tokens of regard like books and flowers, was Mathilde's job.²

In fact Mathilde Jacob played an important role as Rosa Luxemburg's funnel for communicating with the outside world and also as a means for carrying political messages in and out of jail. The best proof of Rosa Luxemburg's charisma is the loyal and devoted service of this fundamentally unpolitical person who was willing to add political functions to her private tasks for a cause in which she was not primarily interested. Indeed, her interest lapsed quickly with Rosa Luxemburg's death.³ Rosa Luxemburg's friends, however, were well aware that the woman engaged as her secretary had voluntarily 'promoted herself to being Rosa's kindly spirit'.⁴ Apart from Mathilde Jacob's communication with Clara Zetkin, she conveyed Rosa's wishes and messages to all and sundry, Mehring, Paul Levi, Haase, and others.⁵ Most important

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 102.

'I really take exception to the fact that you have not visited Clara. You should have *made* time. Do you understand what I am after in this case? The more I reproach myself that I do not stand by her sufficiently, the more was it important and a relief to me that you were doing better than I, and as it were made up for my shortcomings with your own good nature and sympathy for her. And now you have failed me completely . . . I must ask you at once to write to her honestly and openly and make everything good with a really kind letter.'

² The letters are in IML (M).

³ This clearly emerges from her public declaration after Rosa Luxemburg's death; see above, p. 27.

⁴ Luise Kautsky to Mathilde Jacob, 1 November 1915, in the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

⁵ Many of Mathilde Jacob's letters are preserved in the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, as are some 125 letters from Rosa Luxemburg to Mathilde Jacob from 10 July 1916 to 8 November 1918. I have not seen this collection but it is discussed, unfortunately in a very haphazard and unsystematic way, by Ralph H. Tutz in *Journal of Central European Affairs*, Vol. XXIII, No. 3,

of all, Rosa Luxemburg was able to unload on her faithful friend and servant some of the inevitable spleen that collected through the years of imprisonment—without fear that it would be resented.¹

In a Socialist society, for which the peer group was to be a skeleton, the strong must carry the old and infirm. In 1918 Mehring suffered a blackout while walking in the street and Rosa wrote to him:

I cannot tell you how much your last letter and the news of your accident have affected me. Normally I support my own almost four-year-old slavery with the patience of a lamb; but now under the influence of your painful news I was seized by such a fever of impatience and a burning desire to get out to Berlin and see with my own eyes how you are, to shake you by the hand and spend an hour or so chatting with you . . . I am certain that next year at last we shall all be able to gather round you for your birthday. . . .²

It is noticeable that Rosa's concern was largely with the older generation, with the small group of intellectuals who had broken loose with such agony after 4 August 1914. There are only a few references to younger sympathizers, the new shock troops of radicalism, later to dominate the KPD until many of them, too, were flung off the dizzy turntable of Bolshevization. To this extent Rosa was anchored in the Second International; in her personal relations she looked backwards to the past rather than to the future. Only when a different social organization was found to be required in order to make effective an old philosophy did the new men begin to come into their own.

Not that the work of care and protection all went one way. A determined effort was made to cushion Rosa Luxemburg from the exigencies of prison—and the only reason this remained unsung was that its inspirer and director was Leo Jogiches, furtive as ever. Rosa had always suffered from a delicate stomach, and now more than ever; the collection of rice to supply her with the right diet was no easy task in blockaded, war-time Germany. Rosi Wolffstein,

October 1963, pp. 303–12. Although this article contains many errors of fact, one must presume that its quotations and direct references from Mathilde Jacob's letters are reliable.

¹ See letters dated 11 and 18 August 1917, following Rosa's discovery that her cat Mimi had been dead for some time and that her friends had wanted to 'spare' her the news. (IML(B), NL2000-A/16, pp. 29–30, 35.)

² *Die Internationale*, 1923, Vol. VI, No. 3, p. 70.

Rosa's ex-student, had helped significantly in this effort, and was summoned to a secret meeting with the redoubtable Dr. Kryśtałowicz (Leo Jogiches) at a station café to receive his formal thanks on Rosa's behalf.¹ Indeed, Jogiches now devoted himself to Rosa in the most touching way, thus opening up the third and last period of peace in their long and often stormy relationship.

The February revolution in Russia was the first crack in the dishearteningly monolithic pursuit of imperialist war. But no one dreamt that the events in Petrograd would eventually end Russia's participation in the alliance against Germany. On the contrary, a more popular government was expected to release national energy into more effective prosecution of the war. No one quite knew what to make of the events—whether they were a good or bad omen for Germany, or for the Socialists for that matter. Rosa Luxemburg's first reaction was personal. 'So many old friends, locked up for years in Moscow, Petersburg, Orel or Riga, now walking about free! How much easier that makes my own incarceration. It is a strange change of roles, isn't it? But I am satisfied and don't begrudge them their freedom, even though it means *my* chances have got so much the worse.'² In July 1917, and again the next year, the question arose as to whether Rosa might claim Russian citizenship and benefit from deportation, like Marchlewski. Another alternative was a special exchange of distinguished revolutionaries; such a move was at one time envisaged for Karl Liebknecht. Rosa was undecided; 'perhaps, maybe—a difficult question'. In the end she declined. What mattered was the inevitable German revolution, and she wanted to be on hand for it—even if it meant longer imprisonment meanwhile.³

For her information about events in Russia she necessarily depended on the newspapers, and the newspapers were cautious. Right from the start the German government had worked out precise directions to the press about its reporting of the events in Russia. No discussion of the new constitutional forms which had emerged from the Russian revolution was permitted, since 'they only indicate how one should proceed here in case of an upheaval'. Even after the October revolution, which was clearly to Germany's

¹ This story was told to the author by Frau Frölich herself.

² *Briefe an Freunde*, pp. 87–88, 27 May 1917.

³ Rosa Luxemburg to Mathilde Jacob, 29 July 1917, photocopy IML (B), NL2 III-A/16, p. 20.

advantage, the German authorities would only permit such comments on the Soviet state as served as a frightening example; 'all that explains or praises the proceedings of the revolutionaries in Russia must be suppressed'.¹

Rosa's first official reaction in the *Spartakus* letter of April 1917 was also cautious.² The analysis was historical, backward-looking—a sure sign of uncertainty. All that could be done was to hark back to the events of 1905–1906: once more the liberals were shown as being on the verge of reaction instead of in the vanguard of revolution; the proletariat was warned that further advances would depend on itself and no one else. Almost syllabically the next objectives are spelled out (no reason why that distinguished 'international' tactician Rosa Luxemburg from inside a German prison should not give dialectical advice to far-away Petrograd): democratic republic, eight-hour day, confiscation of large landed properties; above all, an end to the imperialist war. It was a curiously formal and archaic programme, as though the clock had really been turned back to 1906. Peace was just the first of several demands that must be put forward, less in the hope of achieving them than as a means of galvanizing working-class action. This was the old idea of a programme, not as a political expression of wants but as a process of political stimulation. It is important to understand this if the reaction of *Spartakus* to the unexpected conclusion of peace by the Bolsheviks less than a year later is to make sense. The demand for peace was a weapon, not something which one could actually hope to achieve.

The second part of the article was a reckoning with the claim of the German government and its SPD supporters that the war against Russia was a war of liberation from Tsarist absolutism. This was safer, more familiar ground.

Events in Russia have also faced the German proletariat with a vital question of honour. . . . Once the Russian proletariat has burst the solidarity of the home front through open revolution, the German proletariat unashamedly stabs it in the back by continuing to support the war. From now on the German troops in the East do not fight against Tsarism any longer, but against the revolution; as soon as the

¹ *Revolutionäre Ereignisse und Probleme in Deutschland während der Periode der grossen sozialistischen Oktoberrevolution 1917/1918*, Berlin (East) 1957, p. 282, quoting a minute from the Ministry of the Interior.

² 'Die Revolution in Russland', *Spartakusbrieife*, pp. 302–5. The attribution to Rosa Luxemburg is mine.

Russian proletariat comes out openly for peace the German proletariat by remaining silent will become the accomplice to an open betrayal of its Russian brethren—if it remains silent. Russia has liberated herself, but who will liberate Germany from military dictatorship, from *Junker* reaction, from the imperialist slaughter?¹

In the next *Spartakus* letter of May 1917 there were two lengthy articles by Rosa Luxemburg.² There had been time to read and think. Preoccupation with the past was pushed aside in favour of a more rigorous examination of the present.

In the stuffy atmosphere of Europe, in which everything has been effectively stifled for three years, a window has at last been torn open, and a fresh and lively current of air is blowing in. . . . But even with the greatest heroism the proletariat of a single country cannot break the stranglehold [of the world war] by itself. Thus the Russian revolution inevitably grows into an international problem. The Russian workers' striving for peace comes into the strongest conflict not only with their own middle class but with that of England, France, and Italy. . . . The Socialist proletariat of England, France, and Italy has the unavoidable duty of unfolding the flag of rebellion against the war—in the form of effective mass actions against the ruling classes at home. . . . As for the German bourgeoisie . . . it only wants to use the Russian proletariat to get itself out of a war on two fronts, seeing how unfavourable the strategic situation is abroad and how poor the supply position at home. This is the same machination by German imperialism to make use of the Russian revolution for its own self-interested purposes as that attempted by the allied powers, only in the opposite way. The western powers want to harness the bourgeois liberal tendency of the revolution in order to . . . defeat their German competitors. The German imperialists want to use the proletarian tendencies of the revolution to avoid a military defeat—and why not, gentlemen? German Social Democracy has served so faithfully and long in dressing up mass slaughter as 'liberation' from Russian Tsarism; now the Russian Social Democrats are called upon to assist by helping the 'liberator' out of his unhappy involvement in an unsuccessful war.³

Scheidemann's role as a go-between for Russia and Germany had been engineered by Parvus's string-pulling behind the scenes, with the blessing of the German Foreign Office. Some of this was known to *Spartakus* though they did not yet realize the full purpose of the originators of the plan. Rosa sensed that Ebert's and

¹ Ibid., p. 305.

² 'Der alte Maulwurf' (The Old Mole), *Spartakusbriefe*, pp. 322-9; 'Zwei Osterbotschaften' (Two Easter Messages), *ibid.*, pp. 347-51.

³ Ibid., pp. 323-5.

Scheidemann's initiative in Copenhagen was part of an official flirtation with Russian revolutionaries *against* the Russian liberals who had declared their support for the war. She was certain that such a mission 'could only get a kick in the pants from Russian Socialists of all shades', but she was wrong. Parvus short-circuited the SPD at this stage and got the German authorities to deal with Lenin direct, instead of with the Workers' and Soldiers' Soviet in Petrograd.¹

Having all too correctly analysed the interests of the belligerent governments and their supporters, Rosa turned once more to the interests of the Russian and German working classes. In her view it was now possible at last to talk of a real war of liberation, the kind of defensive struggle she had indicated in the *Juniusbroschüre*.

The question of peace for the Russian proletariat is not as simple as would suit Hindenburg [and] Bethmann [the German Chancellor] at this particular moment. The outbreak of the revolution and the powerful position of the proletariat as a result have changed the [character of] imperialist war in Russia to something akin to that claimed in the propaganda of the ruling classes in all countries: a war of defence. The liberals, with their dreams of a Russian Constantinople, have had their plans stuffed down their throats; the solution of a patriotic war of defence has suddenly become reality. The Russian proletariat, however, can only end the war and make peace in good conscience when their work—the achievements of the revolution and its unhampered progress—is assured. The Russian workers are today the only ones who *really* defend freedom, progress and democracy.²

Already the analysis diverged sharply from that of Lenin. Looking outwards from Russia, it was the same old imperialist war, now carried on by Kerensky and Chkheidze instead of Nicholas and his ministers—to be combated by exactly the same means; any means, including German help. Looking out from Germany, however, the Russian revolution had achieved something worth defending against the strong and unrepentant German reaction, which might want peace with Russia for tactical reasons, but in the long run would want even more to destroy the revolution. This in essence was to be the *Spartakus* position for the next eighteen months. They recognized the need for peace as the only way to open up further revolutionary horizons, but not a peace which left imperial Germany

¹ Philipp Scheidemann, *Memoiren eines Sozialdemokraten*, Vol. I, pp. 420–7.

² *Spartakusbriege*, pp. 326–7.

triumphant. The x in the equation was the German revolution.

What prescription for the German workers under these circumstances?

Who guarantees that tomorrow, after the conclusion of peace and as soon as German militarism has got its paw out of the trap, it will not attack the Russian proletariat in order to prevent dangerous undermining from that quarter? . . . the throttled 'assurances' of the former heroes of the SPD are not enough. . . . The danger of German militarism for imperialist England or France is truly rubbish, myth, the publicity of competitors. The danger of German militarism for republican revolutionary Russia, however, is real enough. . . . There is only one guarantee against future danger to the Russian revolution: the awakening of the German proletariat, the seizing of power by *German* 'soldiers and workers' at home, the revolutionary action of the *German* people in the cause of peace. To make peace with Bethmann and Hindenburg is a damnably difficult risk for the Russian revolutionary soldiers. The question of peace is indeed a part of the unhindered and utterly radical development of the Russian revolution, but this in turn is tied to parallel revolutionary action in the cause of peace on the part of the French, English, Italian and particularly the German proletariat.¹

The turgid phrases so untypical of Rosa were no accident; there was nothing but vague hopes and generalizations to offer; not a hiccough of revolution in Germany. It was the beginning of that intellectual paralysis that was to befall *Spartakus* increasingly as the war went on, and the Russians acted in a German vacuum.

Even before the pact between Lenin and Trotsky, in which the one accepted Bolshevik organization and the other armed insurrection as the motor of the 'permanent' revolution, Rosa Luxemburg in her German jail had announced the complete dependence of the Russian revolution on revolutions elsewhere. To succeed, the revolution in Russia had to spark off revolutionary outbreaks—above all in Germany. This was the key. Scheidemann's negotiations for a possible peace between the Russian revolution and German imperialism were only mentioned in order to show them as grotesque absurdities. Rosa knew nothing of the assiduous negotiations between Parvus, Karl Moor, and the German Foreign Office, of the impending journey of Lenin and his entourage through Germany in a sealed train provided by the German government. She believed such eventualities to be not only un-

¹ Ibid., pp. 327-8.

desirable but impossible. Her task and that of her friends now lay in bringing about a revolutionary outbreak in Germany. Every effort of *Spartakus* from now on was directed to achieving this aim. If only the masses could be awakened, and made to see their own interest! To that end she now directed her efforts, with an increasingly bitter and sarcastic tone as her words scattered like useless autumn leaves among passers-by preoccupied with other worries than saving the Russian revolution. In Rosa's mind the pattern of the Russian revolution was set in February, not in October. The unpredictable product of history (unpredictable in time), and therefore the more important, was the February revolution; the events of October were merely the logical consequence and as such had already been placed within their historical context in April and May 1917. This was to be the real issue between her and the Bolsheviks, more than any dispute over the tactical details of the next twelve months. For Rosa the achievements of February would last while those of October were a transient success, valuable only as an experience. (As we shall see, she in no way belittled the Bolshevik achievement. But while October was the achievement of the courageous, determined Bolsheviks, February was the achievement of history—base and superstructure!) Unless of course the German working class came to the rescue. And to some extent later Communist attacks on her judgement suffered from the awkwardness of the following choice: either they had to accept the October revolution as a natural consequence of the earlier February revolution, in which case like Rosa they had to admit the historical primacy of the earlier events; or the October revolution was indeed an act of will, an arbitrary *détournement* of history, and only then could Rosa Luxemburg justifiably be accused of misunderstanding when she failed to recognize its special significance. After her death it was said that she had simply changed her mind and recognized her errors. We shall have the opportunity of examining the case for this later. What matters here is that in outline Rosa's ideas had already taken shape *before* October 1917.

Spartakus openly greeted the events of February and propagated them as widely as possible in Germany. The *Spartakus* letter in which Rosa published her two articles contains a collection of documents and proclamations issued by the all-Russian Soviet. Certainly *Spartakus* articles written by other comrades followed

Rosa Luxemburg's analysis very closely. In August 1917 the unknown author of an article entitled 'Burning questions of the time' foresaw in Russia the emergence of a dictatorship of the proletariat, but added: 'Here begins the fatal destiny of the Russian revolution. The dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia is destined to suffer a desperate defeat compared to which the fate of the Paris Commune was child's play—unless the international proletarian revolution gives it support in good time.'¹ But just as the Russian revolution required the help of the German working classes in order to survive, so—true to the 'internationalism' of the *Spartakus* group—did the German Left appeal to the successful Russian revolutionaries for support against their own Mensheviks, the majority SPD.

The agreement of our Russian comrades to admit Messrs. Südekum, Scheidemann, Legien, etc. to the Stockholm conference would be a heavy blow to the international Socialist idea in Germany and to our common cause . . . it might be taken as a recognition and legitimation of these gentlemen by international Socialism and would greatly confuse once more the already well advanced process of clarification among the German workers.²

Here, too, were the first traces of that profound pessimism for the short term which characterized Rosa's thinking about the Russian, and later the German, revolutions. It was not an easy point to make in public, especially while the war was on. As early as April 1917 Rosa wrote to Marta Rosenbaum:

Of course the marvels in Russia are like a new lease of life for me. They are a saving grace [*heilbotschaft*] for all of us. I only fear that you all do not appreciate them enough, do not recognise sufficiently that it is our own cause which is winning there. It *must* and *will* have a salutary effect on the whole world, it must radiate outwards into the whole of Europe; I am absolutely certain that it will bring a new epoch and that the war cannot last long.³

¹ *Spartakusbriege*, p. 356. According to the style of this article, it could well be by Leo Jogiches.

² Letter of Franz Mehring on behalf of the *Gruppe Internationale* to the Petrograd Workers' and Soldiers' Soviet, *Dokumente und Materialien*, Vol. II, pp. 592-3. The letter first appeared as part of the 'Internationale Korrespondenz' in the Swiss paper *Berner Tagwacht*, in June 1917. The Stockholm conference in question never actually took place since the Bolsheviki refused to attend and the English and French delegations could not appear because their respective governments refused to issue passports. From 5 to 12 September, however, a conference of left-wing Socialist groups did take place in Stockholm, known as the Third Zimmerwald Conference.

³ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 157.

But this enthusiasm was for a distant future. An epoch was a long-term concept; as soon as her friends began to cast favourable horoscopes for the immediate political scene Rosa blew cold at once: 'We must not count on permanent success [in Russia], though in any case even the attempt to seize power is already a slap in the face for our Social Democrats and the whole miserable International.'¹ And to Luise Kautsky she predicted even more baldly that 'of course, the Bolsheviks will never be able to maintain themselves'.² Once more she reflected and also created *Spartakus* opinion—though both Franz Mehring and Clara Zetkin were to prove more optimistic after the events of October.³

Neither the circumstances of the October revolution nor the implications of Lenin's policy of peace and land distribution to the peasants were clear to anyone in Germany—except perhaps to the German government. The Left, particularly the leaders in prison, were unable to distinguish the inevitable from the peculiar, the historical from the 'man-made', in the events in Russia. That was why they could not see the factors making for Bolshevik survival. Their disapproval of these factors once they knew them, and their ability to pass judgement on them—which the Bolsheviks later questioned precisely as being ill-informed—was, as we shall see, quite a different matter; for by that time survival was no longer a revolutionary factor but one compounded of non-Socialist concessions which carried within them the dialectic of their own peculiar problems—it was that or repression, on an ever-growing scale.

In July 1917 the wheels of the German security administration ground out Rosa's transfer from the fortress in Wronke to the town prison of Breslau. This was much closer confinement, in terms of physical space as well as visits and facilities. There is no evidence that the transfer was a punishment for any breach of discipline or that the smuggling of illegal material through Mathilde Jacob and Marta Rosenbaum was suspected.

Here I am leading the existence of a proper convict, i.e. day and night they lock me into my cell and all I can see outside is the men's prison

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, pp. 160–1. The East German historian, Leo Stern, summarizing the reaction of the German Left to the outbreak of the revolution in Russia, gives the cheerful quotation, but not the pessimistic one (*Der Einfluss der grossen Oktoberrevolution*, p. 79).

² *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 207.

³ See below, pp. 689, 693.

. . . I limit my presence [in the yard where I can see all the other prisoners running about] to the minimum prescribed by the doctor for health reasons and during my walks I look around as little as possible. The difference from Wronke is in every respect a sharp one, though this is not a complaint but merely an explanation if for the time being I do not write letters woven out of the scent of roses, the azure colour of the sky and the wisps of cloud to which you have hitherto been accustomed. . . .¹

In addition, Rosa's health had worsened again. 'My stomach has been rebelling strongly for several weeks and I actually had to spend part of the time in bed; even now I exist mainly on warm bandages and very thin soup. The cause is uncertain, probably nervous reaction to the sudden worsening of my general circumstances.'²

At the beginning of 1917 an effort had been made to obtain Rosa's release on the grounds of ill-health, but this failed owing to lack of liaison between her own doctor and the local medical practitioner acting on behalf of the authorities.³ In addition, her new lawyer, Dr. Pinner, bombarded the Commander-in-Chief, under whose orders Rosa Luxemburg was detained, with complaints and appeals. The second senate of the military court (*Reichsmilitärgericht*) heard the appeal and refused the military prosecutor's motion that proofs of treasonable activities confidentially obtained should be submitted against her. The prosecutor also argued that her divorce from Gustav Lübeck automatically cancelled her German citizenship. On 22 February 1918 the High Court (*Reichsgericht*) heard a final appeal against detention but dismissed it.⁴ For once Rosa Luxemburg had been wholeheartedly behind the attempt to force the German authorities to release her. Her severe depression at the beginning of 1917 and again in Breslau were in part the consequence of these protracted but unsuccessful efforts.

From the end of 1917 onwards Rosa Luxemburg's influence on the tactics and policy of *Spartakus* undoubtedly suffered a decline. Various factors contributed to this, partly on Rosa's side, partly arising out of the situation. With her transfer to Breslau she was more cut off, her state of mind more self-absorbed than ever. The

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, pp. 126-7.

² *Ibid.*, p. 127.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 150-1.

⁴ See *Reichsmilitärgericht*, No. 476, A(Sch), quoted by Lutz, *Journal of Central European Affairs*, Vol. XXIII (1963), p. 312.

Spartakus letters had largely been her inspiration and effort; without her frequent contributions they lost much of their lustre. Moreover, her immediate circle of political friends, for whom she had acted as the fountain-head of strategy as well as tactics, began to lose its grip on events. Leo Jogiches was arrested on 24 March 1918; the authorities knew that with his arrest they had captured the main organizer of *Spartakus* activities as well as the willing vehicle of Rosa Luxemburg's ideas.¹ This left Franz Mehring, now seventy years old, Ernst Meyer and Paul Levi in charge, of whom only the first was a member of the peer group. More important still, the development of the opposition in Germany was temporarily moving against *Spartakist* influence. There were two waves of strikes, one in April 1917, another far bigger in January 1918—the first to have distinctly political overtones. But although these events had full *Spartakus* support with handbills and appeals, they were not under its direction nor had *Spartakus* exercised any significant influence on them. Not even recent East German history claims more than propagandistic participation for *Spartakus* in either of these events.² Out of these strikes, and leading them, there emerged an elusive organization of workers based on the larger factories of Berlin, and with it the first traces of workers' councils. In spite of arrests and the military draft of thousands of restive workers, the organization remained more or less intact throughout the war and found its political expression in the Revolutionary Shop Stewards (*Revolutionäre Obleute*) who were to play such a significant role in the period from November 1918 to March 1919.

Spartakus was following rather than making events in Germany from the end of 1917 onwards.³ The intellectuals, who provided *Spartakus* with its sophisticated programme and the necessary Marxist analysis of the situation, now had no significant function to fulfil, especially not from prison. Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were too honest to claim for themselves a leading role

¹ *Archivalische Forschungen*, 4/III, p. 1282. See also *Dokumente und Materialien*, Vol. II, p. 131.

² For summary and sources of this evidence, see E. Kolb, *Die Arbeiterräte in der deutschen Innenpolitik, 1918–19*, Düsseldorf 1962, p. 49.

³ For Jogiches' report on the January strikes and the *Spartakus* role in them, see *Dokumente und Materialien*, Vol. II, pp. 131–6. This document was found during the house search undertaken at the time of his arrest and was given limited and confidential distribution in the administration by the German authorities as a cautionary tale.

which at the time they did not play; Liebknecht, whose correspondence was very restricted by prison regulations, merely noted down a continual commentary on events, while Rosa's letters gave no more than fleeting, desperate references. There was remoteness, self-absorption; her remaining efforts were concentrated on the one event on which she could speak with unchallenged authority—the Russian revolution.

Among the first public commentators on the Bolshevik victory at the beginning of November 1917 Rosa Luxemburg was noticeably absent. This may have been due to physical difficulties. The most enthusiastic support came from Radek's old friends in Bremen, and from Clara Zetkin.¹ Both these articles, while stressing the dangers and difficulties, pledged immediate and complete support for the Bolsheviks. But in private Rosa Luxemburg asked Luise Kautsky on 24 November:

Are you happy about the Russians? Of course, they will not be able to maintain themselves in this witches' Sabbath, not because statistics show economic development in Russia to be too backward as your clever husband has figured out, but because Social Democracy in the highly developed West consists of miserable and wretched cowards who will look quietly on and let the Russians bleed to death. But such an end is better than 'living on for the fatherland'; it is an act of historical significance whose traces will not have disappeared even after many ages have passed. I expect great things to come in the next few years, but how I wish that I did not have to admire world history only through the bars of my cage.²

To Mathilde Wurm she had written a week earlier: 'My heart is heavy for the Russians, I don't expect the continued victory of the Leninists, but still—such an end is better than "living on for the fatherland".'³

¹ *Arbeiterpolitik*, No. 46, 14 November 1917. See also Clara Zetkin in the women's supplement of *LV*, 30 November 1917.

² *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 207. This letter was written almost immediately after the death of Hans Diefenbach, during a period when Rosa was emotionally handicapped in her ability to write.

³ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 55, 15 November 1917. Once more the partially identical phraseology of these two letters is an interesting example of Rosa's careful 'rationing' of words and feelings, and incidental evidence that her letters were deliberate, not spontaneous, creations. The contemptuous reference to 'living on for the fatherland' [instead of dying] is based on Heinrich Heine's sarcastic portrait of the heroically posturing but perpetually surviving Polish revolutionary émigrés of his day (see above, p. 103, note 3).

By the middle of November the impending peace negotiations with the Bolsheviks had been written up in the German press and Rosa's private comments became much more incisive.

Yes, the Bolsheviks; of course they don't please me either with their fanatical determination to make peace at any price [*Friedensfanatizismus*] but after all *they* are not to blame. They are in a cleft stick and have only the choice between two sets of troubles, and are choosing the lesser. *Others* are responsible for the fact that the devil is the beneficiary of the Russian revolution. . . . Consequently, let us first sweep before our own doors. On the whole the events there are glorious and will have immeasurable results. If I could but talk with you and Igel [Karl Kautsky's brother, Hans] about all these things and especially if I could only get out of here! But complaining isn't my strong suit; for the present I am trying to follow events and am in good hope of participating one of these days. . . .¹

Doubts about the wisdom of a Russian revolutionary peace with German imperialism were expressed in the first public *Spartakus* comment on the events of October. A curious reversal in the roles of USPD and *Spartakus* had taken place. The former now hailed the prospect of negotiations and attempted to use the events in Russia for bringing pressure on the German government in the direction of Kautsky's old scheme for a 'just' peace without annexations.² They had thus inherited *Spartakus*'s slogan of peace at any price, first and foremost, if there was to be anything left of the proletariat. *Spartakus*, on the other hand, now saw in the conclusion of peace with Russia nothing but benefit for German imperialism and its wish to destroy the Russian revolution. The article 'Historical Responsibility' in the *Spartakus* letter of January 1918 was sour and unhappy in tone; the anonymous author could see no good from any of the probable alternatives in the near future. Now that an armistice had been concluded, a separate peace treaty between Germany and Russia was only a matter of time.

Not even the irony of seeing the hated and despised Bolshevik revolutionaries elevated to the status of equal negotiating partners by the German government could alleviate the harm.

Only the rock-like certainty of its reliance on the hopeless backwardness of the German people could have brought German reaction to make the

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, pp. 214-15, 19 December 1917.

² *LV*, 12 November 1917.

experiment of shaking the hand of the Petersburg murderers and pyromaniacs, who have just thrown on to the rubbish heap throne, altar, interest payments on foreign bonds, titles and various other sacrosanct items, who have strung up unrepentant generals from the windows of railway carriages and put the useless scions of the royal house in prison. . . . According to the press, Trotsky has made several speeches about the international situation in which he presents the effect of the Russian revolution on other countries in a very rosy light. . . . If these press reports are correct then we must regrettably pour water into Trotsky's champagne. It is psychologically understandable that the Bolsheviks should see a prestige success in that most important question of peace and should present themselves as successful to the Russian people. But a second look shows the Bolsheviks in another light. The immediate effect of the armistice in the East will merely be that German troops will be moved from there to the West. . . . Already the last bloody German advances in Flanders and in the South, the new 'marvellous' successes in Italy, are the direct results of Bolshevik victory in Petersburg . . . the mask of virtue and restraint which was forced on German imperialism by its precarious military situation up till now will be thrown into the lap of the Scheidemanns. With the help of God—who is undoubtedly on the side of the big battalions—a 'German peace' will be dictated. . . . This is how the situation really is and the Bolsheviks are only deceiving themselves and others if they hear the melody of peace on earth. . . . The last laugh about the Russian revolution has hitherto been exclusively enjoyed by Hindenburg and the German nationalists.¹

January 1918—the lowest ebb of confidence and hope. The unknown Jeremiah could not even offer any good advice, for every avenue of progress was blocked. In fact the article has all the makings of an epitaph.

The German workers continue to watch the spectacle good-naturedly, continue to be mere spectators, and so Soviet rule in Russia cannot find a fate different from the Paris Commune. This connection [between Germany and Russia] is already visible in the deterioration of Bolshevik policy. Only the desperate search for some sign of proletarian action in Germany can for instance explain—even if it does not excuse—the fact that the Bolsheviks even for one moment allowed themselves to carry on negotiations with the German official Socialists. Their negotiations with Hindenburg and Hertling [the new German Chancellor] may in their eyes be nothing but sad necessity which merely illuminates the evil German circumstances, but at least they do not cast

¹ *Spartakusbriefer*, pp. 406–9.

any reflection on those in power in St. Petersburg. The fact that they find it necessary to spread revolution into the German masses through such dirty channels as Parvus-Scheidemann proves that they too suffer from a lack of principle [*zerfahrene Zweideutigkeit*], which is completely at variance with their usual severe morality and intolerance of compromise.¹

It was the severest public criticism of the Bolsheviki ever to be uttered by the German Left—typical of the profound pessimism and the deep self-hatred of this black period.

For the first time since 1914 the issue of self-determination, Rosa Luxemburg's old bone of contention, was raised again.

More important and even graver is another mistaken attitude of the Bolsheviki, 'the right of national self-determination' which the Soviet government brandishes around. In reality there is only *one* form of national self-determination which is not a mockery of this 'right': that is the revolution of the proletariat, the mass of people in each nation. Other than this, the right of self-determination within the framework of the bourgeois state is nothing but a hollow phrase which in practice delivers the people into the hands of their ruling classes.²

The bitter polemics of 1913–1914 still rankled.

After the conclusion of the peace of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918, public comment by *Spartakus* surprisingly became more favourable again. Lenin had gone to great trouble to explain and excuse the separate peace; he felt, quite correctly, that it would certainly be misunderstood and resented in Germany. It was, he declared, to the accompaniment of stormy applause, 'the only way out for the survival of the efforts of the proletariat and the poor peasants . . . however hard the conditions it has imposed'. In return he excused the inaction of the German working class: was

¹ *Spartakusbriefe*, pp. 415–16. I do not feel able to identify the author of this depressing article with any confidence. The flat and uncompromising despair does not conjure up Rosa Luxemburg at all. On the other hand the long discussion of Polish and Lithuanian self-determination makes the authorship of Leo Jogiches at least possible.

The reference to Parvus and Scheidemann concerns the Social Democrat leaders' visit to Stockholm in December 1917 at Parvus's request, to negotiate a possible peace with the Russians. This visit took place with the knowledge and approval of the German authorities, who wanted to put out an unofficial feeler to the Soviet government to find out its terms. Parvus had been in financial and political contact with the Bolshevik Bureau in Stockholm since the summer. The attempt failed; the Russians in the end would not deal with the SPD, while the SPD executive were not prepared to carry out the Russian wishes for real peace agitation at home. See Philipp Scheidemann, *Memoiren eines Sozialdemokraten*, Vol. II, pp. 123 ff.

² *Ibid.*, p. 416.

it perhaps a veiled form of moral bargain? 'It is unjust to accuse the German workers of not making a revolution . . . things don't go like that. Revolutions cannot be made to order . . . they ripen as part of the historical development. . . .'¹ The soothing use of Rosa's old phrase of 1904 against Lenin's disciplined revolutionary will was possibly unconscious irony. None the less, 'the [German] working masses will understand, will say: "the Bolsheviki have acted correctly".'²

Apart from the emotional enthusiasm of Clara Zetkin and the concurrence of the small Bremen group, historical justification of the Bolsheviki was chiefly provided by Franz Mehring. Already at the end of 1917 he had adopted in public the long view which Rosa Luxemburg was content to express in her private letters.

Revolutions have a long wind—if they are real; the English revolution of the seventeenth century, the French revolution of the eighteenth, took forty years to impose themselves [on history] and yet how the tasks of these revolutions shrink—one might almost say into *minutiae*—compared to the enormous problems with which the Russian revolution has to struggle.³

At the beginning of 1918 and throughout the year Franz Mehring continued his propagation of 'the long wind of history'. It was not only the need to justify the Russian events in public at any price, which *Spartakus* and—though reluctantly—Rosa Luxemburg accepted. Even Karl Liebknecht, almost completely isolated in Luckau jail—'unable once again to get a proper grip on Russian problems', he complained bitterly—had marked an early outburst against the Bolshevik peace policy in his private notes: 'Not to be printed! With all reserve, owing danger of misdirection. Only intended as basis for discussion. We must avoid any basic tendency to anti-Leninism. Greatest care and tact in all German criticism of Russian proletariat!'⁴ Mehring was more positive. He had never been interested in tactics. In contrast to all his hatreds and self-hatreds, he had a real love for the impersonal processes of history. Where Rosa had primarily abhorred the physical

¹ Speech at the conference of factory committees of Moscow region, 23 July 1918, *Pravda*, No. 153, 24 July; Lenin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXVII, pp. 506-7.

² Speech at session of All-Russian Central Executive, 23 February 1918, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXVII, p. 26.

³ *LV*, 31 December 1917.

⁴ Karl Liebknecht, *Politische Aufzeichnungen*, pp. 32, 102.

annihilation and suffering of the working classes during the war, where Lenin had seen the value of death and destruction for revolutionary purposes, Franz Mehring merely saw abstract history in the making. His increasing support for the Bolsheviks—though he too had criticized the separate peace—and his faith in their survival had a highly personal colouring and certainly does not provide any evidence for the later Bolshevik thesis that their action actually served the best interests of the German proletariat.

Mehring apart, *Spartakus's* increasing commitment to the Bolsheviks was inevitable if the German working classes were not to be boxed in by the sort of negatives implied in the *Spartakus* letter of January 1918. Following the treaty of Brest-Litovsk German troops occupied the Ukraine in spring and summer 1918, together with large parts of the Baltic States and Finland. Violent opposition to what were practically annexations of large parts of Russia was intended to help the Bolsheviks in spite of themselves; to all intents and purposes Germany was once more at war with Russia and the problems of conscience posed by a separate peace were things of the past. Moreover the USPD, which had welcomed the February and October events in Russia, was now becoming sharply critical of the Bolsheviks. On 15 November 1917 Kautsky had analysed Russian conditions and found them wanting; according to the best Marxist standards, conditions in Russia were not ripe for Socialist rule. This thesis produced an immediate reaction from Franz Mehring in *Der Sozialdemokrat* on 5 January 1918; it also induced Rosa Luxemburg to mock Kautsky in public as well as in private. If it was a matter of fighting the USPD leadership or arguing with Kautsky, Rosa at once took up arms on behalf of the Bolsheviks.¹

The long wind of revolution in Russia crippled the chance of any German version in the foreseeable future. Rosa was not willing to say this in public, but Franz Mehring was. In an open letter to the Bolsheviks he wrote: 'If only I could send you better news from the internal life of the German working-class world. But official Socialism grows like an oil stain, even though it may be close to moral and political bankruptcy and daily continues to come closer to it.'² By declaring bankrupt all German revolutionary potential,

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 207. For Lenin's opinion of this support, see below, pp. 707-8

² *Dokumente und Materialien*, Vol. II, p. 158.

Mehring necessarily admitted the failure of the whole *Spartakus* policy; with him it was intellectually in for a penny, in for a pound. 'We have made one big mistake, namely that from an organizational point of view we joined the independents in the hope of driving them forward. This hope we have had to give up. . . .'¹

As late as 5 September 1918 Ernst Meyer wrote to Lenin in much the same vein. 'You will have waited and still be waiting impatiently, as we are, for signs of a revolutionary movement in Germany. Happily all my friends are considerably more optimistic. We cannot unfortunately report large actions at present, or even in the near future, but we have plans for the winter and the conditions in Germany support our work.'²

In the *Spartakus* letter of September 1918 Rosa thus broke a considerable period of silence.³ The essay was the result of a long discussion between her and the leaders of *Spartakus* still at liberty. The latter had by now pronounced an embargo on any criticism of the Bolsheviks; only Rosa's special status made them include this article in the current issue. None the less, the editors added a note of caution:

This article expresses doubts which are widespread in our circles—doubts which arise from the *objective* circumstances of the Bolsheviks not from their *subjective* actions. We are printing it largely on account of its conclusions: that without a German revolution there can be no salvation for the Russian revolution, no hope for Socialism after this world war. There remains only one solution—mass rising of the German proletariat.⁴

Starting from the beginning, Rosa examined the prospects and results of the Russian revolution after eight months of Bolshevik rule. Far from any ignorance or misunderstanding, she showed very real knowledge of events, as well as of the intentions of the Bolsheviks.

The policy which has guided the Bolsheviks is evident: peace at any price, to obtain a respite, meantime to build up and strengthen pro-

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

² *Ibid.*, p. 195. Cf. his own rather different version in *Rote Fahne*, 15 January 1922: 'In vain did I make every effort to impress on Comrade Luxemburg that we were able to look forward to great revolutionary events in Germany in the very near future.' The article was written as part of the KPD's defence against Paul Levi's publication and Meyer, a most punctilious person, may be forgiven his retrospective optimism (below, pp. 792 ff.).

³ *Spartakusbriege*, p. 453.

⁴ *Ibid.* The article itself must have been written some time at the very end of July or more probably in early August.

letarian dictatorship in Russia, to realize as many Socialist reforms as possible and thus to await the outbreak of the international proletarian revolution, to hasten this event with the Russian example.

So far not very different from the current or subsequent Bolshevik self-image. But, Rosa went on, the Russian revolution was in an unhappy dilemma.

Two notions stood Godmother at its birth, the unshakeable belief in the European revolution and the determination to defend its existence within Russia. But the evil Godmother was left out of account—German militarism, to which Russia has delivered itself for good or ill by making its separate peace. This peace was in reality nothing else but a capitulation of the Russian revolutionary proletariat before German imperialism. Naturally Lenin and his friends deceived neither themselves nor others. They openly admitted their capitulation. Where they did deceive themselves was with the hope of buying a real respite, the hope of escaping once and for all from the hell-fires of the world war. They did not take account of the fact that Russia's capitulation at Brest-Litovsk would stiffen the hopes of the German militarists, which in turn could not but weaken the chances of a revolutionary rising in Germany; far from bringing about the end of the war with Germany, they merely hastened the beginning of a new phase of it.¹

Rosa Luxemburg's severe indictment was on four main counts, the same that she later elaborated in her pamphlet 'The Russian Revolution'.

[One,] the victory of counter-revolution in all the revolutionary outposts of Russia—for Finland, the Baltic, Ukraine, Caucasus, all these are Russia, namely the territory of the Russian revolution, whatever the hollow middle-class phrases about 'national self-determination' may claim. Two, separation of the remaining revolutionary areas of Russia from its granaries, coal mines, iron-ore mines and oil supplies, in fact from all the most important sources of life. Three, encouragement and strengthening of all counter-revolutionary elements inside Russia. Four, making Germany the arbiter of the political and economic destinies of Russia and of relations with its own provinces—Finland, Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, Caucasus, even neighbouring states like Rumania.²

All four problems were indeed to prove great enough almost to overturn the Russian revolution—and to lead with a vengeance to a reversal of the policy of national self-determination, to the

¹ Ibid., p. 454.

² Ibid., pp. 454-5.

repression of Stalin and Dzierżyński while the 'encouragement of the counter-revolution' brought about the Cheka and the Terror. For Rosa it was no longer a question of the damage the Bolsheviks were doing themselves and others during their short period of survival, but of choice—the choice of surviving (this was by implication recognized to be possible) with grave blemishes or of not surviving (this time) with an unstained record for the future. Rosa did not specifically recommend the latter course, but she did elaborate the two alternatives.

Russia was the last small corner where revolutionary ideals still had some value, where the eyes of all honest Socialist elements in Germany, as in all of Europe, were turned in order to find relief from the disgust with the behaviour of western working-class movements. We hope that Lenin and his friends will answer such suggestions with a categorical 'so far, but no further'. . . . Any and every political defeat, even the ruin of the Bolsheviks in honest struggle against superior forces and in the teeth of the historical situation, might be preferable to such moral collapse.¹

Rosa Luxemburg had no easy advice to offer. 'It is the fatal logic of the objective situation that *every* Socialist party which comes to power in Russia today *must* follow false tactics, as long as this advance guard of the international proletarian army is left in the lurch by the main body.'² As ever, the only solution was a mass rising in Germany. But unfortunately this was not practical politics, merely a mixture of moralizing and self-flagellation.

Rosa Luxemburg had announced her intention of publishing her criticisms of the Russian revolution in the form of a pamphlet and was trying to get Franz Mehring to do the same. All efforts to dissuade her seemed doomed to failure.³ She wrote a further article containing a still sharper attack on the supplementary protocols to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk—and this time Levi, Meyer, and Leviné decided not to print it.⁴ After the second article was delivered in Berlin through the usual good offices of Mathilde Jacob, Paul Levi travelled to Breslau to have it out once and for all with

¹ Ibid., pp. 457–9.

² Ibid., p. 460.

³ Clara Zetkin, *Um Rosa Luxemburgs Stellung zur russischen Revolution*, Hamburg 1922, reprinted in Clara Zetkin, *Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften*, Vol. II, p. 385.

⁴ See Ernst Meyer, 'Rosa Luxemburgs Kritik der Bolschewiki', *Rote Fahne*, 15 January 1922.

the impenitent critic. The only record of this meeting is his own, and then only a brief reference.¹

They had an obstinate and lengthy argument, but in the end he succeeded—perhaps the only occasion in the last decade that Rosa had been talked out of an intention to publish. Even then, it was only the argument that her remarks would be misused by enemies which convinced her. But after Levi's departure she nevertheless sat down at once and wrote out a draft which she sent him in September 1918 through an intermediary: 'I am writing this pamphlet only for you and if I can convince *you* then the effort isn't wasted', she assured him.²

Rosa Luxemburg could afford to be more forthright and detailed in what was practically a private discussion, just as Karl Liebknecht in prison had poured himself without reserve into his private notebooks. She now went back to first principles. Her pamphlet was not only a comment on the Russian revolution but a critique of the very notion of Socialist revolution. The pamphlet was rigorously divided into heads and sections like a legal brief. Bouquets first.

The party of Lenin was the only one which grasped the mandate and duty of a truly revolutionary party; with the slogan—'all power in the hands of the proletariat and peasantry'—they insured the continued move forward of the revolution. Thereby the Bolsheviks solved the famous problem of 'winning a majority of the people' which has always weighed on the German Social Democracy like a nightmare. . . . 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 . . . transformed them almost overnight from a persecuted, slandered, outlawed minority whose leader had to hide like Marat in cellars, into the absolute masters of the situation.³

This passage has always presented a problem. The Bolsheviks see it as a rather involved way of presenting a blank cheque of approval, slightly marred by the ill-informed criticism immediately following; but for Social Democrats it is the example-extraordinary of a deep-down democrat who insists on seeing democracy even in the arbitrary tyranny of Bolshevism—though not without doing

¹ Paul Levi's introduction to Rosa Luxemburg, *Die Russische Revolution*, Berlin 1922. For its history see below, p. 792.

² *Ibid.*, p. 1. Quotations are taken from the English edition by Bertram D. Wolfe, *The Russian Revolution*, Ann Arbor (Michigan) 1961.

³ *The Russian Revolution*, pp. 38–39.

violence to every demand of logic and evidence. And in formal democratic terms the idea of a Bolshevik majority is nonsense. But that was not what Rosa Luxemburg meant. There was no question of elections or mandates. 'Winning a majority' was the same doctrine of revolutionary action as a solvent for static opposition—movement against rigidity—as she had preached in the SPD from 1910 to 1914. By acting instead of reacting, by moving and not talking, the Bolsheviks had utilized their revolutionary period to the full and swept the masses along. For the moment. But there followed a bill of particulars which cut sharply into the general plethora of praise.

1. *Land Policy*. The fact that the Soviet government had not carried out full-scale nationalization of large and middle-sized estates could not be made the subject of reproach.

It would be a sorry jest indeed to demand or expect of Lenin and his comrades that in the brief period of their rule they should already have solved or even tackled one of the most difficult tasks, indeed we can safely say *the* most difficult task in a Socialist transformation of society . . . but a Socialist government must at least do one thing when it comes to power, it must take measures which lead in the direction of a later Socialist reform of agriculture; it must at least avoid everything which may bar the way to those measures in future. Now the slogan launched by the Bolsheviks—immediate seizure and distribution of the land to the peasants—necessarily tended in the opposite direction. Not only is it not a Socialist measure; it even cuts off the way to such measures; it piles up insurmountable obstacles to the Socialist transformation of agrarian relations. . . . [In short,] the Leninist agrarian reform has created a new and powerful layer of enemies of Socialism in the countryside, enemies whose resistance will be much more dangerous and stubborn than that of the large aristocratic landowners.¹

2. *The Nationality Question*. This chapter was a classic restatement of Rosa's lifelong view of the essential economic and political unity of the Russian empire, and the error of hawking the concept of national self-determination to all and every constituent member of the Russian empire, large or small.

It is exactly as if the people living on the north coast of Germany should want to found a new nation and government. And this ridiculous pose of a few university professors and students was inflated into a political force by Lenin and his comrades . . . to what was at first a

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 46.

mere farce they lent such importance that the farce became a matter of the most deadly earnest—not a serious national movement for which . . . there are no roots at all, but a single and rallying flag for counter-revolution. At Brest[-Litovsk], out of this addled egg crept the German bayonets.¹

This much could have been written against the PPS. But then the argument became more fundamental.

The 'right of national self-determination' constitutes the battle-cry of the coming reckoning of international Socialism with the bourgeoisie. It is obvious that the . . . entire nationalist movement which at present constitutes the greatest danger for international Socialism has experienced an extraordinary strengthening from the . . . Russian revolution and the Brest[-Litovsk] negotiations . . . from all this the terror and the strangling of democracy followed directly.²

Neither the particular nor the general statement was new. But what was brilliant was the sudden intuition at the end, which linked this problem specifically to that of terror. Because of the weak edges of the revolution, because of the mistaken tactic which permitted the creation of strongly inimical movements and régimes in the Ukraine, the Baltic states, and elsewhere, the government at home was obliged to resort to the fiercest measures in order to maintain itself on that territory to which, by its arbitrary acceptance of national self-determination, it had been confined. In this she was right. The centrifugal pressures of nationality were in the end to bring out the repressive policy of Stalin, Ordzhonikidze, and Dzierżyński, three non-Russians, whose practical views on national self-determination differed totally from those of Lenin and against whose rigid terror his last impotent efforts were directed.³

3. *Constituent Assembly and Suffrage.* The next two items in *The Russian Revolution* dealt with Bolshevik policy with regard to the Constituent Assembly and suffrage. Rosa Luxemburg criticized the Bolsheviks' action in dispersing the Constituent Assembly, which they themselves had called, and in restricting the suffrage. The details were not important, and these—but only these—she later retracted.⁴

But again she was concerned only with tactics as examples of

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

³ For this and further discussion of the differences in the national question between Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin, see below, pp. 853-9.

⁴ See below, pp. 716-19.

principle. She took issue with Trotsky's theory—he too was quick to elaborate theories—that institutions tend to lead a life of their own and, if they did not reflect the particular reality assigned to them, must be destroyed: a fear of reification which strongly survived in Soviet constitutional practice. To this she opposed her own long-held view about mass influence *on* institutions. 'The living fluid of popular mood, continually forced round representative bodies, penetrates them, guides them . . . even in bourgeois parliaments.'¹

Similarly, on suffrage:

. . . freedom of the press, the rights of association and assembly all have been outlawed for all opponents of the Soviet régime . . . 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 assembly, the role of the broad mass of the people is entirely unthinkable.²

On the face of it, this could only mean that the existing institutions should have been preserved, full freedom of the press and of assembly guaranteed, and so on. No doubt Bolshevik rule was to be an example for the future, for the eventual and final Socialist revolution (in Germany?), and not simply a means of clinging to power at the price of deformation and compromise. Therefore, purity of Socialist principles needed emphasizing continually, at the expense of tactical success. But more important still, Rosa Luxemburg was not putting forward concrete alternatives to Bolshevik mistakes. She was not writing for the Bolsheviks at all, but for the future, for German revolutionaries. In the last analysis the present was unimportant; present, past, and future had equal weight. Rosa Luxemburg learnt things—unlike the Bourbons—but she too never forgot anything. The opponent here was the Lenin of 1903, not the Trotsky of 1918. She was wrong in supposing that a kind of mass pressure on a Constituent Assembly in Russia, moving it forward and keeping it Socialist, was available; quite the contrary. She did not realize the extent to which the Bolsheviks were a minority in the country; she caught only a glimpse of the fact that Bolshevik rule was possible only by toleration of the peasants, who were more interested in peace and land than in Socialism. But this was secondary to the more general proposition that arbitrary curtailment of inconvenient institutions and

¹ *The Russian Revolution*, p. 60.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 66–67.

popular processes after a revolution was bound to be self-generating and repetitive, bad habits which would lead the government farther and farther away from contact with the masses.

4. *Dictatorship*. The same feeling of malaise was expressed in the last sections dealing with the problem of dictatorship.

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 conception 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.¹

Of course this was not a plea for bourgeois democracy but for the democracy which Socialists had always believed to be possible only after the success of a revolution. No doubt it assumed mass enthusiasm for the Bolsheviks which did not exist, but more important was the feeling that the Bolsheviks were imposing democracy from above rather than building on it from below.

Lenin is completely mistaken in the means he employs. Decree, dictatorial force of the factory overseer, draconic penalties, rule by terror, all these things are but palliatives. The only way to rebirth is the school of public life itself, the most unlimited, the broadest democracy and public opinion. It is rule by terror which demoralizes.²

Rosa Luxemburg, who did not mind in the last resort whether the Bolsheviks maintained themselves or not—and this perhaps was the major difference between her and them—was far more afraid of a deformed revolution than an unsuccessful one. She took Lenin’s organizational abilities and objects seriously enough and extended them through time to their inevitable consequences.

With the repression of political life in the land as a whole, life in the Soviets must also become more crippled . . . 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. The few dozen party leaders of inexhaustible energy and boundless experience direct and rule. Among them only a dozen outstanding heads do the leading and an élite of the working class is invited from

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

² *Ibid.*, p. 71.

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, however, but only a dictatorship of a handful of politicians in the bourgeois sense . . . yes, we can go even further: such conditions must inevitably cause a brutalization of public life. . . .¹

Khrushchev could have used these words in his speech denouncing Stalin's régime at the Twentieth Congress if he had thought of them! They contain all that he said—if one substitutes 'one man' for 'a few leaders', admittedly an important difference—only much more concisely than his own long speech.

Finally, Rosa Luxemburg turned once again to the remedy for these tendencies. 'Lenin and Trotsky and their friends were the *first* who went ahead as an example to the proletariat of the world. . . . But in Russia the problem could only be posed. It could not be solved there. In *this* sense, the future everywhere belongs to Bolshevism.'²

How far then was Rosa Luxemburg right? The fact that she accepted the notion of Soviets (workers' and soldiers' councils) in Germany and fought bitterly against the calling of the German Constituent Assembly, her willingness to draw a line under the old Russian polemics during the German revolution and not to haggle with Radek over this part of the past when he arrived on 19 December 1918, her admission to Warszawski that she had changed her mind about a lot of things (unspecified)—all these later caused Communist historians to talk of a general withdrawal of her criticisms.³ But this seems to me to be a one-sided judgement. No doubt she changed her mind about details, though even here she herself pointed out in her speech to the KPD's founding congress in December 1918 that her opposition to the Constituent Assembly was based on the fact that Germany still had an anti-Communist government, and that a comparison with the Russia of November 1917 was therefore incorrect. More significant than changing her mind was her unwillingness, in the middle of the German revolution, to grub around in the Russian past. But most important of all, the pamphlet on the Russian revolution was not primarily a discussion of detailed policies. It was an examination of the basic propositions of revolution and in fact the only glimpse from Rosa's pen of how she envisaged the future. Her general conclusions had little

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 76–77 ² See below, p. 782. ³ See below, pp. 717–19, 793–4.

or nothing to do with the details she was criticizing; rather she was applying well-established, systematic conclusions to a new set of facts. 'The Russian Revolution' happened to be the title of the particular frame passing through Rosa Luxemburg's mental epidiascope at the time. In this sense her argument was highly deductive; she was arguing from an attitude—her particular attitude—to the facts and not, as appears at first sight, using the facts available about Russia to construct a theory of revolution.

Unlike Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg did not accept a difference between party life and eventual public life, between party and post-revolutionary society; for her the Socialist revolution was nothing more than the expansion of Socialism from the party to the whole society. The idea of *Socialists* in control of *capitalist* society was hardly thinkable, the idea of accepting and temporarily even strengthening such a *status quo* and calling it stability could only be lunacy. If this last is a necessary condition of Bolshevism then Rosa was truly anchored in the Second International. Lenin on the other hand did make the sharp distinction. He evolved a theory of party discipline and organization which he put into effect with every means at his disposal. His approach to public life after the revolution was, however, highly empirical; provided the party was properly organized, it could afford every change of tactic, survive every manœuvre, could fortify or discard at will, if necessary, every single institution in society. Only the constitution of the party mattered. The Bolshevik view of society did not change much before and after the revolution, except in terms of their power within it; there was still 'we' and 'it'. Party discipline could not relax, but rather became tighter. Only in this way could rapid tactical changes in government policy be undertaken without lack of cohesion. It was Stalin who later completed the picture, first by making society conform to the graveyard discipline of the party, from the centre towards the periphery; then, finding alteration of policy a course too brusque for party cohesion, he reversed the thrust of power, and made the party as empty as society, from the periphery towards the centre. In 'balancing' society and party, Stalin was closer to Rosa Luxemburg than to Lenin, though their methods were somewhat different.

Rosa Luxemburg's pamphlet on the Russian revolution has become famous as an almost clairvoyant indictment of the Bolsheviks. In part this is justified. But its purpose will be better served if we

see it as an analysis of ideal revolution based, like so much of Rosa Luxemburg's work, on a form of critical dialogue, in this case with the Bolshevik October revolution. Those who are made joyful by criticism of the fundamentals of the Bolshevik revolution would do better to turn elsewhere.

XVI

1918—THE GERMAN REVOLUTION BEGINS

POLITICALLY, *Spartakus* was at a very low ebb in the summer of 1918. Most of the leaders were immured in indefinite confinement while the war dragged on, incapable of decision. Judging from the bulk of the press and from official German reactions, the outlook for the revolution in Russia was gloomy—the Bolsheviks unlikely to maintain their position in spite of the very policies which had helped to prolong the radical agony in Germany. ‘Oh God, my nerves, my nerves. I cannot sleep at all’, Rosa wrote to Luise Kautsky in July 1918. ‘Clara too has been silent for too long, has not even thanked me for my birthday letter, a thing quite unheard of in her case. I cannot contain the fear within me. . . . For myself I am full of courage. To bear the sorrow of *others*, for that I lack courage and strength. All these are merely thoughts, ghosts. . . .’¹

Then, unexpectedly and spectacularly, the Western Front collapsed in September. The worst fears of the German High Command soon communicated themselves to the capital; as so often, people were overtaken by events, those committed to the *status quo* as well as those who aspired to overthrow it. In September 1918 a new wave of strikes broke out. On 28 September the German General Staff informed the imperial government that armistice negotiations were essential if a catastrophe was to be avoided. On 1 October Lenin notified his colleagues that the situation in Germany was sufficiently ripe for action by the Russian government.² The executives of the SPD and the USPD had to consider their position now that the German government belatedly tried to associate wider political groups in the liquidation of the unsuccessful war policy. On 23 September 1918 the SPD executive and the

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, pp. 220–2, dated 25 July 1918.

² Lenin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXXV, pp. 301–2.

Reichstag group of SPD deputies jointly stated their minimum demands for participation in any government.¹

Quicker off the mark, the USPD leaders and the Revolutionary Shop Stewards had begun to meet regularly and discuss how the impending situation could be turned to good account. They too issued an appeal to the population, which contained their immediate demands from the government—more extreme in tone and content than that of the SPD.²

Spartakus issued two final letters, in September and October 1918. In neither of these was there any optimistic prognosis for the coming months, any signs that the long-predicted collapse of the imperial government was imminent. The September letter contained Rosa Luxemburg's gloomy analysis of events in Russia which we have already discussed. Though *Spartakus* had already indicated some of the methods and techniques of the future revolution in outline, taken over from the Russian experience, there was little evidence that the group foresaw any imminent application of these ideas. Though the conception of *calling* for workers' and soldiers' councils as a *means* of furthering the revolution goes back in Germany to the beginning of 1918, their function as a form of state *power* on a more permanent basis was first promulgated in a handbill in the summer of 1918.³ But these were anyhow no more than theoretical formulations. The later investigations of the German *Reichstag* into the causes of the German collapse as well as modern historical research both show how little *Spartakus* was able to contribute in the summer and early autumn of 1918 to the development of events in Germany.⁴ Interesting evidence from a source most unlikely to denigrate *Spartakus* comes from Lenin, who had an extremely sharp eye not only for revolutionary potential but equally for weakness and ineffectiveness. On 20 September 1918 he wrote to Vorovskii, one of his representatives in Stockholm:

¹ *Vorwärts*, 24 September 1918.

² *Dokumente und Materialien*, Vol. II, pp. 207–10.

³ Walter Tormin, *Zwischen Rätediktatur und Sozialer Demokratie. Die Geschichte der Rätebewegung in der deutschen Revolution 1918/19*, Düsseldorf 1954, pp. 35 ff. and 48 ff. For a Communist work on this subject, see K. Mammach, *Der Einfluss der russischen Februarrevolution und der grossen sozialistischen Oktoberrevolution auf die deutsche Arbeiterklasse*, Berlin (East) 1955.

⁴ These researches must be set against German nationalist claims for the effectiveness of internal left-wing sabotage in order to save the 'honour' of the German army. The police reports on *Spartakus* activity, on which these claims were based, are misleading; clearly police informers, in Germany as elsewhere,

. . . Is it to be tolerated that even people like Mehring and Zetkin are more concerned to take issue with Kautsky from a *moral* (if one may use this term) point of view, rather than a *theoretical* one? Kautsky, they say, really ought to have better things to do than to write [polemics] against the Bolsheviks.

Is this any kind of argument? Can one weaken one's own position to such an extent? This means nothing else but to arm Kautsky gratuitously.¹

Lenin went on to order an immediate theoretical campaign in the sharpest terms against Kautsky in which he himself proposed to participate strongly; he ordered Vorovskii to procure for him immediately as many of Kautsky's current writings about the Bolsheviks as possible, to enable him to reply.² This criticism of too much *Spartakus* 'morality' instead of aggressive theoretical combat was based on articles in *Leipziger Volkszeitung* and other legally-appearing papers, and clearly showed that Lenin had somehow sniffed out the exhaustion of *Spartakus* and its unpreparedness for coming events.

By early October the German government was visibly beginning to disintegrate. *Spartakus* and the Left radicals from Bremen had finally decided to collaborate closely. Both recognized at last the impending revolutionary possibilities. The first thing was to break the existing government and in particular the state of martial law. An appeal by the *Spartakus* group in October 1918 therefore called on the people to rise, to create 'conditions of freedom for the class struggle of the workers, for a real democracy, for a real and lasting

provided precisely the kind of evidence their employers hoped to get from them.

In this connection it is an interesting irony of history that pre-war Communist historians, with every natural incentive to write up the significance of their own *Spartakus* ancestry, sometimes resolutely refused to do so. Thus P. Langner, *Der Massenstreik im Kampf des Proletariats*, Leipzig 1931, p. 49: 'The collapse of Wilhelminian Germany [in] . . . 1918 did not take place as a result of the struggles of the working classes against imperialist war and the bourgeoisie. It came from inside, as a result of the physical incapacity to continue the war.' Nothing shows up the nationalist *Dolchstoß* (stab in the back) myth more clearly than this. However, post-war East German history on the whole tends to exaggerate the importance of *Spartakus*. All the recent evidence, including the substantial East German literature, is summarized in an appendix to E. Kolb, *Die Arbeiterräte in der deutschen Innenpolitik 1918/1919*, Düsseldorf 1962, pp. 410-14.

¹ First published in *Pravda*, No. 17, 21 January 1925, quoted from *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXXV, p. 299.

² The promised reply to Kautsky was written on 9 October 1918; see *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXVIII, pp. 85-93. A shortened version with unfavourable editorial comment appeared in *Vorwärts*, 25 October 1918.

peace and for Socialism'.¹ Shortly afterwards a more positive appeal was launched calling upon the workers as well as the soldiers to organize. But the form of organization was not yet specified: 'the spontaneous mutinies among the soldiers must be supported by all means and be led towards an armed uprising, the armed uprising for the struggle to gain the entire power [of the state] for the workers and soldiers . . .'.²

On 7 October *Spartakus* held a national conference, the first for nearly two years. Nothing is known of the discussions at the conference; but a report, together with the resolutions and an appeal to the workers, was circulated illegally, and part of it appeared in the last *Spartakus* letter in October.³ The joint conference itself produced a lengthier analysis of the world situation and more strenuous and precise demands, but again they were confined to an attempt to obtain particular concessions from existing authority rather than the destruction of that authority itself. Clearly it was not a programme within the normal political context of that word—to be achieved by all available means. Rather it was to serve as a rallying cry for bringing the masses into action, if possible behind *Spartakus*; once revolution was on the move further goals could always be set. The whole process was intended as a continual raising of revolutionary sights so that the ponderous and reluctant dragon of the German working classes could finally be induced to snort and move. But there was still nothing about the organizational forms of the coming struggle, much less about the way to implement any future working-class victory.

On 12 October the Prussian government and some of the other provincial governments declared an amnesty for political prisoners. Three days later the *Bundesrat*—the upper house of the Reich legislature—officially announced the participation of both *Bundesrat* and *Reichstag* in the coming bid for peace. The German government was still hopeful of saving its authority by broadening its base, even though the allies had already declared that the Emperor at least must be sacrificed before any armistice negotiations would be entertained. Karl Liebknecht was among the first to be released under the amnesty. He returned to Berlin on 23 October and was escorted by a crowd of workers from the station

¹ *D. & M.*, Vol. II, p. 225. Compare the name of the Cominform journal after the Second World War: 'For a lasting peace, for a people's democracy!'

² *Ibid.*, p. 227. ³ For the full text, see *D. & M.*, Vol. II, pp. 228–34.

straight to the Soviet Embassy. Nothing is known in detail of the discussions he had there; a short and somewhat ominous sentence of Karl Radek's merely confirms complete agreement: 'The night after [Karl Liebknecht's] release Bukharin told us that Karl was in complete agreement with us . . . if he had at that time been able to come to us, no king would have been welcomed as Liebknecht would have been welcomed by the Russian workers.'¹

From the moment of his release Liebknecht automatically took over the leadership of the *Spartakus* group. His reputation and moral authority had never been higher. On 25 October the executive of the USPD offered to co-opt him, but Liebknecht stipulated that he would only accept if the USPD altered its programme and tactics and fell into line with *Spartakus*. Though not refused outright, this stipulation cooled USPD enthusiasm, as it was meant to do.

While these discussions were going on, the revolution itself broke out at the naval base in Kiel, the same place where in August 1917 the only significant mutiny of the war had taken place. The inability of the government to do more than send a negotiating commission brought the ferment out into the open everywhere. From the beginning of November onwards Soldiers' Councils appeared at the front and Workers' Councils sprang up in most of the major cities of Germany. As yet these were demonstrations of revolt rather than instruments of revolution, and in most places they had no clear programme except to attempt to impose their authority—or at least their right to exist—on local authorities and army commanders. The Sailors' Council at Kiel sent a radio message to Moscow from which the Russian leaders deduced that revolution in Germany was now under way.

For a short time the situation in the provinces was more revolutionary than in Berlin. Representatives of the USPD, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, and *Spartakus* represented by Liebknecht and Pieck—fatal partnership—began to plan an organized rising and fixed the day for 4 November. However, in full meeting the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, though they accepted the principle, refused to accept the early date agreed by

¹ Karl Liebknecht, *Klassenkampf*, p. 108 (Appendix: 'In memory of Karl Liebknecht', first published in February 1919 in *Izvestiya*). The same comment is made by Radek in his biographical sketch in memory of the three German leaders, *Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, Leo Jogiches*, Hamburg 1921. See also below, p. 715.

their negotiators. A few days later, on 6 November, in view of the evident success of the mutiny in Kiel and the ferment in the provinces, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards finally settled the 11th as 'the day'. Liebknecht's immediate proposal to bring this date forward to the 8th was lost by a considerable majority in the meeting. Was it the hope that events would overtake them after all?

Meantime the SPD too had been drawn into the impending negotiations for a change of government. However, the executive was treating with two sides, with those who planned an uprising, and also with the government itself about a peaceful hand-over of power. Notes passed backwards and forwards; the negotiations with the government appeared to reach deadlock when the SPD insisted that the Emperor must abdicate. In order to reinforce its position during these negotiations, the government brought in troops on 7 November to occupy the main factories, and forbade a proposed mass demonstration to celebrate the anniversary of the Russian revolution. Finally, on the same day, the SPD leaders sent an ultimatum to the Chancellor; if he refused it they were determined to join the rising.

In the end all these elaborate plans came to nothing. On 9 November, two days before the deadline, a general strike took place in Berlin and large groups of armed workers and soldiers thronged the streets. It was the effective end of the Empire. The Chancellor, Prince Max of Baden, formally handed over his power to SPD chairman Ebert. But even then the SPD's advent to power was not the result of its own efforts. Liebknecht had gauged the potential of the demonstrations correctly; in a speech from the balcony of the Imperial Palace shortly after midday, he proclaimed the Socialist Republic. When the news of these events reached the *Reichstag*, where the SPD caucus was in permanent session, Scheidemann was persuaded to declare the Democratic Republic then and there to prevent a complete *Spartakus* take-over.

Now I saw clearly what was afoot. I knew [Liebknecht's] slogan—supreme authority for the workers' and soldiers' councils—and Germany would therefore be a Russian province, a branch of the Soviet. No, no, a thousand times no! . . . A few working men and soldiers accompanied me into the hall. 'Scheidemann has proclaimed the Republic.' Ebert's face turned livid with wrath when he heard what I had done. . . . 'You have not the right to proclaim the Republic, what

becomes of Germany . . . whether she becomes a republic or something else—a constituent assembly must decide.’¹

Immediate negotiations took place between the two Socialist parties with a view to forming a joint government based on equal representation. The concession of parity by the SPD was generous; but in return almost all those radical conditions posed by the executive of the Independents to which the SPD took exception were withdrawn, ‘to cement the revolutionary Socialist achievements’. Now that the day had come, pressure for unity among the leaders was strong. The new Reich executive, known as the Council of People’s Commissars (*Rat der Volksbeauftragten*), consisted of three SPD and three USPD delegates.² The *Spartakus* group—which of course was an organized pressure group within the USPD—had called for the ‘Russian example’ on 7 November, the anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution—at least for the Russian spirit if not yet for the Russian facts. This meant no compromises. But all mention of Russia frightened the leaders of the two Socialist parties to death. On 9 November *Spartakus* issued a special supplement to the new *Rote Fahne* in which it called for a more advanced and detailed programme of revolutionary steps:

1. Immediate peace.
2. End of martial law.
3. Opening of prisons.
4. Disarming of all the police, of all officers and soldiers who did not accept the basis of this programme.
5. Take-over of all military and civil authority by representatives of the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils.
6. Handing over of all military establishments and armament factories.
7. Handing over of all transport facilities, factories and banks to the representatives of the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils.
8. Cessation of military tribunals.
9. Dissolution of the Reich and all provincial parliaments.
10. Dismissal of the Chancellor, all ministers and state secretaries, as well as all officials who would not serve the Socialist people. Replacing of these by representatives of the workers.

¹ Philipp Scheidemann, *The Making of a New Germany*, New York 1929, Vol. II, pp. 261–2.

² Part of the correspondence is reprinted in *D. & M.*, Vol. II, p. 331 (SPD) and p. 346 (USPD).

11. Removal of all royal dynasties as well as corporative class institutions.

12. The election of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils everywhere in Germany, in whose exclusive hands legislation, executive decisions, administration of all social institutions, funds and public property should be placed. The entire working population in cities and on the land should participate in the election of these councils without distinction between the sexes.

13. Immediate contact to be made with Socialist parties abroad.

14. Immediate reopening of the Russian Legation in Berlin.

Already *Spartakus* demands were far exceeding the realities that were in process of achievement. The intention was quite clear. With the first release of revolutionary activity, the goals had at once to be set higher, and so on in continuous progression.

This then was the situation when Rosa Luxemburg was released from the city jail in Breslau. Apparently the amnesty of 12 October had been deemed to apply only to those serving a specified sentence; the large number interned under administrative order were either forgotten or had been deliberately ignored at some stage in the administrative chain. Only when the revolutionary wave reached Breslau on 9 November were the gates of the prison opened. The last few weeks had tried her nerves and patience to the utmost. She had refused all visits, since

my mood is such that the presence of my friends under supervision has become impossible. I have suffered everything patiently, and under other circumstances would have remained patient for a long time. But the general situation . . . has wrecked my psychological detachment. These conversations under supervision, the impossibility of talking about things that really interest me, have become such a burden that I prefer to renounce every visit until we can meet as free people. It cannot take long. . . .¹

Her first task on release was naturally to address the expectant crowds in the central square of Breslau, from the balcony of the old *Rathaus* where the judgements of the city elders had long ago been given to the citizens. She was no stranger to the city, or to them. Now she was able to judge the new temper from which she had been cut off for so long.² And late that afternoon she hastened

¹ *Letters from Prison*, p. 78, dated 18 October 1918, to Sonia Liebknicht.

² Frölich, p. 288; *LV*, 10 November 1918. Frölich wrongly gives the date of her release as the 8th instead of the 9th. Publication of the Breslau *Volksmacht* had been suspended by the government for a few days.

to Berlin where 'she was greeted with joy by all her old friends, but with concealed sadness, for they suddenly realized what the years in prison had done to her. She had aged terribly and her black hair had gone quite white. She was a sick woman.'¹

The outbreak of revolution in Berlin, whose extension was only prevented by the speed with which the joys of government were accepted by SPD and USPD alike, had established a pattern which was already set when Rosa Luxemburg arrived on the scene. There was no question of altering the arrangements that were being made on the 9th between the leaders of the official Social Democrats and the Independents. Indeed, *Spartakus* accepted this solution as fulfilling the immediate needs of the present. In the words of Rosa Luxemburg: 'The image of the German government corresponds to the inner ripeness of German conditions. Scheidemann-Ebert are the proper [*berufene*] government of the German revolution in its present stage.'² The task of *Spartakus*—which ceased to be the *Gruppe Internationale* and finally adopted '*Spartakus*' as an official title on 11 November 1918—now was to prepare and hasten the conditions in which the next stage of the revolution could take place. There had been no question on 9 November of hustling aside the SPD, much less the USPD, and taking over power itself. Even Liebknecht's proclamation of the 'Socialist Republic' from the Palace had been a declaration of intent rather than a practical proposal for action; a means of pushing the Independents. *Spartakus* was barely equipped to provide an organized and coherent ginger group within the USPD; its immediate preoccupation was the growth of its influence and support, and the formation of a tactic to act upon the masses. To take over the government was out of the question; they had far less chance of success than the Bolsheviki in October 1917.

Thus the situation set objective limits to the possibilities of the group. However, there were also severe subjective limitations to its policy. Liebknecht, whose personality and attitudes dominated

¹ Frölich, loc. cit. Although there are minor factual inaccuracies in Frölich's account of these last months, he spent most of them in Berlin within Rosa's orbit, and his observations are first-hand evidence. Frölich was involved in at least two of the major street actions in December and January, and gave evidence at the trial of Ledebour in 1919. On the other hand he will make no admission of anything but monolithic wisdom for the *Spartakus* leadership, of which he was a member; his political judgements are therefore of less value.

² *Die Rote Fahne*, 18 November 1918.

the activities of *Spartakus* for the next two months, was quite adamant in his refusal to make any compromise with either SPD or the Independents. He refused participation both in the government of 9 November which had been suggested by the negotiators on both sides and, as we have seen, would not even serve on the executive of the USPD. This policy of abstention from any commitment to parties which did not accept the total *Spartakus* programme was no doubt shared by all his colleagues. But the programme itself had also been set: no Constituent Assembly, all power to the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. This was the policy borrowed from the Russian experience. It was concerning the whole-hearted acceptance of this tactic that Radek reported that 'Liebknecht and we are in complete agreement'.

There is no reason to suppose that Rosa Luxemburg disagreed either in her evaluation of the situation or about the tactics to be adopted. Just as she had taken over the leading role in interpreting the Polish Revolution in 1905–1906, she now took on the same task in Germany. Her special skill consisted as always in analysing events in revolutionary Marxist terms and in emphasizing the role of *Spartakus* within the necessities of the situation. This meant constant review of that situation. She was a superb propagandist. All her writings were directed towards persuading a proletariat assumed to be more aware than ever of its needs and possibilities; waiting only to be guided in the required direction. Her emphasis was above all on clarity. As it had been necessary for so long to dig a demarcation ditch between the PPS and the Polish Social Democracy and to refute the false appeal of the seducer, so it was now essential to demarcate even more clearly a correct working-class policy when the false siren-calls were legion. The militant crowds were being harangued from all sides, SPD, USPD, *Spartakus*, Revolutionary Shop Stewards; last, but not least, by middle-class interest groups. Soon, moreover, there developed a further complication in the shape of a younger group of ultra-radicals, who wanted complete dissociation from the *mêlée*, a disdainful withdrawal till history placed its chance before them on a silver platter. In practice this merely amounted to forgoing all the possible opportunities of revolution, like the brief refusal of the Bolsheviks to participate in the 1906 Duma elections. As confusion increased, so necessarily did the temper of the voice of clarity. Rosa's inflammatory tone was in the first instance due

to a desire not so much to create positive revolutionary action as to provide a firm and unmistakable channel for the streams of advice and proposals unleashed by all the various socialist parties. Clarity came to mean volume and pitch as much as correct analysis.

Any search in Rosa's writings for specific approval or disapproval of the Russian example during these months is based on a misunderstanding of her attitude and her situation. The sharp criticism of Lenin and the Bolsheviks contained in her writings in prison has been contrasted by Communist historians with her tacit acceptance of the Russian programme after November 1918—the result of a conversion. Rosa Luxemburg's few specific statements have been carefully culled as valuable evidence of a definite change of mind. Thus a few years later Warszawski reported the receipt of a letter at the end of November, brought to Warsaw by a German soldier. This was Rosa's answer to Warszawski's questions about the attitude to be adopted towards the Russian revolution. 'If our party [SDKPiL] is full of enthusiasm for Bolshevism and at the same time opposed the Bolshevik peace of Brest-Litovsk, and also opposes their propagation of national self-determination as a solution, then it is no more than enthusiasm coupled with the spirit of criticism—what more can people want from us?' With most of the old SDKPiL leaders now in Russia and working closely with the Bolsheviks (Dzierżyński, Hanecki, Unslicht, Leder, Radek, as well as Marchlewski—the split had long been healed), there was naturally great pressure on the local Polish party headed by Warszawski with its still official links with Rosa Luxemburg and Jogiches in Germany. 'What shall I do?' Warszawski had asked, and Rosa continued:

I shared all your reservations and doubts, but have dropped them in the most important questions, and in others I never went as far as you. Terrorism is evidence of grave internal weakness, but it is directed against internal enemies, who . . . get support and encouragement from foreign capitalists outside Russia. Once the European revolution comes, the Russian counter-revolutionaries lose not only this support, but—what is more important—they must lose all courage. Bolshevik terror is above all the expression of the weakness of the European proletariat. Naturally the agrarian circumstances there have created the sorest, most dangerous problem of the Russian revolution. But here too the saying is valid—even the greatest revolution can only achieve that which

has become ripe [through the development of] social circumstances. This sore too can only be healed through the European revolution. And this is coming!¹

It will be noted that Rosa made the same reservations, with the same emphasis on matters of primary and secondary importance, as in her writings for Paul Levi—without the polemical tone. Where was the conversion?

Similarly Clara Zetkin reported that Rosa's two urgent requests to her in the summer of 1918 to get Mehring to arrange a scientific and critical analysis of the Russian revolution, on the basis of her own work, were not pursued, and that she made no further reference to these requests or to any need for them.²

Both conclude that Rosa Luxemburg was wrong about certain aspects of the Russian revolution in the first place, and that in any case she changed her mind after her release from prison. The criticism of Bolshevik suppression of other parties Clara Zetkin ascribed to Rosa's 'somewhat schematic, abstract notion of democracy'. She claims that Rosa misunderstood the discriminatory electoral laws in Russia, the dismissal of the Constituent Assembly and the refusal to elect another; that she failed to grasp the essence of 'proletarian dictatorship', the need and nature of terror, and the Bolshevik relationship between party and masses.³ Warszawski's conclusions were identical. None the less, he qualified the 'errors' of his old and brilliant comrade.

We have seen that the opinions which Rosa Luxemburg stated in her pamphlet were no longer her opinions from November 1918 and until her death. All the same, in spite of all the errors and incompleteness of her work, it is revolutionary work. Rosa Luxemburg's criticism differs from opportunistic criticism because it can never harm the cause or the party of revolution, it can only enliven it and help it—because it is revolutionary criticism.⁴

Thus both Adolf Warszawski and Clara Zetkin deduced—admittedly on instructions from the executive of the KPD and the Comintern in its dispute with Paul Levi—a fundamental revision of Rosa's attitude to the Russian revolution. Whatever she did not

¹ Adolf Warski, *Rosa Luxemburgs Stellung zu den taktischen Problemen der Revolution*, Hamburg 1922, pp. 6–7.

² Clara Zetkin, *Um Rosa Luxemburgs Stellung zur russischen Revolution*, Hamburg 1922, reprinted in Clara Zetkin, *Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften*, Berlin 1957, Vol. II, p. 385.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 392, 396–8, 393, 400, 404, 408.

⁴ Warski, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

revise were alleged to be errors. However, like so many discussions which involve the projection of someone's views from one period to a totally different one, especially after their death, the problem is largely irrelevant. Rosa was never quick to change her mind. She was obstinate and had considerable confidence in her own powers of analysis, and in this case there was anyway no real need to recant. New circumstances could always invalidate the practical relevance of ideas, though not necessarily their validity in the past. There is no reason to suppose that she now approved of those aspects of the Russian revolution which three months earlier she had criticized; in fact she took pains to reiterate some of her criticisms.¹ In any case, she had always postulated most strenuously that most of the bad features of the Russian revolution would dissolve in the melting-pot of a European revolution; the advent of that revolution automatically altered the context of most of her remarks. With this, the problems that had bothered her in the summer of 1918 simply became irrelevant.

Possibly the only factual error to which she ever admitted was her support for a Constituent Assembly in Russia at the beginning of 1918. For the rest, she had always insisted that the problem of terror and the suppression of democracy were phenomena of isolation, and a world-wide, or at least European, revolution would do away with them. But they were no less reprehensible for being temporary.

In any case, all the evidence shows that she was willing and anxious to collaborate with the Russians, to learn from their experience, and to agitate as strongly as possible for a link between revolutionary Russia and revolutionary Germany. Right from the start *Spartakus* demanded that the Soviet Legation, which had been closed on 5 November after allegations that it was abusing its diplomatic immunity by smuggling propaganda material, should be re-opened as soon as possible. But this did not imply any admission of Russian precedence, or the subordination of German tactics to the dictates of Moscow. As we shall see, she resisted this possibility to the end of her days. In November 1918 this problem simply did not exist. Lenin and the Bolsheviki were still willing to admit, if not the primacy of the German revolution over the Russian—though there is some evidence of this—at least the critical importance to the Soviet Union of Communist success in

¹ See above, pp. 700, 703.

Germany. The Bolsheviks were prepared to make real sacrifices for this. In short, the whole dispute between *Spartakus* and the Bolsheviks was for the moment drowned in the call for action in Germany, and Rosa was the last to prefer abstract criticisms of other people's activities to the exploitation of her own immediate possibilities. This was Kautsky's speciality. By 9 November 1918 the rights and wrongs of the Russian revolution had for the moment become irrelevant.

As in the spring of 1916, the leadership of *Spartakus* was once again in the hands of Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, and Leo Jogiches (released from his Berlin prison on 9 November). With them in the executive were Meyer and Levi, who had between them run *Spartakus* after the arrest of its other leaders, Lange, H. Duncker and his sister Käthe Duncker, A. Thalheimer, Pieck, Eberlein, and Paul Frölich, back in the fold after his Zimmerwald-Left period during the war. Clara Zetkin was in Stuttgart and Mehring was too old and ill for active participation. On 10 November *Spartakus* issued its new programme based on the events of the previous day. More strongly than ever it emphasized the need to get rid of all parliaments and to substitute Workers' and Soldiers' Councils everywhere in Germany, with all administrative and legislative power. The need was for centralization, the slogan 'the unified Socialist Republic of Germany'. Unlike the Russians, with their fetish about nationality rights, federalism had no place in a *Spartakist* Germany; semi-autonomous provinces were merely a guarantee of reaction. No one apparently considered that the decentralization accompanying hundreds of councils, each supreme, would be far more chaotic than provincial governments.

At the same time the appeal underlined the poverty of what had been achieved to date.

Nothing is gained by the fact that a few additional government Socialists have achieved power. . . . See to it that power, which you have captured, does not slip out of your hands and that you use it for your own goal. . . . No 'Scheidemann' must sit in the government, no Socialist must enter government as long as a governmental Socialist is still in it. No co-operation with those who betrayed you for four years.¹

Already the fatal weakness of *Spartakus* had made its appearance, the incitement to remove the present government without the stipulation of a clear alternative. While this was based on a definite

¹ *D. & M.*, Vol. I, pp. 341-2.

tactic—and not merely unclear thinking—it was a tactic that led, as we shall see, to confusion and not to clarity.

On 10 November a joint meeting of all the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Councils took place at the Circus Busch—the traditional place of assembly for large popular gatherings. This meeting elected an executive which, pending the calling of a national congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, was to act as its trustee and representative. Its functions were not clearly defined, but given the spontaneous nature of the Councils it was a miracle that anything as concrete as an executive emerged at all. The meeting confirmed the six People's Commissars as the provisional national executive but its own functions and role vis-à-vis this latter body were left unclear. The Commissars considered themselves legitimately if provisionally invested with supreme authority, responsible only to the Constituent Assembly to be elected in January, or as soon as practicable. *Spartakus*, on the other hand, which considered the executive of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils as the supreme authority, responsible only to the coming national congress of councils, immediately agitated against any resignation of power into the hands of the Commissars. Thus the differing conceptions of revolutionary power immediately led to a tactical divergence between the two extreme Socialist camps. Both fastened their slogans on to institutions, *Spartakus* on the Councils, the SPD on the coming Constituent Assembly. The Independents swung in between, accepting the Constituent Assembly as inevitable—they always had a clear sense of the limits of revolutionary possibilities; pending the election, however, which they wished to put off as long as they could, the revolutionary power of the Councils was to be built up as much as possible. They accepted the duality, which the groups on either side would not; *Spartakus* opposed any parliament, while the SPD expected the Councils to wither away once a legitimate government came into being.

These articulate opinions existed, we must repeat, only at the top. They were by no means reflected in the membership of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils in Berlin, still less in the rest of Germany. In Berlin and in most of the Reich, SPD members, or soldiers and civilians unattached to any party but conservative on the whole, formed the majority on the Councils. The USPD provided a consistent and sometimes substantial minority, though in a few places it dominated the Councils; and its left wing,

Spartakus, for a period controlled a few Councils, in Brunswick and Stuttgart. The *Spartakus* call for all power to be given to the Councils was therefore not primarily intended to promote institutions which they did not in fact control, or in which they did not have even a substantial minority. No doubt they hoped that more power for the Councils would make the membership more radical, that the slogan itself would sharpen the situation generally without too much immediate institutional emphasis just as it had done in Russia. But for the moment, while agitating strongly on their behalf, *Spartakus* was not even able to get its main leaders co-opted on to the provisional executive of the Councils in Berlin. The demand of *Rote Fahne* on 10 November 1918, that Rosa Luxemburg be asked to join this executive, was ignored. Later attempts of *Spartakus* leaders to join or influence the meetings of the executive, or of the national congress of Councils in December, all failed, on the fine legal point that Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were neither workers nor soldiers! German precision and orderliness lent its particular flavour even to the revolution. Had Rosa Luxemburg forgotten all her expletives about the psychology of German Social Democracy?

Another immediate preoccupation of *Spartakus* and of the USPD was to get their papers published. *Spartakus* in Berlin adopted, at Jogiches' suggestion, the technique of the SDKPiL in Warsaw during the 1905 revolution. A small group, with Liebknecht at its head, occupied the offices of the *Berliner Lokalanzeiger* on 9 November, while raids were also made on other papers in Berlin. The occupiers insisted on the production of the newspaper under the title *Die Rote Fahne* (The Red Flag) and the second evening issue of Friday 9 November carried this title for the first time. But the loyalty of the printers to their management, and their threat to down tools, jeopardized the chances of any further such issues. Rosa Luxemburg had just arrived from Breslau by train and had gone straight to the newspaper offices; her first physical contribution to the German revolution was an eloquent appeal to the printers' proletarian conscience—never in the past famous for its militancy.¹ Even this was no use; next morning the printers, under instructions from the old management, firmly refused to print any

¹ Hermann Duncker, 'Wie die erste Nummer der *Roten Fahne* erschien' in *Einführungen in den Marxismus*, Berlin (East) 1958, Vol. I, p. 395. Also *Rote Fahne*, 9 November 1928.

more. Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, now in charge of all *Spartakus* publications, were turned out on 11 November.¹ Reference to the local Workers' and Soldiers' Council produced a directive that the occupation was illegal. On 12 November, however, the executive of the Berlin Councils authorized the use of printing and distribution facilities for the production of *Rote Fahne*, the authorization being signed by Richard Müller, one of the leaders of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, and by Captain Beerfelde, an officer with left-wing sympathies. Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, accompanied by an escort of workers, personally carried the authorization back to the firm's offices. But the management was now adamant in its refusal—the fear of *Spartakus* was not so great when commercial interests were at stake—and turned to Ebert personally: 'Our firm has been suffering twinges of conscience in case this authorization is really to be followed. . . . We are determined to trust the government programme for peace and quiet and the assurances for the safety of private property. This authorization, however, would place the vast resources of the firm at the disposal of quite the contrary tendency.' The People's Commissars thereupon consulted with the Council of Workers and Soldiers; a brief, laconic comment across the firm's protest states: 'The order against the publishers will not be carried out, further orders of this sort will not be given.'² Rosa Luxemburg thereupon tried to make a more commercial arrangement with the firm for bringing out *Rote Fahne* but, assured of government support, the management refused this as well.³

After this *Rote Fahne* did not appear again until 17 November. An unfavourable contract had finally to be made with a new publisher, which was expensive for *Spartakus*. This, and the small ration of paper allocated to the radicals, greatly hampered the range of their distribution. The USPD also had difficulties, and their main organ, *Freiheit*, first appeared only on 16 November.⁴

Thus *Spartakus* could not hope to influence the main organs of government directly. All it could hope to do was to direct and influence the genuine revolutionary potential of the masses with

¹ Wilhelm Pieck, *Die Gründung der KPD*, Berlin 1928, reprinted in *Reden und Aufsätze*, Berlin (East) 1951, Vol. I, pp. 97–98.

² *D. & M.*, Vol. II, pp. 289–392.

³ *Der Ledebour-Prozess*, Berlin 1919, p. 513, Meyer's testimony.

⁴ *Ledebour-Prozess*, p. 514. A number of sources wrongly give 18 November as the first date of *Rote Fahne*'s reappearance. See bibliography, p. 908, No. 624.

the limited means at its disposal, and on this objective all its efforts were henceforward concentrated. It was freely admitted that the *Spartakus* organization was embryonic. But, contrary to the assumption of some later anti-Communist historians, *Spartakus* was well aware of these limitations, even if it conveniently did not admit them in public; the agitational policy was adopted partly because it suited the political philosophy of Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, but particularly because they and their colleagues knew well that their situation permitted no other form of action. On 9, 10, and 11 November the leadership of *Spartakus* was in almost continuous session to formulate policy and to review negotiations with both Revolutionary Shop Stewards and USPD. The agitational demands of *Spartakus* on both these groups were still being consistently refused, just as the Revolutionary Shop Stewards had overruled Liebknecht with regard to the date of the proposed uprising. If anything the USPD, who had allowed Liebknecht to formulate their demands in the correspondence with the SPD after 9 November and had wanted him on their executive, were more susceptible to *Spartakus* influence than the Revolutionary Shop Stewards.¹ From the USPD side, at any rate, there was still a fund of old comradely loyalty. If only *Spartakus* were prepared to negotiate seriously instead of resorting constantly to demagogy! *Spartakus*, however, negotiated by means of abuse; its terms were nothing less than the complete adherence of Goliath to David.

The Revolutionary Shop Stewards, on the other hand, were possibly the only group of the three who had anything like an effective organization—though even this varied greatly from factory to factory. They were determined to preserve it. They stressed the necessity for keeping the revolutionary demands in line with the organizational possibilities—as opposed to the USPD's more political preoccupations; Liebknecht's conception of continuous mass action was mere 'revolutionary gymnastics'. *Spartakus* in turn accused them of suffering from a 'mechanical conception which places far too much emphasis on technical

¹ Richard Müller, *Vom Kaiserreich zur Republik*, Berlin 1924-5, Vol. II, p. 29; Pieck, *Reden*, Vol. I, p. 99.

One *Spartakist*, Schreiner, who had joined the left-wing Socialist cabinet in Württemberg (Stuttgart), was forced to resign on 15 November because *Spartakus* would not sit in any commission or government with the SPD (Wilhelm Keil, *Erlebnisse*, Vol. II, p. 107).

preparations'. Monotonously *Spartakus* dinned its only lesson, mass action, into unreceptive ears—at least as far as its potential allies were concerned.¹

The *Spartakus* leaders knew they had no effective mass organization. The main historical burden of the German Communists to this day has been their failure to build up an organization during and particularly at the end of the First World War. But it certainly was not due to any oversight. The *Spartakus* leaders deliberately decided to forgo any sustained attempt to create an organization in November 1918. They held that the revolutionary possibilities made this an unnecessary dispersal of effort; by concentrating on organizational work and neglecting the inspiration and leadership of an existing if uncertain mass movement, they might miss the bus of revolution altogether. The fact that the rising of 9 November had taken place spontaneously, that the organized parties had followed and not led, seemed to justify this decision. At the meeting of 11 November Rosa Luxemburg particularly stressed the need for *Spartakus* to remain within the organizational network of the USPD as long as possible, so that the masses might be captured for the *Spartakus* programme or possibly the Independent leaders be removed by democratic processes. After all, here was an organization ready-made—the USPD. To achieve all this, a full USPD party congress was considered necessary, and this Rosa immediately demanded. Jogiches, who knew the organizational possibilities better than anyone, supported her whole-heartedly, and the meeting once more adopted a programme whose main emphasis was on propaganda. Rosa laid down as immediate tasks the reissue of their daily paper, the production of a more theoretical weekly, special papers for youth and for women, a soldiers' paper, syndication of leading articles to be offered to other newspapers—shades of *Sozialdemokratische Korrespondenz*; finally, the creation of a special department for propaganda in the army.² Never had a revolution had such a paper base.

¹ For the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, see Richard Müller, *Vom Kaiserreich zur Republik*, Vol. I, pp. 129 ff., and Emil Barth, *Aus der Werkstatt der deutschen Revolution*, Berlin, no date, pp. 30 ff.; for *Spartakus*, *Illustrierte Geschichte der deutschen Revolution*, Berlin 1929.

Liebknecht, who had the habit of sketching his views for his own benefit in revolutionary shorthand, characterized his own policy as: 'slogan [*Parole*]—mass action—further raising [of all demands]' (*Illustrierte Geschichte*, pp. 203 ff.).

² Pieck, *Reden*, Vol. I, p. 100. H. Duncker, *Erinnerungen von Veteranen der deutschen Gewerkschaftsbewegung an die Novemberrevolution*, Berlin (East) 1958, p. 21.

Organizationally, therefore, *Spartakus* was slow to develop; in most of the important provincial cities it evolved an organized centre only in the course of December and in many cases not until February or March 1919. The remarkable exception was Stuttgart where there had been an important *Spartakus* centre since the summer of 1918, which had, among other things, acted as a collection point for deserters from the German army.¹

By the same token *Spartakus* had no means of bringing direct and personal pressure to bear in the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. Attempts to arrange caucus meetings of *Spartakus* sympathizers within the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Councils did not produce satisfactory results, and an independent Communist caucus within the Berlin Council was formed only on 20 February 1919.² Attempts to have well-known *Spartakus* leaders co-opted to the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils in Berlin failed with monotonous regularity.

By mid-November 1918 *Spartakus* had exhausted its capacity for direct influence on the USPD leadership and was openly quarrelling on tactics with the Revolutionary Shop Stewards. It now adopted a wholly oppositional attitude and had to rely exclusively on mass action to bring its programme to fruition. Rosa Luxemburg did not participate in the early decisions which had produced this configuration but there is no reason whatever to suppose that she disagreed with it. Certainly any reservations she may have had in September and October with regard to the revolutionary potential in Germany, and any consequent lowering of revolutionary sights, had now given way, if not to optimism, at least to the demands of a fully revolutionary solution—and its corollary, the application of the dictatorship of the proletariat against the class enemy as well as his working-class allies. Whether she understood by this what Lenin understood, and what Radek later gruesomely elaborated with his graphic illustrations about knives and gallows, may be doubted. None the less, technique apart, firmness and the full Marxist treatment as then understood in Germany were accepted by all the *Spartakus* leaders.³ The only question was how to bring about the heightened situation, so essential for *Spartakus* plans? All Rosa Luxemburg's thinking for

¹ Keil, *Erlebnisse*, Vol. II, p. 12.

² *Rote Fahne*, 21 February 1919.

³ See the report of the discussion on this point on 11 November in *Rote Fahne*, 15 January 1922.

the past ten years had led her to emphasize the revolutionary possibilities of the masses, as against the possibility of influencing reluctant leaders. Since *Spartakus* possessed no effective organization, this policy was not only theoretically desirable but practically inevitable. So for the next four weeks Rosa Luxemburg's talents and energy were devoted to justifying the *Spartakus* position, to analysing events as a guide to the revolutionary masses, and finally to keeping in being the revolutionary potential of 9 November, on the grounds that what had been achieved that day was only a beginning and a poor one at that. When reading her articles in *Rote Fahne* it is essential to bear in mind the circumstances we have described, all resulting from the positive tactical decisions forced on *Spartakus* on the one hand, and from its isolation, partly deliberate, partly circumstantial, from both majority Socialists and Independents on the other. 'The revolution has begun; not joy over what has been achieved, not triumph over the beaten enemy are the orders of the day, but the strongest self-criticism and iron conservation of energy to continue the work that has only been initiated. Our achievements are slight, and the enemy is *not* beaten', she wrote, as early as 18 November in the first issue of *Rote Fahne* after the printing hiatus had been overcome.¹

As usual, Rosa's first reaction to a situation was the broadest possible analysis of general conditions. But soon enough she dived into more tactical considerations. Now that there was a movement wholly in sympathy with her ideas, the old pre-war habit of creating policy out of criticism no longer applied; something more positive was needed. But old habits died hard—even now, the existence of the Independents was to serve Rosa Luxemburg as a beak-sharpener. As we shall see, this pre-war style of policy-formation did not suit everyone, and there were many youngsters in the group who preferred to ignore rather than waste time attacking the USPD.²

The proposal of the provisional executive of People's Commissars to call a Constituent Assembly as soon as possible was the first point of attack.

Constituent Assembly as the bourgeois solution, Councils of Workers and Soldiers as the Socialist one. Among the open or disguised agents of the ruling classes the slogan [of a Constituent Assembly] is natural.

¹ *Rote Fahne*, 18 November 1918.

² See below, pp. 757 ff.

With the guardians of capitalist money hoards we never argue *in* the legislature or *about* the legislature. But now even the Independents take their place among the guardians of capital on this vital question.¹

As yet Rosa still made some concession to the good intentions of the Independent leaders; it was their mistaken and feeble application of Marxism which led them to misunderstand the real nature of a Constituent Assembly.

They have forgotten that the bourgeoisie is not a political party but a ruling class . . . but once profits are really in question, private property really in danger, then all easy-going talk of democracy immediately comes to an end. . . . As soon as the famous Constituent Assembly really decides to put Socialism fully and completely into practice . . . the battle begins. . . . All this is inevitable. This battle must be fought out, the enemy destroyed—with or without a Constituent Assembly. ‘Civil war’, which they are so anxious to cut out of the revolution, cannot be cut out. For civil war is simply another name for class war, and the thought that Socialism could be achieved without class war, that it follows from a mere majority resolution in parliament, is a ridiculous petit-bourgeois conception.²

Thus the very *conception* of a Constituent Assembly was a negation of the class war and therefore unacceptable to Socialists.

A week later the last illusions about any muddle-headedness on the part of the Independent leaders had disappeared.

We never did think much of Messrs. Haase, Dittmann and Kautsky; often during the war we found that they suffered from verbal diarrhoea but from time to time—particularly when action was required—from the other kind as well. . . . They merely long for conditions of peace and quiet; some of them to be able to digest party congress resolutions peacefully like spring vegetables, the others to avoid getting out of breath in a situation which is greater than the horizons of their conception. . . . We do not need to accuse the Independents, like *Vorwärts*, of a policy of dubious compromises. What they have recently been carrying out is no policy of any kind.³

The clearest statement of the alternative was made a month later—it was Liebknecht’s ascending revolutionary progression in literary terms—when the Reich Conference of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils in turn adopted the proposal of the People’s

¹ ‘Die Nationalversammlung’, *Rote Fahne*, 20 November 1918.

² *Ibid.*

³ ‘Der Weg zum Nichts’, *Rote Fahne*, 28 November 1918.

Commissars for elections to a Constituent Assembly. History was pressed into service, the history of the English revolution:

Not in the debates [of the Long Parliament] in Westminster Abbey, though it may have contained the intellectual centre of the revolution, but on the battlefields of Marston Moor and Naseby, not in glowing speeches, but through the peasant cavalry which formed Cromwell's Ironsides, was the fate of the English revolution decided.

And of the French:

And what was the result of the National Assembly? The Vendée, the emigration, the treason of the generals and the clergy, a revolt by 50 departments, the coalition of feudal Europe, until at last the only means to save the revolution: dictatorship and, as its final form, the terror.

Parliaments were thus useless as means of ensuring revolution, even bourgeois revolution; they were merely the end product of revolutions achieved by other means, in physical and social battle.

Parliaments were only arenas of class warfare for the proletariat as long as bourgeois society ruled in peace and quiet, they were the tribune from which the masses were called [by Socialist deputies] to the banner of Socialism and trained for the coming battle. Today we are in the middle of the proletarian revolution and we need to axe the very tree of capitalist exploitation . . . Lassalle's famous words are more true today than ever. 'The real revolutionary *states what is*' and today *this is*: here capital—there labour; here Constituent [Assembly]—there democracy, in the form of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils.¹

And so it went on, with ever increasing violence. The creation of a deep cleft between Constituent Assembly and Councils had all the impact of a geological upheaval.²

Although the distinction between these two forms of institution served as a useful means of dividing *Spartakus* from the rest, this was not the only means of achieving clarity. Rosa loved history—the present was real only as the reflecting surface of the past; she constantly related the events of the present to what had happened since 4 August 1914.

The ghost of 4 August 1914 reigned in the meeting place of the Council Congress. The old pre-revolutionary Germany of the Hohenzollerns, of Hindenburg and Ludendorff, of martial law and the mass executions

¹ 'Nationalversammlung oder Räteregierung?', *Rote Fahne*, 17 December 1918.

² E.g. 'Ebert's Mamelucken', *Rote Fahne*, 20 December 1918; 'Die Wahlen zur Nationalversammlung', *Rote Fahne*, 23 December 1918.

in Finland, in the Baltic and in the Ukraine, all were unashamedly present in the hall of the Prussian parliament [where the Council meeting took place]—in spite of [the events of] 9 November. . . . But the revolutionary tension, the revolutionary consciousness of the masses must become more acute every day. Every event, particularly the Congress with all its mistakes and reactionary resolutions, has in fact contributed considerably to the clarity and education of the masses, by heightening the contradiction in the attitudes and feeling of the masses. . . . Only lack of clarity, heavy-heartedness; only veils and mist can harm the cause of revolution. Every clarity, every unveiling [of disagreeable facts] is so much oil on the flames.¹

But just as the masses had to be clear about their situation, so it was from time to time regrettably necessary to defend *Spartakus* in the eyes of the masses. This was where Rosa Luxemburg made her own particular contribution to the writings of the time. Here especially she left statements which rose above the immediate necessities of revolutionary action and have remained as a valid commentary on what is best in proletarian revolution for all time. More perhaps than any other member of *Spartakus*, she was at all times concerned with the ethics of revolution, both as an essential part of revolution itself and as a tactical reminder to all its detractors of the moral purposes of revolution. She poured scorn on the rumour-mongers:

Liebkecht has killed 200 officers, has been killed himself, has looted the shops, has distributed money among the soldiers to incite them to destroy the revolution. . . . Whenever a window pane crashes on to the pavement, or a tyre bursts in the street, the Philistines at once look over their shoulders; their hair standing on end and pimply with goose-flesh, they whisper: 'Aha, here comes *Spartakus*'.

A number of people have been writing to Liebkecht with touching personal requests to save wife, nephew or aunt from the coming mass slaughter, which *Spartakus* has planned. We have come to this in the first year and month of the glorious German revolution! . . . Behind these rumours, ridiculous fantasies, and shameless lies there is a serious purpose. The whole thing is planned . . . to create an atmosphere of pogrom and to shoot *Spartakus* politically in the back. They [the official Social Democrats, Scheidemann, Ebert, Otto Braun, Legien, etc.] consciously and deliberately misrepresent our Socialist aims as banditry. They yell against putsches, murder and similar rubbish, but they mean Socialism . . . but the game will not succeed . . . though

¹ 'Ein Pyrrhussieg', *Rote Fahne*, 21 December 1918.

yet vacillating sections of workers and soldiers may be inveigled into opposing us. Even if a momentary return of the counter-revolutionary wave should throw us back into those prisons which we have only just left—the iron course of revolution cannot be held up. Our voice will sound loud and clear, the masses will understand us, and then they will turn all the more fiercely against the propagandists of hate and pogroms.¹

Against the constant accusation of being a party of terror Rosa had this to say.

[Those] who sent 1½ million German men and youths to the slaughter without blinking an eyelid, [those] who supported with all the means at their disposal for four years the greatest blood-letting which humanity has ever experienced—they now scream hoarsely about ‘terror’, about the alleged ‘monstrosities’ threatened by the dictatorship of the proletariat. But these gentlemen should look at their own history.

The revolution that had brought them into power long ago had used its fair share of force.

Terror and fear were the weapons of bourgeois revolution with which to destroy illusions and hopeless resistance to the mainstream of history. The Socialist proletariat, however, thanks to the theory of scientific Socialism, enters into its revolution without illusions, with a clear comprehension of the ultimate consequences of its historical mission, of the unbridgeable contradictions of society, of the bitter enmity to bourgeois society as a whole. It enters the revolution not in order to follow utopian illusions *against* the course of history, but to complete the iron necessities of development, to make Socialism *real*. . . . It therefore does not require to destroy its own illusions with bloody acts of violence in order to create a contradiction between itself and bourgeois society. What it needs is the entire political power of private capital, of wage-slavery, of middle-class domination, in order to build up a new Socialist society. But there are others who need terror, anarchy, and the rule of violence today: the middle classes who are shaking in their shoes for their property, their privileges, and their profits. It is they who fabricate the myths about anarchy and putsches, and pile all these on to the shoulders of the proletariat, in order to unleash their real putsches, their own real anarchy, in order to stifle the proletarian revolution, to drown Socialist dictatorship in chaos, and to create on the ruins of the revolution a class dictatorship of capital for ever and ever.²

¹ ‘Das alte Spiel’, *Rote Fahne*, 18 November 1918.

² ‘Ein gewagtes Spiel’, *Rote Fahne*, 24 November 1918.

Rosa Luxemburg's conception of terror, which she developed in the coming weeks, was later to be attacked both by the Communists—for not being radical or clear enough—and by 'neutral' historians, who claimed that this was mere phraseology to disguise planned and necessary terror in all its consequences. Certainly Rosa Luxemburg's formulations differ substantially from those of the Russians, particularly Radek, who for some years to come was to be the spokesman of the official Russian view in German Communist affairs. 'When the Independents, like Hilferding and Ledebour, said that they accept dictatorship but without terror, without force, they show that they do not accept dictatorship of the working classes at all. . . . Dictatorship without the willingness to apply terror is a knife without a blade.'¹ Other members of *Spartakus* did not find it necessary to write on this question at the time; those who survived only denounced Rosa Luxemburg's conception much later, on Stalin's orders. When Radek arrived in Berlin illegally on 20 December, this was one of the first subjects he discussed with Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg—had the comments in the *Spartakus* letters struck home to them more than the Bolsheviks were openly prepared to admit?

Our argument was mostly concerned with terror. Rosa was hurt that Dzierżyński had accepted the post of heading the Cheka [the Russian security police]. 'After all terror had never beaten us; why should we have to depend on it?' 'But with the help of terror,' I answered her, 'by persecuting us, they throw us back a full five years. We plan for world revolution, we need a few years' grace. How can you deny the need for terror under those circumstances? Anyhow terror is valueless when applied against a young class, representing the future of social change and therefore full of enthusiasm and self-sacrifice. The case is quite different with classes whom history has sentenced to death, and who in addition bear the responsibility for the crime of the world war.' Liebknecht supported me warmly. Rosa said, 'Perhaps you are right, but how can Josef [Dzierżyński] be so cruel?' Tyshka [Jogiches] laughed and said: 'If the need arises, you can do it too.'²

¹ Struthahn (Karl Radek), *Die Entwicklung der deutschen Revolution und die Aufgaben der Kommunistischen Partei*, Stuttgart 1919, p. 5.

² Karl Radek, 'November—A small page out of my memoirs', originally in *Krasnaya Nov'*, 1926, No. 10, pp. 139-75, reprinted in Otto-Ernst Schüddekopf, 'Karl Radek in Berlin, Ein Kapitel deutsch-russischer Beziehungen im Jahre 1919', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 1962, Vol. II, p. 133. This will in future be cited as Radek, *Diary*.

Once again there is no need to isolate Rosa's conceptions from their context. She had strong personal reservations about terror, but had necessarily accepted Russian events as being the result of particular circumstances. The revolution in Germany was improving those circumstances and making the use of terror unnecessary in both countries. She naturally believed in the slow, if irresistible, advance of revolution from that moment onwards. Taking this long but optimistic view, she did not envisage any need to return to the harsh exigencies of isolation. Out of earshot of the daily propaganda bulletin, the founding members of the German Communist Party heard her declare that, in the long view, 'the working-class revolution needs no terrors for its ends, it hates and despises cold-blooded murder'.¹

At the same time she was fully conscious that terror would be applied as a weapon of defence by the opponents of the revolution; that many Socialists, including possibly herself, would yet fall victim to it. She was not squeamish; mass action in all its forms must result in frequent destruction of life as well as property. The more armed resistance to revolution, the greater the clash and the damage. Revolution was not a drawing-room game, or an abstraction; it was simply inevitable. This view differed, however, from the organized and deliberate terror on the part of the revolutionaries which she had condemned in Russia. While it is therefore correct that Rosa Luxemburg never occupied herself with the technique of terror, her attitude cannot be described as 'clever sophistry', or as an attempt 'to avoid a clear confrontation with this issue through self-deception, and with the help of subtle dialectic'.²

Finally Rosa supported every available means of keeping the masses awake and on their toes. *Spartakus* organized repeated demonstrations, not only in reply to what it considered major provocations by the government but as a constant check on its own ability to call up mass support. Thus on 21 November there were big meetings in Berlin at which, among others, Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg addressed the crowd. On 1 December there were a further six big public meetings.³ From then on *Spartakus* was continuously mobilizing support in the streets. Rosa Luxemburg analysed these mass movements as 'Acheron on the move':

¹ *Bericht über den Gründungstag der KPD*, p. 53.

² Kolb, *Arbeiterräte*, p. 140.

³ *Rote Fahne*, 2 December 1918.

They console the masses with the promise of golden rewards from a future democratic parliament . . . but the healthy class instinct of the proletariat rises up against this conception of parliamentary cretinism. . . . The strike movement now unleashed is proof that the political revolution has crashed into the basic structure of society. The revolution returns to its basic roots, it pushes aside the paper props of ministerial changes and resolutions . . . and enters the stage on its own behalf . . . in the present revolution. The recent strikes are not trade-union agreements about trivial details . . . they are the natural answer of the masses to the enormous tremors which capital has suffered as a result of the collapse of German imperialism . . . they are the early beginnings of a general confrontation between capital and labour in Germany. . . . Acheron is on the move, and the dwarfs who carry on their little games at the head of the revolution will either be thrown off the stage or they will finally learn to understand the colossal scale of the historical drama in which they are participating.¹

This joyful indulgence in mass movement, this persistent call for action and clarity, helped to create the conditions for the hopeless January rising in which both Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were killed. Her writings, with their heightened tone and sharp revolutionary formulation, are often considered to have whipped up the unjustified and premature action. But this judgement assumes first of all that the *Spartakus* appeals in general and Rosa's writings in particular—certainly the best writing and the most provocative challenges of the day—received wide publicity, and were acted upon. No direct evidence of the effects of *Spartakus* propaganda on the masses is available; we do not know whether the mass demonstrations took place because of appeals by *Spartakus* or USPD sympathizers in the factories, or as a result of public announcements in the press, or spontaneously, or all three. The confusion of political allegiance in factories, councils, and other organizations make a clear identification of *Spartakus* influence almost impossible. Moreover, there is no substantial evidence that the mass actions which had overtaken the leading organizations before and on 9 November had ever been brought under any effective control. The case for connecting *Spartakus* propaganda directly and causally to the popular manifestations in November, December, and January has still to be proven.

Direct incitement to action was anyhow not the prime purpose

² 'Der Acheron in Bewegung', *Rote Fahne*, 27 November 1918. Acheron is the mythological river of woe that seals off Hades.

of Rosa Luxemburg's writing. Today this is obvious enough; in the revolutionary situation at the end of 1918 Rosa Luxemburg was thundering for clarity precisely because there was confusion in the ranks and crossing of lines. If the official Social Democrats were really the agents of temporarily frightened capitalists—revolutionary *shabbesgoyim*—and if the Independents were unconsciously assisting them in that role, then the continuous exhortations to be on guard could only be taken as calls for action by the masses, if they read them. Her essays, full of historical parallels and scientific analyses, may have been intended as rather emphatic commentary on events, but not to an excited mass of half-demobilized soldiers and unemployed workers. It was the situation which made *Rote Fahne* inflammatory, not its content. The only alternative was out of the question—adjusting the tenor of one's appeals to the tactical demands of the moment, hot and cold, stop and go, like the Bebel leadership of the SPD before the war.

The answer to this apparent dilemma is simply that Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, both of whom had already paid for their revolutionary determination during the war, accepted the full consequences of what they were doing as a part of historical necessity. If indeed the masses rose and were defeated then this would clarify the situation still further; it was part of the inevitable process of education in a revolutionary situation. In the last resort, leaders who are themselves willing to accept the sacrifice of their liberty and life are probably the only ones who can justifiably call upon their supporters to do the same, particularly when these sacrifices are a necessary part of distant though inevitable victory. That the whole conception of revolution may have been mistaken, that there was really no prospect of long- or short-term victory in Germany, is another question; given the circumstances and traditions of the *Spartakus* leaders, it is not meaningful to ask why they did not act 'Russian' during this period. The Independents' policy of compromise, accepting the inevitable Constituent Assembly and hoping to develop a revolutionary tactic within it, was anathema to *Spartakus*. When Kurt Eisner came from Munich to Berlin at the end of November for the conference of provincial Prime Ministers (he had by this time been elected Prime Minister of Bavaria), he had a long dialogue with Liebknecht. He attempted to persuade the latter to make common cause with the more

moderate revolutionaries, even to form joint governments with them, in order to ensure that present revolutionary achievements might at least be maintained and a decent peace obtained from the allies; but he was answered with a stern 'no'. 'The achievement of Socialism is only possible if everything is pulled down completely; only after the destruction of the entire capitalist system can reconstruction begin.'¹

If anything, the membership of *Spartakus* was even more revolutionary than the leaders. The pressure for action came from below—just as Rosa Luxemburg had always predicted. In December several mass demonstrations led to attacks on public buildings by groups of young *Spartakus* members. On 21 November an attempt, with resultant casualties, had been made to storm police headquarters, in spite of the fact that the Berlin Police President was a left-wing Independent—later a Communist—and probably the only senior official in the capital who sympathized with *Spartakus*.² On 8 December detachments went once more from a public meeting to the military headquarters and stormed it.³ And at many *Spartakus* meetings official speakers were often followed on to the rostrum by unexpected members of the crowd, who sometimes made hair-raising but seriously-meant demands, including the liberation of prisoners in all the jails and the instant capture of various prominent personalities. Almost each day there were rival meetings called by the different groups which sometimes clashed.⁴

Rosa Luxemburg knew that in revolutionary times irresponsible elements attached themselves to the revolutionary parties: 'The proletarian revolution will always have to reckon and fight with this particular enemy and tool of the counter-revolution.'⁵ In the crowds there were no doubt some footloose criminals, but the bulk were young uncompromising radicals, who wanted the constant warnings against any truck with the enemy translated into a complete personal break with all the coat-tails of society—and

¹ H. Roland-Holst, *Rosa Luxemburg*, pp. 189–90. The official note of the conversation, with a depressing hand-written comment on its failure, is in *Geheimes Staatsarchiv München*, Political Archives, VII, Series 115, hand-written note of conversation Eisner-Liebknecht, 24 November 1918.

² Eduard Bernstein, *Die deutsche Revolution, ihr Ursprung, ihr Verlauf und ihr Werk*, Berlin 1921, Vol. I, p. 71; *Geheimes Staatsarchiv München*, Political Archives, VII, No. 79, folio 7.

³ Pieck, *Reden*, Vol. I, p. 104.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution* (ed. Bertram D. Wolfe), p. 74.

into action, above all action. It was the unreal hysteria of Hervé all over again. During these stormy weeks, and particularly at the founding congress of the German Communist Party, the leadership collided with some of these elements, and was sometimes overruled by them. But they were part of the stuff of proletarian revolution; there were more important things to do than to condemn them for their impetuosity. That task can be left to German middle-class historians anxious to pick over the dungheap of the 1918 national disgrace.

XVII

IRRESISTIBLE FORCE AND IMMOVABLE OBJECT

HAVING obtained confirmation of their authority from the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Council, the provisional government of People's Commissars quickly set about making it real. Legitimacy was no limitation on power. Ebert—though the phrase 'I hate social revolution like the plague' cannot be attributed to him with certainty—decided that order and a return to normal were the immediate priorities of the situation. He was willing and able to accept all the responsibility. More than his two Social-Democrat colleagues in the government, Scheidemann and Landsberg, he had a strong sense of legitimacy, with regard both to the institutions he had inherited from his predecessors and the new forms of power which had tentatively emerged on 9 November. Ebert was a literal man. Most of the demands put forward by the pre-war SPD under Bebel's leadership and his own, as an unrealizable slogan, had unexpectedly become reality. The notion of revolutionary progression, in which the present stage was but a small step, seemed nonsense to him. What was needed was a bout of revolutionary digestion. Accordingly, the government asked for and obtained from the executive of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils increased powers to cope with the situation. And on 21 December 1918 the national Congress of German Workers' and Soldiers' Councils set the seal of its confirmation and approval on Ebert's government.

This same preoccupation with legitimacy, from which followed the urge for 'peace and quiet', made him resort without hesitation to any available means of achieving his mandate. The most obvious and convenient tool was the army. The High Command had sworn allegiance to the Republic, and this commitment was sufficient guarantee for Ebert, a man for whom an oath was an oath. He considered the delicate negotiations with the army as his personal function, and did not deem it necessary to submit them to the

approval of his USPD colleagues—for, after all, they were only intended to achieve an object that had already been agreed on by all the People's Commissars. As far as he was concerned, any over-eagerness on the part of the army to intervene was only a reaction to *Spartakus's* encouragement of revolutionary excesses—the inevitable results of a disturbed situation.

The course of events in December and January hinged largely on a number of incidents which appeared to disturb the slow process of consolidation by the government. On 6 December troops occupied the editorial offices of *Rote Fahne* and attempted to arrest the executive of the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Council, and were only with difficulty persuaded to leave; at the same time there were calls to make Ebert President. There is no conclusive evidence that Ebert inspired this or wished it to happen, but he did nothing to issue any denial or to denounce and punish the instigators.¹ None the less, these events were followed by mass demonstrations and strikes. Then, on 21 December, the government attempted to deal with the People's Naval Division (*Volksmarinedivision*), a unit of revolutionaries and mutineers, who had installed themselves in the Marstall, the stables of the Imperial Palace, and were pressing their somewhat mercenary services on the revolutionary government. Their idealism for the government of the revolution was heavily tinged with concrete demands for pay and privileges. The negotiations with the government, partly over these and partly over the continued presence and even existence of the unit, came to an abrupt end when troops under the command of Otto Wels, the Social-Democrat Commandant of Berlin, made an unsuccessful assault on the stables. This incident, and particularly the sharp manner in which the negotiations had been broken off and an attack mounted without warning, caused the three Independent members of the provisional government to resign. Henceforth the USPD was wholly in opposition once again. Finally, the government's attempt to remove the left-wing police president of Berlin, Emil Eichhorn, on 3 and 4 January, led directly to the events of the January rising, as a result of which Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were murdered.

Each of these incidents provoked a reaction which was in no

¹ Arthur Rosenberg, *Geschichte der deutschen Republik*, Karlsbad 1935, p. 84. For a view of Ebert's complicity, see Walter Oehme, *Damals in der Reichskanzlei, Erinnerungen aus den Jahren 1918–1919*, Berlin (East) 1958, pp. 62 ff. All the main sources carry slightly different versions of this controversial event.

proportion to its actual importance. The situation was largely beyond the control of both the government and its opponents. Having decided for itself that the government and its Independent supporters were mere agents of the counter-revolution, *Spartakus* saw all these events as signposts along a predicted road, and called out its troops on each occasion. Though it continued, at any rate until the end of the year, to call for the *advance* of the revolution, it was soon obliged to call its supporters not so much to advance as to defend existing achievements against the attacks of the government. These rallying cries for defence were actually a more effective tactic than any call for further advances. *Spartakus* was on its own in demanding rapid and total advance on all fronts, but it could and did find ready allies for the defence against counter-revolution, real or imagined. The workers of Berlin, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, as well as the USPD leadership—particularly after their members left the government—were much more disposed to support action of this kind, for it was precise and not vague or irresponsible. At times the People's Naval Division signified its support, especially when its own interests were threatened. But although events more or less forced co-operation on these groups, it was not too effective. *Spartakus* always mistrusted the intentions and good faith of its allies. While co-operating with them in practice, it went on demarcating its own position from theirs, and continued to show them up in public as cowards and weaklings. The rapid tactical realignments of Lenin had never taken hold in Germany, not even among the radicals. *Spartakus* was imprisoned in the limitations of its commitment to purity and principles as public weapons instead of a private hoard of strength. This made tactical adjustments impossible.

Now that the Independents were in opposition to the government once more, they began to split on the issue of co-operation with *Spartakus*. On 8 December one of their right-wing members, Ströbel, had stated openly that *Spartakus* and the USPD were irreconcilably separated by the difference between German and Russian methods. He saw *Spartakus* as the slavish imitators of Russian methods and the Bolshevik programme; the preoccupation with giving exclusive power to the Councils seemed alien and remote to Germany.¹ He and others advocated for the USPD a clear separation both from Left and Right. Too many

¹ *Die Freiheit*, No. 43, 8 December 1918.

compromises on both sides were responsible for the fact that the Independents were being pulled apart. The alternative was to make a decision between the two extremes. 'We have no policy. We have appeals and leading articles, we have speeches and resolutions, but we have no policy. . . . There are only two possibilities for the USPD: exit from the cabinet and adherence to *Spartakus*—or continuation in the government and sharp demarcation from the Left.'¹

This emphasis on 'German tactics for a German revolution' as opposed to foreign and alien methods plagued the leadership of the USPD. They too wanted revolution, but by indigenous means of unexceptionably German manufacture. At present they were in a blind alley; as Breitscheid had said, the party had either to evolve a policy of its own or to make a clear choice between Left and Right. We have already seen that the accusation of slavish imitation of Russian methods could not really be justified against *Spartakus*. The notion of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils had taken root in Germany spontaneously, even before *Spartakus* had become committed to the system. While *Spartakus* made no bones about its attachment to the Russian revolution and friendship for the Bolsheviks, Rosa Luxemburg had gone out of her way to emphasize the international aspect of the German revolution; her appeal of 25 November to the proletarians of all countries had strongly hinted that it was the German revolution which provided the pivot of the international movement and was the most important factor in the world situation.² As regards direct Russian assistance, there was none. Since the departure of the Russian diplomats following the closing of the Legation on 5 November, there had been no official Russian representatives in Germany until Radek arrived illegally in December. The notion of *Spartakus* as a Russian agent who had blindly adopted a foreign programme for application in Germany was grossly exaggerated. For the Independent leaders, however, the assertion of a German road to revolution was a matter of national pride—left-wing variety; they felt they had inherited the pre-war position of the SPD in the International. Unable to convert these aspirations either into a policy of their own or into a choice between their neighbours, the Independent leaders went on vacillating.

¹ Rudolf Breitscheid in *Der Sozialist*, IV (50), 12 December 1918.

² *Rote Fahne*, 26 November 1918.

The internal struggle between *Spartakus* and the Independent leadership for the control of USPD policy and the direction of its substantial membership came to a head in December. *Spartakus* had been pressing for a party congress and it was this issue which dominated the general meeting of the USPD of Greater Berlin on 15 December. An influential group of the USPD had altogether lost interest in discussing the problem of Councils or Constituent Assembly as alternatives; they considered it a 'waste of time'.¹ At the meeting Hilferding brought a resolution to the effect that the next task was to accept the elections as inevitable and to ensure the greatest possible success for the Independents. At the same time he stipulated the tasks as 'to ensure the safety and increase of our revolutionary achievements with complete decisiveness and without feeble compromise'.

Rosa Luxemburg made an impassioned speech against this whole conception. She and Haase appeared as main speakers on the question of policy and presented their different views. She sketched the history of the last few weeks.

Five weeks have passed since 9 November. The picture is totally changed. Reaction is much stronger today than on the first day of the revolution. And Haase tells us 'Look how wonderfully far we have come'. His duty should have been to show us the advance of the counter-revolution, supported by the government of which Haase is a member. . . . We are still prepared to enter the government today if it carries out Socialist policy based on proper principles.

Precisely the adherence to the policy of the existing government had cost the Independents votes in the elections for the first all-German congress of councils.

Haase has also accused us of bowing to the views of the masses. [According to him] we are not prepared to take over the government without the agreement of the masses. We do not bow, but we also do not simply wait around. . . . Yes, conditions within the USPD are intolerable, since there are elements in it who do not belong together. Either you agree to go the same way as the social patriots, or you join *Spartakus*. Only a party congress can decide this question, but in demanding a party congress, we find Haase's ears just as closed as we found those of Scheidemann when we made similar demands during the war.²

¹ Rudolf Hilferding in *Die Freiheit*, No. 57, 16 December 1918.

² *Die Freiheit*, No. 57, 16 December 1918.

Rosa Luxemburg submitted her own resolution against Hilferding's. She demanded the immediate exit of the USPD members from the government (it was six days before the Marstall incident), resolute opposition to the Constituent Assembly, the immediate seizure of power by the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, the dissolution of the Council of People's Commissars, and finally the immediate convocation of a USPD congress. Her resolution was lost by a large majority, 195 votes against 485 for Hilferding. The Berlin members did not want to accept the choice which Rosa Luxemburg and Breitscheid wished to impose on them. They felt that the middle position of the USPD could be maintained against both alternatives, and that it was the correct policy.

This vote also showed *Spartakus* how illusory for the moment were its hopes of discrediting the USPD leaders in the eyes of the membership, or of forcing them at least to submit to a vote of confidence by a party congress. The fact that Rosa really believed in the possibility of sweeping aside the USPD leadership is born out by her private assessment of the situation for Clara Zetkin's benefit. Rosa explained that people were really behind *Spartakus*. They admired and followed *Rote Fahne* far more than *Freiheit* and actually felt that *Spartakus* did not take the Independent leadership to task sharply enough. Only Haase and Hilferding defended their paper—weakly. 'That is why we insist on the party congress.'¹ Not that a party congress would in the event have produced an alignment different from that at the Berlin members' meeting. The delusion that negative votes of this sort were the result of the leaders' narrow manipulations, and that a broader discussion would also produce a more radical attitude, died hard. For the moment *Spartakus* was balked; and there was no point in continuing as an ineffective ginger group within the USPD. At once the leaders made preparations for the founding of a separate party of their own. It was the organizational break at last—but even now not without grave doubts on the part of Rosa and Leo Jogiches.

If they could not have a USPD congress, at least there was the national congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils four days later, on 20 December. Here was another opportunity of 'testing' the masses. *Spartakus* placed great hopes on the congress, called

¹ 29 November 1918, photocopy IML (B), NL5III-A/15, p. 85. A month later, still optimistic, she wrote that the USPD 'is in the process of complete dissolution . . . in the provinces the reunion of USP and the *Scheidemen* is in full cry' (ibid., p. 92). Did Rosa mean leaders or masses? One wonders!

for welcoming mass demonstrations—which would show the delegates how radical the masses were. The majority Socialists' analysis of the situation used many of the same words as *Spartakus*, but with strangely different meaning.

When William the deserter himself deserted, and the Junkers and middle classes took refuge in their rat holes, the entire working population of Germany looked hopefully towards the only political power which was left, the power of the labour movement. . . . The congress which begins today has the proud task of justifying this confidence, and of reinforcing it where it has already begun to weaken. Certain quarters have been pressing the slogan 'All power to the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils'. The congress has supreme power today, for it is the parliament of the revolution, which can break the revolution's government or give it the strong support which the government needs to master the incalculable difficulties before it. The majority of the congress . . . will be sensible enough to recognize the weakness of its composition. The elections which brought it into being were regrettably neither general nor equal nor direct, in many cases not even secret. Such as they were, they were only an expedient . . . ; for all these weaknesses the only remedy can be found in the spirit of the new orderly system of liberty, and in that strong sense of right which is part of the basis of the German working-class movement. . . .

The discussion 'Constituent Assembly or Councils' may have led to qualification even before its final discussions here. Social Democracy does not recognize these alternatives, since its sacred duty lies in giving the entire population as quickly as possible a full and democratic possibility of self-determination, thus bringing forward the elections for the Constituent [Assembly] to the earliest possible date. Until then the government of the Reich, supported by the confidence of the people, must have liberty of action. Additional governments . . . must not be tolerated . . . it depends on [the Left Independent-*Spartakist* movement] whether the sittings [of the congress] are carried out in a spirit of dignity and in full cognizance of the importance of the matters in hand. As far as can be seen, the Social Democrats, with which we equally count the right wing of the Independents, have a vast majority . . . the far Left . . . can be no menace at any elections. But was it not they who announced 'All power to the Councils'? All right then! They have recognized the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils as the highest power and will have to submit to the decision [of the Congress], even if they do not like it.

How easy it must have seemed to the leadership to hoist *Spartakus* with its own petard!

The recommendations to the delegates concluded with the following sentence:

The men who have the enormous task of leading the people in these troubled times must be restrained, clear, quiet and decisive. We need men of action, not men of words.¹

This declaration is quoted at length because it highlights the different conceptions of revolution held by SPD and *Spartakus*—part of the confusion arose from the absence of a distinct revolutionary vocabulary, and both sides had to use the same old words. As regards programme, the SPD was for consolidation. They recognized the revolutionary achievements as real, and believed that the Socialist society of their conception was at hand. They would go on clinging to this idea until in the 1920s they were pushed out of power by the same democratic system they had created; even when a Nazi government, as indifferent to classifying its opponents as the old imperial governments of Russia and Germany had been, persecuted Socialists indiscriminately with Communists, they still believed that the appearances of 1918 had been realities and that only the *Spartakus* excesses had revived forces which history had already pronounced dead.

But the differences between left- and right-wing socialists were not only programmatic. The Social Democrats saw themselves as men of action, 'restrained, quiet, decisive'; *Spartakus* were cheap manufacturers of revolutionary phrases, without any sense of responsibility. They were by definition cowards, fighting with words but risking the lives only of others.² The members of the SPD, on the other hand, saw themselves as courageous, serious, sensible—above all as responsible. Ascriptive phrases like 'calm deliberation' and 'worthy' abound in party speeches of the time. There was a strong sense of inheritance—not only of power, but of a tradition of rule which retrospectively made all the pre-war denunciations sound like envy. It was no longer the system which was blamed, but individuals: the Kaiser, Ludendorff, Bethmann-Hollweg. The class lessons were thrown to the winds. And yet, to the fury of the Left, the old words still served—there were no others—causing confusion and an almost hysterical fury at such theft.

¹ *Vorwärts*, 16 December 1918.

² This suggestion was to emerge forcibly in January 1919. See below, p. 770.

More than any differences in programme, this quarrel over an inheritance made any co-operation impossible, even in the future. In France and Italy, in spite of the same ideological splits, there was never the same sharp social differentiation; under certain future circumstances a 'Popular Front' co-operation between Communists and Socialists proved possible. In Germany this was not the case, and the two groups were unable to co-operate even against the rise of National Socialism, which menaced them equally. For this reason, too, the intermediate position of the USPD became impossible, so that inevitably its own Right and Left configurations soon split and joined the more natural habitats of SPD and KPD respectively. The choice was not only ideological but social, and therefore harsher.¹

The congress did as *Vorwärts* had predicted, in spite of every effort by *Spartakus* to impose its programme from within and without. *Rote Fahne* reprinted resolution after resolution at public meetings against Ebert and against the SPD majority of the congress, but all to no avail.² A resolution submitted by the delegation of the Stuttgart Council, which was largely *Spartakus*-orientated, for the admission of Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg as 'guests with a consultative voice' was defeated by a considerable majority. It may well be that Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht had tried to get mandates for the congress but failed.

There was in Berlin a rule with regard to the elections that only those who work in some industrial undertaking should be admitted to the congress. In the rest of the country no such restriction was imposed, but rather we based ourselves on the idea that, whatever happened, all the various representatives of Socialism, of the revolution, should be present at the congress.³

An orthodox SPD speaker from Berlin riposted that there was no point in admitting Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg since 'we in Berlin at least, but I think all over the Reich, know very well exactly what we have to expect from these comrades'.⁴ As it

¹ In spite of twelve years' common persecution, this social differentiation was carried through to 1946, and has been a feature of the SED in East Germany ever since—embodied in the isolation of the old SPD element within the united party.

² E.g. *Rote Fahne*, 17 December 1918.

³ *Allgemeiner Kongress der Arbeiter- und Soldatenräte Deutschlands vom 16 bis 21 Dezember 1918*, *Stenographische Berichte*, Berlin, no date, pp. 26–27. Speech by Unfried.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

turned out, the work-bench qualification for attendance had been imposed on the Berlin organizations under pressure from the Independents and *Spartakus* precisely to avoid a mass delegation of right-wing trade unionists. It was this fact, though it now worked against Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, which in part decided the majority Socialists at the congress to get their own back by voting against the admission of the two *Spartakus* leaders. When the vote was taken, one of the delegates called upon the congress 'to rise for a man who has sat in jail for four years', but he was shouted down with the traditional German 'pfui'; had they not all suffered, if not like lions, then at least like lambs?

The Soviet government had attempted to send a delegation to the congress. Although the executive of the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Councils had recommended the government to admit this delegation, the local commanders in the East had refused to let it pass, and indeed the SPD/USPD government had decided after lengthy discussions not to allow the Russian Legation to return to Berlin for the time being.¹ There was complete agreement between majority and Independent Socialists on the dangers of Russian intervention in the German revolution, if on nothing else. When the delegation was turned back by the German military authorities in Kovno, Radek, a member of the delegation, obtained the agreement of the Soviet Council of People's Commissars to try and cross the frontier illegally. He arrived in Berlin on 19 or 20 December.² Though he could have attended the last two sessions of the congress, the *Spartakus* leaders told him that his presence there would be useless—everything was going against them. He arrived just at the time when they had definitely decided to found their party without further delay, and he assisted in the preparations.

As a good if recently-converted Leninist, his first questions concerned the *Spartakus* organization.

¹ Philipp Scheidemann, *Der Zusammenbruch*, Berlin 1921, p. 224. For the negotiations regarding the Soviet delegation to the congress, see *D. & M.*, Vol. II, p. 501 and Scheidemann, p. 227.

² See Radek, *Diary*, p. 132. Although Radek in his later writings on the German revolution became less and less reliable about facts as well as interpretation, he wrote this diary shortly after the events described, and some of the earlier details are borne out exactly by a recent biography: Willy Brandt and Richard Löwenthal, *Ernst Reuter. Ein Leben für die Freiheit*, Munich 1957. Reuter, the Mayor of West Berlin until his death and the predecessor of the present Mayor, Willy Brandt, was a Communist in the years immediately after the First World War, known as Reuter-Friesland. He had been a prisoner of war in Russia and, together with a man called Felix Wolf or Rackow, accompanied Radek in his illegal journey from Russia to Berlin.

How many people had we at the congress? There was not even a *Spartakus* caucus. Laufenberg and his Hamburg group occupied an intermediate position. Rosa spoke of him with great suspicion. And in the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Council? There too we had no organized group. In the provinces things were better here and there. In Bremen we had managed to capture a substantial portion of the council under the command of Knief. In Chemnitz, Brandler was working. 'And how large is our organization in Berlin?' I asked. 'We are only collecting our forces. When the revolution began we did not have more than 50 people organized in Berlin.'

I drove with Paul Levi to the offices of the central committee to meet Jogiches. It was like an apiary. The old secretary Mathilde Jacob met me . . . she led me to Jogiches. He had aged a lot, my old teacher. . . . There was still a certain amount of tension between us, since the split in the Polish Social Democracy in 1912 . . . we did not talk about these old matters. He asked after Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Dzierżyński. After a few minutes we were back to our old relationship, open and simple.¹

A curious moment, Radek's arrival in Berlin, the official delegate of the victorious Bolsheviks—a moment of mixed feelings and memories even in the the midst of a hailstorm of present events. Radek, the outcast of Polish and German Social Democracy, the snide journalist with the poison pen who had clutched Lenin's coat-tails in 1914 for protection against Jogiches and Rosa Luxemburg, Radek the '*genus* whore' who had poisoned Rosa's relations with her Bremen friends, had deepened the split in the SDKPiL, had written that the 'Tyshka and Luxemburg clique is finished'—Lenin's plenipotentiary! Radek himself glided elegantly over the personal undertones of the first meeting. And we may well believe that Jogiches, who had really mellowed during the war, soon let the past remain buried—as with Lenin, actual revolution simply buried old personal feuds under its majestic rubble. But Rosa? Radek said nothing. But she stayed with him that first day not one moment longer than was necessary, and would not join them for dinner. The coldness of their encounter became proverbial in the Communist Party.²

¹ Radek, *Diary*, pp. 132-4.

² Ruth Fischer took an extreme view. 'Luxemburg refused even to see him and had to be persuaded by Levi that this was an impossible procedure.' *Stalin and German Communism*, London 1948, p. 76. Ruth Fischer was not then in Berlin and is generally unreliable; in places deliberately so. Consequently I am very reluctant to accept any interpretation of hers without corroboration. For example, 'Liebknecht and his friends opposed Luxemburg's concept as a dangerously unrealistic interpretation of the . . . situation in Germany.' (*Ibid.*) This story is, in fact, an inversion of the truth.

The programme for the new party was entirely written by Rosa Luxemburg and had been published on 14 December.¹

Rosa wrote a draft of a party programme. It was discussed among the leaders and caused no argument at all. The only argument arose over the relationship to the Constituent Assembly. Liebknecht said that he woke up in the morning opposed to participation in the elections, and by the evening supported it. It was a very tempting suggestion to oppose the conception of a Constituent [Assembly] with the slogan of the Councils, but the congress of Councils had itself opted for the Constituent [Assembly]. This fact could not be overcome. Rosa and Liebknecht admitted it, and Jogiches emphasized it continually. But the youths in the party [—like the ‘youths’ in the SPD of 1891—] were bitterly opposed to it. ‘We shall chase them away with machine guns’ [they said].²

Since she had taken over the elucidation and writing of *Spartakus*’s policy in November, the early incessant hammering on tactical demands could now at last give way in part to a broader, more congenial analysis, anchored in history. The intellectual stomach of the masses was supposed to be strong enough for such a diet. Throughout these weeks Rosa was the most consistent exponent of the notion that success was really a long way off, and that the processes of revolution would, though inevitable, be slow. Now she could elaborate this idea, untrammelled by any tactical slogans. Liebknecht, too, admitted this, at least in private.³ But while he was much more influenced by the apparent revolutionary reification of his surroundings—he spoke at meetings almost daily and was in closer contact with the leaders of the USPD and Revolutionary Shop Stewards—Rosa Luxemburg maintained her stable, almost philosophical, vision intact. Her draft programme reflected this. She talked continually of a ‘tough, inexhaustible struggle’ over a long period of time.

For the benefit of her immediate party audience she also contrasted sharply the alternatives of chaos and victory, challenging the easy notion that victory was inevitable, irrespective of Socialist mistakes. There *was* an alternative, chaos—and while it might be good propaganda for the masses to demonstrate an optimism of historical inevitability, the new party itself needed a jolt out of its intellectual self-satisfaction. She had frequently hinted at this in

¹ ‘Was will der Spartakusbund?’, *Rote Fahne*, 14 December 1918.

² Radek, *Diary*, pp. 134–5.

³ A. Rosenberg, *Geschichte*, pp. 28, 61, 73. This author is most emphatic; also Radek, *Diary*, p. 133.

Rote Fahne; now she spelt it out for the young radical optimists in the movement who were piling on pressure.¹ She warned them solemnly that the counter-revolution would prefer chaos to admitting a Socialist victory. Naturally there were practical proposals too, divided into eight 'immediate measures for the safety of the revolution', eight for the next steps in the political and social field, and another eight economic demands. The programme was part offence, part defence; but the headings alone showed the leaders' defensive posture against 'the infantile disease of Left Communism'.²

The core of Rosa's ideas was contained in the summary at the end.

This is what *Spartakus* stands for.

And because it stands for these things, because it is the moving spirit, the Socialist conscience of the revolution, it is hated, persecuted and slandered by all the open and secret enemies of the revolution itself. 'Crucify it', cry the capitalists, trembling for their hoards. 'Crucify it', cry the lower middle classes, the officers, the anti-Semites, the newspaper satraps of the bourgeoisie, trembling for the fleshpots of class domination.

'Crucify it', the misled and deluded sections of the working classes and soldiers echo, those who do not yet realize that they are raging against their own flesh and blood when they rage against *Spartakus*.

In hate and slander against *Spartakus* all the counter-revolutionary, anti-social, dubious, dark and dangerous elements combine. This alone shows clearly that the real heart of the revolution beats with *Spartakus*, that the future is with it. *Spartakus* is not a party which wishes to obtain power over the working classes or by 'using' the working classes. *Spartakus* is no more than the self-conscious part of the proletariat, which points out to the broad masses their historic tasks at every step, which represents at every stage of the revolution the final goal and acts in the interest of proletarian world revolution in all national questions. *Spartakus* refuses to share the government with the servants of the middle classes, with Scheidemann-Ebert, because it considers such co-operation treason to the very foundations of Socialism, a source of strength to the counter-revolution, and the crippling of the revolution itself.

Spartakus will also refuse to accept power merely because Scheidemann-Ebert have gone bankrupt and because the Independents find themselves in a blind alley as a result of their co-operation with them.

¹ For these, see above, p. 715. For her analysis of the chaos alternative, above, p. 730.

² *Bericht über den Gründungsparteitag der kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands (Spartakusbund) vom 30 Dezember 1918 bis 1 Januar 1919*, Berlin, no date, pp. 53-55 (cited hereafter as *Bericht KPD*).

Spartakus will never undertake to govern other than through the clear and unmistakable wish of the great majority of the proletarian masses of Germany, and never without their conscious agreement with the ideas, aims, and methods of *Spartakus*. Government by the proletariat can only battle its way to complete clarity and readiness, step by step, through a long valley of sorrows, of bitter experience, of defeats and victories. The victory of *Spartakus* is not at the beginning but at the end of the revolution: it is the same thing as the victory of the great masses of the Socialist proletariat. . . .¹

To the well-ordered tranquillity of the historian, this appeal must seem naïve and highly romantic. And so, perhaps, it was. She had waited so long for the revolution, had defended its coming against so many powerful and learned detractors—and here it was, the apparent result, not of party manœuvres, but of conscious proletarian action in its own interest and on its own behalf, just as she had always claimed. But it would be absurd to dismiss this declaration of faith as an attempt to cover ice-cold calculations with a little attractive warmth. It was not just a mantle thrown over hard organizational realities, as so much of later Bolshevik propaganda; this was what *Spartakus* had to offer *instead of* organization.

It was optimistic, in the sense that there opened up enormous vistas of a better life, but at the same time the distance of the projection and the warnings of defeats and sorrows convey an aura of profound pessimism in practical, immediate terms. Contrary to appearances, the historical belief in objective situations tends to be pessimistic; those who rely on their own action, who draw the circle of their world tight enough to encompass only the range of their own personal possibilities—these are the real optimists. This declaration of faith, tacked on to a party political programme, reads like a testament. Lenin, too, pinned such a testament to the wall before dying; when the years of tactical polemics, of firm proposals for action, suddenly opened out on an objective situation almost beyond remedy, at this late moment he challenged his too-powerful lieutenants: 'I shall fight Great Russian chauvinism to the end of my life.' The *Spartakus* programme was Rosa's testament, just as it is also the concise summary of her life's work. Here was the famous statement that *Spartakus* would take power only with the support of the majority of the masses, which has led to such bitter squabbling between Social Democrats and Communists

¹ *Bericht KPD*, pp. 55–56.

over Rosa's intellectual corpse. It was this idealism, this apparent commitment to orthodox liberal democracy, which later brought a powerful section of the German Communist Party under the leadership of Ruth Fischer to diagnose Rosa Luxemburg's influence in the German working-class movement as 'syphilitic'.¹

We already know that to look for vestigial traces of orthodox or mere majority democracy in Rosa's thought is misleading.² Emphatically she did not believe—and continually fought against—the idea that the genius of a central committee and a lot of power sufficed to establish a correct policy. But equally there was no question of waiting for, or soliciting, the masses. The masses meant action—in the right situation; through action to a majority and not, as in orthodox democracy, consensus first and maybe action later.³ Rosa Luxemburg had no doubt that the support of the masses must come with action and could come in no other way, but that it was a sporadic and not a continuous process; finally, that it coincided with the seizure of power and the advent of Socialism. The creation of only two alternatives, Bolshevism or Social Democracy as they developed, retrospectively narrowed the area of choice; at the time Rosa's ideas were a lively third alternative.⁴

Nor is there any need to suppose that Rosa's formulation was merely a propaganda move to attract mass support. Quite the contrary: the whole programme, though it made concessions to the immediate requirements of *Spartakus*, was a declaration of faith, included more for the party members than the masses. If anything, it contradicted the urgency of the daily blare in *Rote Fahne*. The

¹ See below, pp. 800, 806.

² Arguing against national self-determination in Poland and those who claimed support for it from 'a majority in the nation', Rosa Luxemburg had written as far back as 1908: 'Woe to the Social-Democratic party that should ever consider this principle [of legitimate majority rule] authoritative. It would be equivalent to a death sentence on Social Democracy as a revolutionary party. . . . "The will of the nation", or of its majority, is not a sort of God for Social Democracy, before which it humbly prostrates itself; on the contrary, Social Democracy's whole historic mission depends above all on revolutionizing, on forming the will of the "nation"—that is, its working majority.' (*Przeegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, No. 6, August 1908; *Wybór Pism*, Vol. II, pp. 155 ff.) The sentiment is genuine enough, though the pregnant phraseology was more suitable for 1908 Poland than 1918 Germany. Later Bolshevik critics of Luxemburgism's excessive preoccupation with majorities and democracy were clearly unfamiliar with this excerpt—as with almost all her Polish writing.

³ For the analysis of this argument, see above, Chapter XII.

⁴ This narrowing corridor between a Stalinist 'Left' and a *petit-bourgeois* 'Right'—or otherwise minute sectarianism—is despairingly illustrated for a later (still narrower) period in Simone de Beauvoir's novel of post-1945 French politics, *Les Mandarins*.

most important evidence for the claim that the incitements in *Rote Fahne* were intended as situational analyses—albeit optimistic—rather than tactical directions for action, can be found in the official *Spartakus* programme itself.

The decision to found an independent party was not taken lightly, as we have seen. In spite of the failures at the USPD meeting and the Council congress, Rosa Luxemburg in particular was still preoccupied with the need to remain inside an existing organization and so keep contact with the masses. In isolation even doctrinal purity was no good. Isolation meant not merely an organizational vacuum, it meant leaving the real world of Socialism for a void. Here—and here only—there is some justification for an analogy with Social Democracy as against Bolshevism; the idea of splitting and re-forming without any apparent loss of contact with the masses was unknown and held to be selfish and absurd. But even then the distinction from Bolshevism can be carried too far. Once in power, the Bolsheviks adopted the same, if not a more rigorous, attitude to splits, as being a descent into the darkest void. In the end, however, Rosa Luxemburg accepted the majority's decision to organize a separate party; of the leadership, only Jogiches actually voted against it—and he the organizing expert. Only the delegates from Brunswick voted with him.¹ Nevertheless, Clara Zetkin was persuaded by urgent letters from Rosa and Jogiches to remain in the USPD for the time being. There were still right-minded members to be stolen, and it was her job to steal them.² Jogiches' doubts about the wisdom of the organizational break merely confirmed the doubts of no less a Leninist than Radek; even at the party congress itself, 'I still did not feel that I was in the presence of a party'.³

¹ Hans Wenzel, *Das Revolutionsjahr 1918–1919 in Braunschweig*. Unpublished thesis (Brunswick), p. 119; *Die Oktoberrevolution und Deutschland, Protokoll der wissenschaftlichen Tagung in Leipzig 25–30 November 1957*, Berlin (East) 1958, p. 137.

² Clara Zetkin, *Ausgewählte Reden*, Vol. II, Introduction, p. xiii; also pp. 100 ff. She left the USPD only after the party congress in May 1919.

³ Radek, *Diary*, p. 136. When Radek remonstrated with Rosa Luxemburg about the extreme tone of her articles she replied that 'when a healthy child is born, it struggles and yells and doesn't bleat'. The same argument, in practically the same words, was used in the discussions of the Central Committee of the RSDRP about the German terms for peace in January 1918. Lenin said that 'the Western revolutions were still foetal while the Russian revolution was a healthy and loudly yelling infant demanding the right to be heard' (*Protokoly Tsentralnogo Komiteta RSDRP, Avgust 1917–Fevral' 1918*, Moscow 1929, p. 198). This is another incidental example of the strikingly common pool of left-wing similes.

But by an overwhelming majority a preliminary all-German conference of the *Spartakusbund* decided on 29 December 1918 to go ahead with the creation of a new party. The founding congress of the KPD followed on immediately in the reception hall of the Berlin City Council, from 30 December 1918 to 1 January 1919. The political situation was very tense. After the incidents with the People's Naval Division on 24 December, groups of *Spartakus* members had again occupied *Vorwärts* and forced the production of issues sympathetic to their own cause. The Independents had left the government a few days earlier and were now officially in opposition. The first groups of *Freikorps*—volunteer associations of soldiers and officers to combat the revolution—had been formed, and leaflets calling for the murder of the *Spartakus* leaders were already in circulation. There were persistent rumours that Karl Liebknecht had been killed and on 7 December an attempt had in fact been made to kill him.¹ It was in this atmosphere that the KPD was constituted.

Reports were made by various members of the executive on the major questions of the day. The congress laid down the conditions for further co-operation with both USPD and the Revolutionary Shop Stewards; in theory this still depended on their unqualified adherence to *Spartakus* policy. A telegram of greetings and solidarity was sent to the Soviet government. When Radek spoke in the name of the Russian party and officially welcomed the founding of the KPD on its behalf, there was a minor sensation; all the journalists reporting the congress, which was held in public, rushed off to telephone the news that an illegal Russian representative had arrived—and what a representative! But sly and cautious Pieck had temporarily had the doors locked.²

Then came the climax of the proceedings. Shortly after half-past two on the last day of 1918, Rosa Luxemburg made a long speech on the subject of 'our programme and the political situation'.³ The bellyful of compromises, of submissions to the organizational exigencies of large parties, of loyalty to an old though ruinously betrayed idea—all this had finally come to an end. For the first time Rosa Luxemburg was able to weave a German party directly into the very tissue of Marx and Engels, unadulterated by the glosses and dilutions of their patrician disciples. Her speech was full of

¹ *Ich war, Ich bin, Ich werde sein*, Berlin (East) 1958, Introduction, p. 20.

² Radek, *Diary*, p. 136.

³ *Bericht KPD*, pp. 18–42.

references to the Communist Manifesto. In a famous passage she referred to the introduction which Engels had written to the second edition of Marx's *Class Struggle in France*. Engels seemed there to deny the validity of armed struggle in modern times—Rosa had wrestled with Engels's interpretation of this before—and appeared to emphasize the primacy of legal action.

Here Engels added a lengthy criticism of the delusion that in modern conditions of capitalism the proletariat could achieve anything by revolution in the streets. I think it is time, seeing that we are standing in the middle of a revolution, and for that matter in a street revolution with all that goes with it, to take issue with the conception which was the official one of German Social Democracy right up to the last, and which is entirely responsible for the events of 4 August 1914. I do not wish to imply that Engels, through his statements, bears the responsibility for the developments in Germany: I only say that what he produced was a classical text for the notions which flourish in German Social Democracy, or rather which have helped to kill it. . . . And when the introduction says that with today's development of armies it would be madness to suppose that the working classes could deal satisfactorily with soldiers equipped with the latest arms, then it assumes that these soldiers are anyway, and will always be, a pillar of the ruling classes—an error which would be incomprehensible in the light of today's experiences for a man at the head of our movement. But we know under what actual circumstances the particular document was written. To the honour of our great masters and particularly of Engels, who died much later, it must be emphasized that Engels wrote his introduction under the direct pressure of the Socialist deputies in the Reichstag of the time. . . . In order to deal with radical elements in the SPD Bebel and other comrades nagged Engels, who lived abroad and had to rely on their view of the situation, to save the German working classes from going off the rails into anarchism. . . . Engels did not live to see the results, the practical consequences of the use of his introduction. I am certain that if one knows the works of Marx and Engels, just as if one knows the living revolutionary spirit which breathes from all their work, one is bound to be convinced that Engels would have been the first . . . to protest with all his power against the interpretation which led to total reliance on parliamentary means. He would have pulled back the coach with all the means at his disposal, to prevent it slipping into the mud. . . .¹

It was an interesting argument because this introduction had in fact been used by Kautsky and the SPD leadership to justify their

¹ *Bericht KPD*, pp. 22–24.

antagonism to mass action, and never more so than during the 1910 mass-strike debates. Five years after Rosa Luxemburg's death Ryazanov, then head of the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute in Moscow, published the original full text of Engels's introduction and it was found that the SPD executive had actually left out those bits referring to the positive aspects of armed revolution, and had thereby tailored the sense to fit with their conception of what was tactically required.¹ Rosa, like everyone else, had no idea that the original had been edited. None the less, she found time in the middle of her revolution to reinterpret at least the sense of the document, because it remained a clear obstacle to the desired radicalization of policy. One of the aspects of the new party was that greater respect would be paid to the texts of the Old Masters. In this sense the founding of the KPD was the Marxist Reformation, against the indulgences of Pope Kautsky. The Bolsheviks never admitted that such a thing was needed—Kautsky the renegade had 'turned away' from truth; they were the worse historians for it.

Rosa's speech was, oddly enough, one of the least propagandistic and most philosophical that she had ever made. Apart from the impatient rank and file at the congress, here she was at last in a circle of people who had surmounted all the hurdles of the last few years, who really were devoted to the same ideals, to whom one could talk 'straight'; this meant that there was no reason now to compromise with the real language of Marxism.

We are at a moment when the Social-Democratic, or Socialist, programme of the proletariat must be put on a totally new basis. Party comrades, we shall now take up the thread which Marx and Engels first spun 70 years ago with the Communist Manifesto. . . . Consciously, and in contradiction to the results of the last 70 years, together with the entire conception on which the Erfurt programme was based, we liquidate all of this and with it the consequences that led directly to the

¹ The full text of Engels's introduction appeared for the first time in German in *Internationale Pressekorrespondenz*, No. 141, 1924. A letter of protest dated 1 April 1895 from Engels against the misuse and amendment of his introduction was reprinted in Karl Kautsky, *Der Weg zur Macht*:

'I was astonished to see in today's *Vorwärts* an extract from my introduction, reprinted without my approval and tailor-made in such a manner as to present me as a peaceful worshipper of legality at any price [*friedfertiger Anbeter der Gesetzhlichkeit quand même*]. I shall be all the more pleased to see the whole thing now reprinted in *Neue Zeit* to remove this unworthy impression. I shall certainly tell Liebknecht my views very clearly and also those, whoever they are, who gave him the opportunity to misrepresent my intentions.'

But this letter hinted only at distortions, not suppressions.

world war. There is no longer a minimum and a maximum programme. Socialism is both of these at the same time, and is itself the minimum that we have to achieve.¹

But the spiritual echo of like-thinking friends led even Rosa to a degree of charismatic optimism at one moment.

The hopes of Ebert–Scheidemann of controlling the proletariat with the help of brutalized soldiers have already been largely destroyed [instead of her more usual: ‘will fail’]. . . . The proletariat has lost all its illusions that the government of Ebert–Scheidemann–Haase is a Socialist government. . . . The government daily loses the support of great masses of the proletariat. Apart from the lower middle classes, there remain only bits, sad bits, of the proletariat to support them, and it is very doubtful how much longer [any] will continue to support them at all.²

Finally, Rosa Luxemburg again elevated the masses into the mainstream of the revolution.

The battle for Socialism can only be carried on by the masses, directly against capitalism, in every factory, by every proletarian against his particular employer. . . . Socialism cannot be made and will not be made by order, not even by the best and most capable Socialist government. It must be made by the masses, through every proletarian individual. Precisely there where the proletarians are chained to capital, the chain must be broken. That is Socialism, only in this way can Socialism be created. And what is the form of the struggle for Socialism? It is the strike. And that is why we have seen that the economic phase has now moved into the foreground in the second period of the revolution.³

Nothing shows more clearly that Rosa Luxemburg had retained her basic concept of revolution since 1906, and was far from adopting Bolshevik methods in Germany. But the less one forgets the less one learns, and this doctrine of mass confrontation was central to her thought.

The congress murmured approval of the Marx formulations, of the commitment to the masses, of the rather arid and formal remarks

¹ *Bericht KPD*, pp. 19, 26.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 29–31. The *petite bourgeoisie*, or lower middle class in non-Marxist jargon, was a highly abstract concept for Rosa; a sort of *Lumpen-bourgeoisie*. As with the peasantry, she never managed to infuse this class with any social vitality. See above, p. 342.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 33. These sentences had all been marked for deletion in the copy of the *KPD Bericht* used by the present author. ‘This belonged at one time to a Communist journalist of the thirties, who had been editing a new version of the speech for publication—without the emphasis on economic ‘spontaneity’.

about agriculture: "The most important conception of the Socialist economy is to remove the contradiction and the division between town and country. Industry cannot even be reorganized in a Socialist direction without a live connection with an equally reorganized agriculture." The storms of applause came when Rosa attacked the SPD and USPD leaders personally. She pointed to the build-up of troops in the East, to the government's horse-trading with the military leaders in Germany. The congress had applauded Karl Liebknecht too when he said: 'We only remained in the USPD to drive it forward, to keep it within reach of our whip, to steal its best elements. . . . We may not have captured the leaders, but a good part of the masses.'¹ But in other matters Rosa Luxemburg and her immediate friends did not find things so easy. The congress turned down the executive's proposal to participate in the elections for the Constituent Assembly. On the first day Rosa's appearance had been met with the enthusiasm befitting a distinguished revolutionary leader. But her speech in favour of participating in the election was met by 'weak applause'.² Paul Levi, who had presented the executive's resolution on the subject and supported it at length, had to face repeated dissent, while the floor speakers who fulminated against participation were greeted with great enthusiasm. Participation was finally lost in a vote of 62 against 23. Rosa mildly rebuked the delegates, with the memory of the Duma boycott in her mind.

We understand and value the motives from which stems the opposition to the executive's point of view. Our pleasure is, however, not wholehearted. Comrades, you take your radicalism rather too easily. With all our stormy impatience we must not lose the necessary seriousness and the need for reflection. The Russian example against the Constituent [Assembly] does not apply. When the Constituent [Assembly] was driven out, our Russian comrades already had a Trotsky-Lenin government. We still have Ebert-Scheidemann.³

Leo Jogiches, on the other hand, who alone had opposed the creation of a separate party on such very weak organizational foundations, now proposed to his colleagues that in view of the leadership's defeat on such a vital question of tactics the whole KPD project and congress should be abandoned—though he was soon persuaded to withdraw this suggestion.⁴

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Paul Levi, 'The Congress of the Communist Party', *Die Internationale*, 1920, Vol. II, No. 26, p. 43.

An SPD historian later underlined the essential contradiction of the Communist Party Congress. 'If the Communists considered that the immediate removal of the government was out of the question as a political aim, they should have avoided raising the hope among their followers with all the means at their disposal that the government could be overthrown. Under those circumstances it was frivolous to drive the workers into the streets. . . .'¹ Neither then nor later did her opponents understand the difference between a speech to party members and an appeal to the masses which in Rosa Luxemburg's eyes were two fundamentally different things, and yet were both halves of the truth. When Radek challenged her about the extreme tone of her articles, far in excess of the real potential of *Spartakus*, she said: 'When a healthy child is born, it struggles and yells and doesn't bleat.'² Strong language was a fatal habit in Polish and Russian politics.

In spite of the pressure of events, and the admitted infancy of the new party, it was a great occasion. If the new party was not the result of Rosa's ardent wish, here it was none the less—at least the like-minded now shared a communal yet exclusive organization. Now that the decision had been made to 'go it alone', Rosa had no regrets or doubts. She was more optimistic than at any time since 1914. 'The separation from the USPD had become absolutely inevitable for *political* reasons,' she wrote to Clara Zetkin, 'even if the *people* [in it] are still the same as they were at Gotha [the USPD's founding congress] the situation has entirely changed.' And she berated her absent and easily despairing friend for taking the negative vote against the executive over participation in the Constituent Assembly elections far too seriously.

Our 'defeat' was merely the triumph of a somewhat childish, half-baked, narrow-minded radicalism. In any case that happened at the beginning of the conference. Later contact between us [the executive] and the delegates was established . . . an entirely different atmosphere [*Resonanz*] than at the start. . . . *Spartakisten* are a fresh generation, free from the cretinous traditions of the 'good old party'. . . . We all decided unanimously not to make the matter into a cardinal question [*Kabinettsfrage*] and not to take it too seriously.³

¹ Hermann Müller, *Die Novemberrevolution. Erinnerungen*, Berlin 1931, p. 252.

² Radek, *Diary*, p. 133.

³ Photocopy IML (B), NL5 III-A/15, p. 118.

We have already speculated on the valedictory note in the programme and its accompanying speech, and it would add drama if we could show some awareness in Rosa that these were the last weeks of her life. But, hindsight apart, the evidence suggests the contrary. Rosa was always conscious of the possibility of death in action, and repeatedly mentioned it to her friends—though not always without a touch of rhetoric.¹ But this was a general, almost abstract preoccupation, not even heightened by the events at the end of 1918—except perhaps in the very last days. On 25 December Rosa wrote to Clara Zetkin that she had received ‘urgent warning “from official sources” that the assassins are looking for Karl and myself, and we shouldn’t sleep at home . . . it finally got on my nerves and I simply went back to Südende’. And on 11 January, perhaps the last actual letter from Rosa’s pen: ‘Right now the battle is raging through Berlin, a lot of our brave boys have fallen. . . . Now I must close.’² There was of course plenty of very real danger, only Rosa was not fully conscious of it or simply ignored it. Perhaps she did not take *Rote Fahne* literally!

Little is known of how Rosa Luxemburg lived during these two months. The work of writing and editing *Rote Fahne*, of drafting the programme and appeal of *Spartakus*, would have been a full-time job under any circumstances. *Rote Fahne* was her main worry—‘will it come out, will it not come out. At last, here it is . . . technically not yet up to much’, she wrote to Clara Zetkin on 18 November.³ She insisted on seeing every word that appeared.⁴ All the *Spartakus* leaders, but particularly Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, were living two or three full-time lives at the same time. While Rosa was writing and editing, Karl Liebknecht

¹ ‘My dear young friend, I assure you that I would never flee even if the gallows threatened . . . because . . . I believe sacrifices to be part of a Socialist’s stock-in-trade.’ (Letter to Walter Stöcker, 11 March 1914, IML (B); see *Selected Works*, Vol. II, p. 304.)

² Rosa Luxemburg to Clara Zetkin, 11 January 1919, IML (M), photocopy IML (B), NL5 III-A/15, partly quoted in Luise Dornemann, *Clara Zetkin*, Berlin (East) 1957, p. 288. Clara Zetkin had asked for advice a week earlier on whether she should come to Berlin. The letter only reached Rosa in Berlin on 10 January and she answered it the next day. Clara Zetkin’s final reply, her last letter to her closest friend, had an almost prophetic echo of impending doom. ‘Will this letter, will my love still be able to reach you? . . . Oh Rosa, what days! I see before me so clearly the historic greatness and meanings of all your actions, but my knowledge of these things cannot still the urgent demands of my heart, I cannot overcome my terrible worry and fear for you personally.’ (Clara Zetkin to Rosa Luxemburg, 13 January 1919, *ibid.*, p. 290.)

³ Photocopy IML (B), NL III-A/15, p. 75.

⁴ Clara Zetkin, *Reden*, Vol. III, p. 423.

was negotiating continually within and on behalf of *Spartakus*. There were long and regular meetings of the *Spartakus* executive. Both made continual appearances at public meetings. Apart from the large open gatherings, which took place several times a week, there were meetings in factories in various suburbs of Berlin. By the end of December it was no longer possible for Rosa and Liebknecht to remain safely in their own apartments. At first Rosa lived for a few nights at a time in various hotels, calling at the flat only for mail and clothes; during and after the January risings they were billeted with different sympathizers and changed lodgings every night. It was only during Christmas that Rosa was able even to visit her own home, much less live in it. Mathilde Jacob was her post office once more.

Occasionally Rosa was able to walk anonymously among the crowds of Berlin, to obtain the 'feel' of the revolution as an outsider as well as a participant. Radek describes a dinner with Liebknecht, Jogiches, and Paul Levi on the day after his arrival in Berlin. 'The owner of the tavern regarded Liebknecht with special affection, and gave him far more to eat than us. . . . Afterwards we went for a walk. Great masses of people in the streets. Not pedestrians and strollers as usual, but swarms of people talking about politics, their faces full of interest and joy. We talked politics with one of the drivers in another café.' Later that night Radek spoke at a meeting, and was challenged as a reactionary when he spoke of the hardships in Russia. 'Some worker . . . had misunderstood my remarks about conditions of the battle. They could not imagine what a revolution was really like . . . I spent New Year's Eve with Liebknecht. In spite of his exhaustion he was as happy as a child.'¹

During these hectic weeks Rosa made a sporadic effort to maintain her connections with at least a few of her closer friends. On 18 November she wrote to Adolf Geck expressing her sympathy on the death of his son, who had died in the last battles of October in eastern France.² Even after the New Year, Rosa found time to write to Marta Rosenbaum, with whom she had developed such a close friendship while in prison.

Berlin, 4 January 1919.

My dear, dear Martchen, I am finally sending you, with a thousand best wishes, the first number of *Rote Fahne*, the effort for which has

¹ Radek, *Diary*, pp. 133-4, 136.

² *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 173.

been keeping me at full stretch from morning to night all these days.¹ I feel a desperate need to see you, to put my arms round you and to talk with you. Kurt [Rosenfeld] told me that you felt hurt through me. I felt as if a brick had dropped on my head. Have I not generated, through all the time of our friendship, sufficient confidence to make misunderstandings out of the question? I feel terribly hurt. Well, I will have to accept that too; we will have to talk, and no shadow must remain between me and my dear Marta with her golden heart. I tried to reach you on the telephone yesterday, but I was unable. Later I did not have a free second. I will try to make it today. Meantime, I embrace you with all my old love and loyalty a thousand times, and with the best regards to you and your husband, your Rosa L.

She did not see Luise Kautsky or any of them again. There was no time, and the world was too divided. But Rosa hoped that all would be well again later, during the inevitable ebb. Meantime her universe was public meetings, the editorial staff of *Rote Fahne*—including faithful Mathilde Jacob and Fanny Jeziarska—and the colleagues of the *Spartakus* executive. A narrow universe but warm, kept warm by the events outside.

No doubt this was the way that Rosa had always wished to live, all her natural impatience and energy absorbed in the manifold activities of real, not theoretical, revolution, with a few intimates only. Rock-like though reserved as ever was Leo Jogiches, still her oldest, closest friend. The glimpses of him during these weeks are of the briefest, but there he was, his main preoccupation the support and protection of Rosa, to whose pre-eminence he at last almost subordinated his own strong personality. And perhaps his presence helped her to develop that extraordinary reserve of nervous energy. It was as though the forcible contraction of effort during the years in prison now catapulted her forward more fiercely than ever. Those who knew her in these weeks all spoke of her inexhaustible energy, of her disregard for tiredness and the constant headaches and nausea. What price would she have paid with her health if she had survived?

The event that sparked off the January fighting began in a small way, like all the others since 9 November. The continuous large crowds on the move in Berlin, the demonstrations and uncon-

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, pp. 168–9. The reference to the ‘first number’ is confusing as this appeared on 9 November. But Rosa was running weeks behind in those of her private affairs to which she could attend at all.

trolled mass meetings, the many minor and more serious incidents, finally caused the government to take action against the police president, Emil Eichhorn. Under his command, the police seemed to be turning into a revolutionary institution. The SPD was determined that this sensitive post should no longer be occupied by one of its Independent opponents. The government put in Ernst, a right-wing Social Democrat; someone reliable. The last straw was Eichhorn's refusal to submit himself to the authority of the Prussian Ministry of the Interior; he claimed that he was responsible in the last resort only to the executive of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council. *Vorwärts* had been running a campaign against him since 1 January, hinting that he was a Russian agent since he had once worked for a Russian news agency; it was a handy and effective denunciation, even though it was entirely unfounded.¹

There was no reason to suppose that this legitimate if inadvisable dismissal would lead to more than the usual protests and demonstrations. On 4 January he was officially sacked, but refused to leave his office. On the evening of the same day a routine meeting of the executive of the USPD organization of Greater Berlin reacted to the news with a unanimous resolution that 'the attack on Eichhorn must be repelled', but what to do or how far to go was not settled or even discussed at any length.² For once the USPD decided to put the potential of the masses to the test, before deciding on any course of action. But while the Independents merely called for a protest demonstration on 5 January, *Rote Fahne*, in line with its usual practice, called for the strongest popular reaction.³ *Spartakus* could not afford to admit the need of a popular thermometer. A meeting of the KPD executive specifically rejected any attempt to take over the government—'we can hold out for two weeks at the most'—but a call was made for the usual arming of the workers and disarming of the troops.⁴

The demonstrations of the 5th turned out to be larger than anyone had expected. The revolutionary leaders, particularly the

¹ Paul Hirsch, *Der Weg der Sozialdemokratie zur Macht in Preussen*, Berlin 1929, pp. 133 ff. *Vorwärts*, 1 January 1919 onwards; also *Preussischer Untersuchungsausschuss, Bericht über die Januar Unruhen in Berlin*, No. 4121A, Col. 28 ff. Eichhorn's own story is in Emil Eichhorn, *Über die Januarereignisse*, Berlin 1919, pp. 60 ff.

² Richard Müller, *Der Bürgerkrieg in Deutschland*, Berlin 1925, p. 30. All the sources agree that no decision on any course of action was taken at this meeting.

³ *Ledebour-Prozess*, p. 44, testimony of Ledebour; *Rote Fahne*, 5 January 1919.

⁴ Richard Müller, *Bürgerkrieg*, loc. cit.



Eden Hotel, 16 January 1919. The soldier at the table (third from left, with drooping moustache) is Rosa Luxemburg's murderer, Runge. (For a note on this photograph, see the List of Illustrations, p. vii)



Karl and Sonia (or Sophie) Liebknecht on a hike, shortly after their marriage

KPD, now saw complete justification for their policy; if such a turn-out did not call for action, nothing ever would. It was reported—wrongly, as it turned out—that the troops too were ready to join in.¹

The great moment seemed unexpectedly to have struck, and the revolutionary groups bowed to it. A fatally loose organizational co-operation was worked out. On 5 January the Berlin USPD leadership, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, and the executive of the KPD issued a joint proclamation, calling on the masses 'not to accept the attempt of the government to stifle the revolution with bayonets. With the attack on the Berlin police authorities, the entire German proletariat, the entire German revolution is at stake.'² A similar call for further demonstrations was made on the 6th. By this time the *Vorwärts* offices had been occupied once more by demonstrators, and a revolutionary issue appeared on the 6th under the anonymous sponsorship of 'The Revolutionary Workers of Greater Berlin', specifically calling for the removal of the traitors Ebert and Scheidemann, seizure of power by the Council, and arming of the masses.³ Almost simultaneously, that same Workers' and Soldiers' Council—the object of the revolutionaries' affection—announced to the population its own confirmation of Eichhorn's dismissal and thus removed the last ground of legitimate complaint.⁴

The first-fruits of the co-operation of the three revolutionary groups was the formation of a Revolutionary Executive of thirty-three members. This in turn created a directorate of three: Liebknecht, Ledebour, and Scholze, representing the KPD, the Independents, and the Revolutionary Shop Stewards respectively. Much doubt exists as to the exact purpose of this executive—whether it was merely to direct the movement, as its participants later claimed, or whether it was to take over the government once the existing incumbents had been removed.⁵ This was the classic 'unmade' revolution as propounded by the German Left: let the events dictate the institutions; mass pressure on institutions could make them infinitely flexible. The concept may have been peculiarly Rosa Luxemburg's, but for the moment it was accepted even by her personal opponents in the USPD.

The exact motives of each group and the precise connection of

¹ *Ledebour-Prozess*, p. 51.

² *D. & M.*, Vol. III, p. 10.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁵ *Ledebour-Prozess*, p. 53.

events have never been entirely clarified. At the meeting of 5 January, consisting of delegates from all three groups, the decision to overturn the government had been approved against the opposition of a strong minority from among the Revolutionary Shop Stewards; precisely the group that had been most active in bringing their organized workers out on the streets. Nor had the executive of the KPD by any means committed itself to the removal of the government; indeed, most of the evidence shows that the representatives of the KPD in the joint meetings, Liebknecht and Pieck, agreed to the sharp resolutions and maximum demands *against* the specific instructions of their party.¹ Apparently, the news of the occupation of *Vorwärts* and other newspaper offices reached the revolutionary executive after it had made its non-decisions about the future, and caused considerable surprise.² This in turn gave rise to a general wave of euphoria.

The *Volksmarinedivision*, the People's Naval Division, whose continued existence had been assured by popular support during its conflict with the government at the end of December, now refused to come in on the side of the insurgents. They remained neutral, their leaders making themselves conspicuous by their absence when attempts were made by revolutionary emissaries to enlist their aid.³ Thus the insurgents lost the services of the only body of armed revolutionary troops.

Already by the afternoon of the 6th the Revolutionary Executive was in some doubt as to its ability to control events, and began to support the initiative of the official USPD leadership for negotiation with the government. It was clear probably by the evening of the 6th, certainly by the morning of the 7th, that there was no chance of overturning the government, and troops were known to be moving steadily into Berlin. But having been carried along like everyone else on the wave of events, the Communists saw negotiations at this stage as a complete betrayal, the old SPD executive tactic of 1910. Rosa Luxemburg wrote of 'the complete neglect of the most elementary rules of revolutionary action'. Instead of occupying the real positions of power, only a few newspapers and

¹ R. Müller, *Bürgerkrieg*, pp. 32 ff. Pieck, *Reden*, Vol. I, pp. 115-16. See also Karl Heinz Luther, 'Die nachrevolutionären Machtkämpfe in Berlin', *Jahrbücher für die Geschichte Mittel- und Ostdeutschlands*, Vol. VIII (1959), p. 212.

² *Ledebour-Prozess*, pp. 62, 82.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 189-94, testimony of sailor Milowski; also Eric Waldman, *The Spartakist Uprising of 1919 and the Crisis of the German Socialist Movement*, Milwaukee (U.S.A.) 1958, p. 176.

news agencies had been captured. For this, however, she blamed the leadership, not the masses. In any case,

when one is in the middle of the sharpest struggle against the government of Ebert–Scheidemann, one does not at the same time start ‘negotiations’ with the government. . . . Such negotiations can only lead to one of two results: either to a compromise or—far more probably—to a dragging out of the situation, which will be used by Ebert’s men for the most brutal measures of repression. . . .

The masses are ready to support any revolutionary action, to go through fire and water for Socialism. But they need clear guidance, and ruthless determined leadership. . . . Germany has always been the classic country of organization, and still more of the fanatic organization mentality, but . . . the organization of revolutionary actions can and must be learnt in revolution itself, as one can only learn swimming in the water. . . . The lesson of the last three days calls loudly to the leaders of the workers: do not talk, do not discuss endlessly, do not negotiate, act.¹

Almost quixotically, Rosa Luxemburg and the KPD were springing to the defence of a revolutionary effort which they had not initiated, whose aim they could not support, but which equally must not be allowed to fail. The lesson was clear—and it was the old lesson of 1907–10: you cannot manipulate the crowds into revolutionary action and then manipulate them out again. For that reason she and her colleagues had initially opposed the insurrection designed to remove the government. But once the masses were out on the streets, you could not negotiate over their heads, even though the result might be a bloody defeat. The same lesson was repeated more emphatically in her other articles; all turned on this question of commitment to the masses, irrespective of tactical results.² The emphasis is continually on the leaders and their failures. Nor was this unjustified: the revolutionary leadership was able neither to drive the movement forward nor to negotiate whole-heartedly to bring it to a rapid end. Thus the government was able to mount its counter-action undisturbed, to turn stalemate or disengagement into victory. Radek had all along been firmly against the whole thing, and especially against Communist participation. He now advised complete about-turn and withdrawal; the KPD must propose formally to the Revolutionary

¹ ‘Versäumte Pflichten’, *Rote Fahne*, 8 January 1919.

² ‘Was machen die Führer?’, *Rote Fahne*, 7 January 1919. ‘Das Versagen der Führer’, *Rote Fahne*, 11 January 1919.

Shop Stewards that fighting must cease; if necessary the armed workers must give up their arms. At the same time, a manifesto was to be issued justifying the retreat and calling for new elections to the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils.¹ This was the Leninist tactic of liquidating mistakes brutally and quickly. The proposal was supported in principle by the KPD executive. How to make it effective?

Next day, the 10th, the KPD Central Committee claimed that it wrote to the Revolutionary Executive withdrawing its two representatives, 'even in their consultative capacity . . . [since] the clarity and strength of the revolutionary movement demands an immediate revision of our relationship with the Revolutionary Shop Stewards. We are always available for an exchange of views . . . and will fight shoulder to shoulder . . . if a really thorough revolutionary action is envisaged.' The letter, signed by Pieck himself—to give the appearance of solidarity; did Liebknecht refuse to sign?—could not be delivered by hand as intended owing to the practical disintegration of the Revolutionary Executive; it was printed instead in *Rote Fahne* on 13 January 1919. Thus it had no practical value, and perhaps was never intended to have; the editorial comment accompanying it in *Rote Fahne* suggested that it was part of the 'clarity' process by which the KPD executive dissociated itself from the vacillating leadership of the revolt. Was the letter ever sent, or meant to be? We do not really know.

Little is known of the details of the internal discussions. In any case, a tradition later grew up in leading Communist circles according to which the KPD delegates to the Revolutionary Executive, Liebknecht and Pieck, acted against the instructions of their party executive, and the KPD leaders tried unsuccessfully to end the participation of their representatives in the disastrous venture. Pieck in his memoirs glided over his own part by painting a picture full of objective difficulties.

The executive of the KPD could not be kept informed about these decisions, nor was it possible to inform them of what was decided [by the Revolutionary Executive]. Only at a later meeting of the KPD executive it appeared that they were in agreement with the struggle against the government's measures, but not with the aims of the enterprise: the fight for government power. Out of this arose considerable differences of opinion, with regard to the activities of Liebknecht and

¹ *Illustrierte Geschichte*, p. 282. Radek's letter to the KPD executive dated 9 January and expressing these negative views was reprinted only here. A discussion of KPD attitudes is in Eric Waldman, *The Spartakist Uprising*.

myself among the Revolutionary Shop Stewards during the enterprise. The cause of this was the lack of decision and lack of clarity on the part of the USPD and the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, as a result of which the USPD leadership began negotiations with the Social Democrats and naturally had not the least interest thereafter in intensifying the common effort. The KPD executive none the less supported the action with all its strength, and enormous masses followed its appeal for demonstrations.¹

A later historian put it more bluntly: 'On January 10 the *Spartakusbund* tried again to end its connection with the Shop Stewards. Again it forbade the participation of Liebknecht, but without effect.'² The KPD leadership disapproved both of the 'putsch' mentality of the Revolutionary Executive, and of the tentative negotiations attempted both by the USPD and a section of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards. What it advocated instead, however, is not clear. According to Rosi Wolffstein, the *rapporteuse* of the KPD founding congress, who was not in Berlin during the January events, Rosa taxed Liebknecht with the following reproach when he returned to the party offices after one meeting of the Revolutionary Executive: 'But Karl, how could you, and what about our programme?'³

Rote Fahne certainly did not reflect Radek's advice to write off the action as ill advised and premature, and to withdraw from it in as good order as possible. Instead, the mass action was reported as a victory; only the negotiations were clearly labelled as a betrayal and capitulation of the revolutionary workers. 'The Communist Party naturally does not participate in this shameful policy, and refuses any responsibility for it. We continue to regard it as our duty to drive the revolution forward . . . and to warn the masses with the sharpest criticism of the dangers of the Shop Stewards' policy of hesitation and the bog[ged down] policy of the Independents.'⁴

The constant hammering on clarity, at a time when the mass action had failed and the city was being occupied by troops bent

¹ Quoted in Pieck, *Reden*, Vol. I, pp. 115-16.

² Ruth Fischer, *Stalin and German Communism*, London 1948, p. 97. Ruth Fischer had every interest in showing up the January action as a good example of the disorganized conditions which her later policy of 'Bolshevization' was designed to remedy. She was not present in Berlin during January, but reported—perhaps exaggerated—a tradition that became well established a few years later.

³ In an interview with the author. Rosi Wolffstein is the widow of Paul Frölich. The story had already become a KPD legend within a few weeks of Rosa's and Karl's deaths.

⁴ *Rote Fahne*, 11 January 1919.

on revenge and repression, contained more pathos and courage than good sense. To analyse the situation on 13 January as though profound historical insights were being opened up by current events, as though history itself was now writing the indictment of the Independent leaders as the working class's false friends, can hardly have contributed much to keeping up the spirits of defeated workers.¹ Emphasis on the perspective of history at a moment of defeat is typically the consolation of an intellectual élite.

But leaders who sincerely believed that the long-term prospect could carry any amount of present failure could naturally resort to this kind of analysis on the grounds that it could actually contribute to greater success next time. The implication was clear: it was the co-operation with the Shop Stewards and the Independents—both indecisive elements—which had brought about the failure of the present action. Next time the masses must follow the lead of the only organization able to recognize reality beneath all the fictions and pretences—the KPD.

What of the glaring contradiction between the desire of the Communists to disengage, and the public castigation of the revolutionary leadership for negotiating? Negotiations of this sort were a betrayal of the masses, and deliberately both Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in their last articles preferred once again to commit *Spartakus* in public to the action of the masses, however disastrous. In future it would be possible to show that *Spartakus*, which had not wanted or called for the overthrow of the government, had still supported the people while the other leaders, who had first set themselves and the masses impossible goals, soon betrayed their followers once it was politic or necessary to do so. There was no time to develop this idea; by the evening of 15 January both Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were dead. But already the outline of the future apologia was clear. As for the differences within the Communist leadership, these could await serious self-criticism as soon as the situation was calmer.

The attempt to negotiate had anyhow not succeeded. On 11 January the government insisted on acceptance of all its conditions, otherwise their counter-attack would begin with an assault on the captured *Vorwärts* building. Although by this time mass support for the whole action had ebbed considerably, the government troops under Noske formally paraded into central Berlin from the

¹ 'Kartenhäuser', *Rote Fahne*, 13 January 1919.

suburbs on 13 January and took the *Vorwärts* building by storm. On 12 January the senior military leaders had informed the government that they did not wish to have further negotiations with *Spartakus* under any circumstances; this might make their own troops unreliable. This was pure military propaganda, since *Spartakus* itself deliberately refused to participate in any of the negotiations; in fact it was the only group to do so. It is to be noted that the name *Spartakus* had now become the invariable synonym for all insurgents—used by the government, SPD, and military alike. Delegates sent to negotiate with the government, who consisted largely of Revolutionary Shop Stewards and Independents, were invariably referred to as *Spartakists*.¹ At the same time the government's determination to impose its will in exemplary fashion on the Left was not matched by similar toughness towards the army. Whatever the truth of the story of Ebert's sell-out to the military as early as November, by the beginning of January the government had placed itself formally in the hands of the armed services. Kautsky wrote: 'From a purely military point of view the government could permit itself to refuse more or less outright any further negotiations. . . . It may truly emerge victorious from this battle and indeed have gained in strength, but only by ceding larger powers to the middle class and military factors, with whose help it was able to triumph.'² And indeed victory in the January fighting made the government undertake a wholesale offensive against even the relatively harmless Workers' and Soldiers' Councils as undesirable revolutionary institutions—still under the guise of dealing with *Spartakus*, of securing law and order.

In the eyes of the public the blame for the revolt appeared to lie largely with *Spartakus*. The Revolutionary Shop Stewards, who had never had either the talent or the means for propaganda, remained largely anonymous and now went underground in their factories. Ledebour had already been arrested on the night of 10–11 January, and the USPD leadership fell into the hands of less committed right-wing leaders. *Spartakus* as a group was easily the most exposed. Middle-class organizations and *Freikorps* leaders encouraged the belief that if the Communist leaders could be dealt with personally, the end of all these troubles would be in sight. This notion, which led to the production of handbills calling for the killing of Liebknecht, was never discouraged by the SPD. Such

¹ Noske, *Von Kiel bis Kapp*, p. 73.

² *Die Freiheit*, 13 January 1919.

personal attainders had been appearing since November, but now reached a crescendo. On 13 January a poem appeared in *Vorwärts* under the name of Arthur Zickler, a regular contributor, which roundly accused the *Spartakus* leaders of cowardice by skulking in their hiding places while honest workers were being killed.

Many hundred corpses in a row,
Proletarians,
Karl, Rosa, Radek and Co.,
Not one of them is there,
Proletarians.¹

The atmosphere in Berlin at this time can therefore be imagined. Both Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, the best-known figures of *Spartakus*, were particularly exposed. At least unofficially there was a substantial price on their heads, offered by right-wing private enterprise, and Scheidemann may well have known of this and encouraged it.²

Both were now on the run, moving from flat to flat every night. Whatever their differences over the tactics of the revolt, their situations were identical, for in the eyes of the world they *were Spartakus*, two halves of a hermaphrodite whole.³ The offices of the

¹ The poem reads:

‘Vielhundert Tote in einer Reih—
Proletarier!
Es fragen nicht Pulver, Eisen und Blei,
ob einer rechts, links oder Spartakus sei—
Proletarier . . .
Wer hat die Gewalt in die Strassen gesandt,
Proletarier?
Wer nahm die Waffe zuerst in die Hand
und hat auf ihre Entscheidung gebrannt?
Spartakus!
Vielhundert Tote in einer Reih—
Proletarier . . .
Karl, Rosa, Radek und Kumpane—
Es ist keiner dabei, es ist keiner dabei,
Proletarier!’

Shortly after the murders, *Vorwärts* carried an apology by the author. ‘Today I regret this poem. Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were first of all no cowards, but proved to be very brave; secondly, they did not start the mad revolt, but tried to hold it back. Others were responsible . . . now, of course, the gentlemen of the *Rote Fahne* are accusing me (knowing my dislike for court proceedings) of having encouraged the murder of Liebknecht and Frau Luxemburg. . . . This to a Socialist who has sat enthusiastically at the feet of these two, and has himself suffered enormously during this sad period. . . .’

² Frölich, p. 330.

³ The idea of a party being headed equally by a man and a woman was an unattractive by-product of revolutionary socialism in the eyes of the *gente per bene*. There were repeated hints of orgies and at the very least Rosa and Karl were believed to be lovers—an idea that has proved remarkably durable.

KPD were occupied and ransacked by the military. Even then, it took persuasion and the arrest of three leading colleagues to convince Rosa and Karl to take better measures for their own safety.¹ They still insisted on continuing the editing of *Rote Fahne*. On the 12th and 13th they stayed in the working-class district of Neukölin. Apparently the comings and goings in connection with *Rote Fahne* made this hiding place too conspicuous and on the 14th they moved to a middle-class district in Wilmersdorf. It was from there that Rosa Luxemburg wrote her last article, 'Order reigns in Berlin', and Karl Liebknecht 'In spite of all'.²

'Order reigns in Berlin' was a bitter attack on the rule of bourgeois 'order', with all its brutalities and repression.

But even in the middle of the battle, amid the triumphant screams of the counter-revolution, the revolutionary proletariat must make its reckoning with recent events and measure these and their results on the scale of history. Revolution has no time to lose, it marches on—over the graves, not yet filled in, over 'victories and defeats'—towards its great tasks. To follow its direction in full consciousness is the first task of the soldiers for international Socialism.³

Could a final victory of the revolutionary proletariat and the removal of Ebert–Scheidemann have been expected, Rosa asked. Could a revolutionary dictatorship have been established? No, if the degree of ripeness of the German proletariat is taken into account. The *permanent* victory in this context was not yet possible. Not that the revolt was pointless or unnecessary, for it was the provocation of the government that had brought it about.

It was a *matter of honour* for the revolution to ward off this attack with all its energy, if the counter-revolution was not to be encouraged to further efforts. . . . It is an inner law of revolution not to stand still on its achievements. Attack is the best form of defence. . . . The revolutions so far have brought us nothing but defeat, but these inevitable defeats are themselves one stepping-stone on top of another to the final victory. . . .

But the leadership has failed. None the less, the leadership can and must be rebuilt by the masses out of the masses. The masses are crucial, they are the rock on which the final victory of revolution will be built.

¹ Pieck, *Reden*, Vol. I, p. 118.

² 'Die Ordnung herrscht in Berlin', *Rote Fahne*, 14 January 1919; 'Trotz alledem', *Rote Fahne*, 15 January 1919. This was the last date of publication before the paper had to go underground. It did not appear again legally until February.

³ *Rote Fahne*, 14 January 1919.

The masses were up to the mark, they have forged this defeat into the chain of those historical battles which are themselves the strength and pride of international Socialism. And that is why a future victory will blossom from this 'defeat'.

'Order rules in Berlin.' You stupid lackeys! Your 'order' is built on sand. Tomorrow the revolution will rear ahead once more and announce to your horror amid the brass of trumpets: 'I was, I am, I always will be!'

The next day Karl Liebknecht added his own valediction:

Hold hard. We have not fled. We are not beaten . . . for *Spartakus*—that means fire and spirit, heart and soul, will and deed of the proletarian revolution. For *Spartakus*—that stands for all the longing for achievement, all the embattled resolution of the class-conscious proletariat . . . whether or not we shall survive when all is achieved, our programme will live; it will dominate the world of liberated peoples. In spite of all.¹

The farewell was intended to be temporary, actors whose play had come to the end of the run, whose backers had withdrawn. But in fact the two leaders were saying goodbye to life itself.

On 15 January a section of troops arrested Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg towards nine o'clock in the evening. No one knows how their hiding place was discovered, but it may well be that the presence of these two strange guests in this respectable middle-class block of flats caused some other tenants to notify the military, or one of the anti-revolutionary defence organizations.² Pieck was present by accident; on the instruction of the Communist executive he had brought them false papers and the latest information from party headquarters.³ The owner of the flat, Frau Markussohn, later described Rosa's appearance to Luise Kautsky. 'Her sunken cheeks and the dark rings under her eyes from so many sleepless nights were evidence of her physical exhaustion, but her strength of will remained unimpaired.'⁴ When the soldiers came she was resting; she now suffered constantly from headaches. She packed a small case, and took some books—a further spell in jail was inevitable. An attempt to give false names was of no avail: the soldiers knew well with whom they were dealing.⁵ Karl Liebknecht was taken away first, then Rosa Luxemburg and Pieck followed in

¹ 'Trotz alledem.' ² H. Roland-Holst, op. cit., p. 207.

³ Wilhelm Pieck, 'Der 15 Januar 1919', first published in *Internationale Pressekorrespondenz*, Moscow, 10 January 1928. Reprinted in Pieck, *Reden*, Vol. I, p. 432. The account of the arrest given below follows Pieck's narrative.

⁴ H. Roland-Holst, loc. cit. ⁵ Frölich, p. 332.

another car which drove to the Eden Hotel, the temporary headquarters of one of the para-military divisions in the centre of Berlin. Their arrival had been notified in advance, for Rosa Luxemburg was greeted with sarcastic taunts and much abuse. She was taken to the first floor of the hotel, where a Captain Pabst went through a formal interrogation.¹ It was already late at night.

It has never been entirely clear how premeditated the subsequent murders were, and how many people knew of them before and immediately afterwards. Pabst himself—who survived all the subsequent events in Germany with profit though without much honour—stated in 1962 that ‘in practice the authority of the State was in the hands of the *Freikorps*, but they had the full support of Noske’, then a member of the government and People’s Commissar in charge of military affairs.² Possibly Rosa’s stinging replies helped to enrage the officers still further.³ According to investigations carried out shortly afterwards by Jogiches and published in *Rote Fahne* during February, the whole plot was worked out in advance, as soon as it was known to the leaders of this particular division that Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht had been apprehended and would be brought in to their headquarters.⁴ The obvious participants were later brought to trial before a military court in which the soldier Runge was sentenced to two years and two weeks’ imprisonment, while Lieutenant Vogel got four months. The other accused were acquitted. Reference to these events, particularly as far as knowledge and approval of them were concerned, was made in a number of libel actions ten years later.⁵

¹ Pabst’s role in the affair has had some unexpected recent publicity. Pabst himself, who is still alive, published an account of the events of 15 January 1919 in a German newspaper in January 1962. Following this, the ‘Bulletin of the Press and Information Office of the German Federal Republic’ commented officially that the account given by Pabst was substantially correct, and that the murder of the two revolutionary leaders was ‘an execution in accordance with martial law’ (*Standrechtliche Erschiessung*). *Bulletin des Presse und Informationsamtes der Bundesregierung*, 8 February 1962, No. 27, p. 223.

Der Spiegel, the editors of which were shortly thereafter indicted for treasonable activities on other counts, published a sarcastic interview with Pabst (*Der Spiegel*, No. 16, 18 April 1962). Karl Liebknecht’s widow, Sophie (or Sonia) Liebknecht, at present living in East Berlin, announced that she would take proceedings against the head of the West German Information Department for ‘glorifying murder’. To date there has been no further news of these proceedings.

² *Der Spiegel*, No. 16, pp. 38–39.

³ Maurice Berger, *La nouvelle Allemagne*, Paris 1919, p. 275.

⁴ *Rote Fahne*, 13–16 February, 19 February 1919.

⁵ These mostly centred round Jörns (or Jorns), the examining magistrate charged with the investigation of Rosa’s murder. He was strongly suspected of

There is little point in going through the mountains of conflicting evidence, but within certain limits the course of events is moderately clear. The government certainly did not issue express orders for the murder of any of the *Spartakus* leaders. At the same time Noske did nothing to restrain his bloodthirsty auxiliaries. The *Freikorps* members, at the time and later, felt they could rely on Noske's support in any subsequent proceedings, should these arise. In addition, a number of precedents for unpunished summary action had already been set. The negotiators on behalf of the group that had occupied the *Vorwärts* building were shot down on 11 January while carrying their flag of truce, and some of the other occupants were severely beaten up.¹ No proceedings were ever taken or envisaged against those responsible. The maltreatment of individual revolutionaries had by then become a common occurrence.

None the less, the officers of the *Garde-Kavallerie-Schützen-Division*, of which Pabst was first Staff Captain, knew that the murder of these two well-known *Spartakus* leaders was an event of greater importance than any shooting of hostages in the course of street fighting. Probably when the news was telephoned through that the two leaders had been captured the problem was discussed and it was decided to deal with them summarily. Soldier Runge, who later felt that he had been shabbily treated by his superiors and unloaded his own version in the newspapers, was persuaded or bribed or ordered—or all three—to stand by the side door of the Eden Hotel and to hit the emerging *Spartakus* leaders over the head with his rifle butt.² For the sake of appearances the official instructions were to take Liebknecht and Luxemburg to the civil prison at Moabit, where all the other leaders of the revolt so far captured had been taken. Pieck, waiting in the passage outside the

suppressing evidence, or rather of ensuring that nothing came out that might require suppression. In 1928 this allegation was printed in *Das Tagebuch* (e.g. 24 March), and Jörns accordingly sued the editor, Josef Bornstein, for libel. At that time Jörns was already well-established as a Reich Procurator (*Reichsanwalt*). The fact that he was a thoroughly political lawyer is shown by his later career in the Nazi People's Court. For the evidence of political loading of the administration of justice against the Left, even in the early days of the Weimar Republic, see J. Gumbel, *Vier Jahre Mord*, Berlin 1923, particularly pp. 81, 101–2, where a comparative table of sentences against Left and Right is given. See also F. K. Kaul, *Justiz wird zum Verbrechen*, Berlin (East) 1953, p. 280.

¹ *Ledebour-Prozess*, pp. 206 ff. Hermann Müller, *Novemberrevolution*, p. 267.

² See his own 'confession' made to *Rote Fahne*, 11 January 1921. Though his evidence tallies precisely with Pieck's, he was quite clearly capable of saying whatever suited the occasion. Cf. also below, p. 781, note 1.

interrogation room, heard the officers say to each other that not one of the three would leave the hotel alive.

Karl Liebknecht was led out first before the curious and unsympathetic eyes of the soldiers and a few hotel guests. So this was what the legendary *Spartakist* looked like! As he emerged from a side door into a deserted street—nothing indicates premeditation more than this complete absence of passers-by—Runge carried out his instructions, and hit him hard over the head with his rifle butt. Liebknecht was then half dragged, half hustled into a waiting car, which went off in the opposite direction to that of the prison. In the Tiergarten he was made to get out of the car and was shot within a few yards. The fatal shot was actually fired by Captain von Pflugk-Hartung.¹ The body was delivered to a local mortuary as that of an unknown man found by the roadside. On return to the Eden Hotel this section reported to their chief that Liebknecht had been ‘shot while trying to escape’.

Shortly afterwards it was Rosa Luxemburg’s turn. Already in the lobby of the hotel some of the soldiers had been exercising their muscles on her. Pieck heard one of the maids say, ‘I shall never forget how they knocked the poor woman down and dragged her around.’²

The transport of Rosa Luxemburg was in charge of a Lieutenant Vogel. Runge punctiliously performed again and, half-dead, she was dragged into another waiting car. There the messy proceedings were quickly brought to an end inside the car by a shot in the head from the officer in charge. The car stopped at a bridge over the Landwehr Canal and the body was thrown over into the murky waters, where it remained until 31 May. Here the story was that an angry mob had stopped the car and carried Rosa Luxemburg off to an unknown destination. The soldiers were unanimously sorry; they had nothing definite to report about her fate.

Although the Communist leaders knew that the report that Liebknecht had been shot while attempting to escape was a lie, they had no facts as yet to set against the story of his death and Rosa Luxemburg’s disappearance. Since *Rote Fahne* was out of action

¹ By a curious coincidence, I met this same Pflugk-Hartung in a prison camp at the end of the Second World War. I was at that time unaware of his role in these events, but he hastened to inform me of the significant role he had played in freeing Europe from Bolshevism, and suggested this as a valid reason why he should instantly be released from captivity. The whole incident had clearly been a source of permanent pride to him, as to the other participants.

² Pieck, ‘Der 15 Januar 1919’.

for the moment, it fell to the Independents' *Freiheit* on 17 January to challenge the official government announcement regarding the two deaths; this was of course based on the agreed version of the murderers.¹ However, long before her body was found, the real facts began to emerge and were published in *Rote Fahne*. Certainly by April the government knew the facts if not the motives, but still refused publicly to amend the statement of 16 January. For a time a Barbarossa-type myth about Rosa Luxemburg was in circulation, that she had gone underground to direct operations and would emerge once more in due course. However, *Rote Fahne* made it its business to scotch this false hope.

There was a widespread feeling of horror, even in SPD circles. When *Rote Fahne* began its disclosures, *Vorwärts* wrote on 13 February that 'the full force of the law must be invoked against the murderers'. Representatives of the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Council for a time sat in on the judicial proceedings against the murderers. But no prosecution could be made to stick. Demands for a civil as opposed to a military court to try the murderers were refused by the government on the grounds that this would interfere with the process of justice already in motion. The old Socialist conviction about the class 'justice' handed out by the imperial courts had withered away into a more anaemic respect now that six Socialist ministers *were* the Reich government. Besides, the regiment claimed jurisdiction; the allegations referred to acts committed on duty. The minimal sentences actually handed out were based on the derisory charge against Lieutenant Vogel of failing to report a corpse and illegally disposing of it, and against Runge of *attempted* manslaughter. The latter maintained that he had indeed hit Rosa Luxemburg—unexpectedly, there were witnesses—but not enough to inflict serious injury. Vogel's role did not emerge at all. The military court did make an attempt to penetrate the regimental solidarity of the murderers' 'don't knows', but to little avail. Even then, Vogel was hurried away by his friends,

¹ This announcement, in part published by *Vorwärts* on 17 January, is reprinted with comments in Ferdinand Runkel, *Die deutsche Revolution*, Leipzig 1919, pp. 217–20. The SPD version is in Hermann Müller, *Novemberrevolution*, pp. 271–9. The *Freikorps* view also got a public airing. All was the fault of the bloodthirsty Socialist government, who ordered the soldiers to do it; the latter were mere instruments of legitimate authority. F. W. von Örtzen, *Die deutschen Freikorps 1918–1923*, 2nd ed., Munich 1937, pp. 284–9. The shifting of all responsibility on to a higher authority which the war criminals of the Second World War were to make so notorious, did not begin with Hitler.

with false papers, after a very short period of arrest, and waited abroad for the inevitable amnesty. By the end of February Jörns, the investigating magistrate, had succeeded in manœuvring the representatives of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council into a state of impotence; by the time the trial itself took place, they renounced their participation, and there was no one except *Rote Fahne* to ask awkward questions.¹ Besides, other trials were waiting: there were fresher murders to tickle the public palate—Eisner assassinated in Munich in February, Haase shot at the end of 1919; hardly a year passed without at least one sensational political murder. The death of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht very soon lost its flavour of tragic immediacy.²

This attempt to stifle the real story of the murders, with all its political implications, should not merely be seen as an attempt of a small if powerful and obstinate clique operating behind the scenes. The January fighting represented a high-water mark of the revolutionary tide in Germany. Afterwards there was a strong reaction against disorder, which found expression in widespread if tacit support for the government. The waverers came down on the side of law and order—that very 'order' which Rosa had pilloried in her last article. In reporting the death of the *Spartakist* leaders, the bourgeois press did not even attempt to mumble the usual hypocritical phrases. Totally incomprehensible in life and actions to the vast majority of middle-class Germans, the death of the *Spartakist* leaders seemed no more than the inevitable consequence of their madness. *Tägliche Rundschau* wrote that the deaths of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were the 'proper expiation for the blood bath which they unleashed . . . the results of her own action killed the woman from Galicia [*sic*]. . . . The day of judgement on Luxemburg and Liebknecht is over. Ger-

¹ For the reports of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council's delegate to the Council itself on their efforts, see *Protokoll*, 56, 57. *Sitzung des Zentralrates der deutschen Sozialistischen Republik*, 15 Feb. 1919. These protocols are in typewritten form in IISH, shortly to be published.

² This brief account of the proceedings is based on the newspaper reports and later testimony of the participants in a string of libel actions connected with Jörns, the examining magistrate. In addition, the official record of the public proceedings is still available (Prussian Ministry of Justice papers, now *Bundesarchiv* Koblenz, P.135/11759), but adds little that was not published in the newspapers. Almost all the witnesses were waiters, male and female (a profession with a curious propensity for inconclusive testimony at police proceedings, when not actually employed by the police or the secret service). Only one 'inside story' from the side of the participants was ever published, that of Runge.

many has peace, it can breathe again.' And the *Deutsche Tageszeitung* on 16 January took the line that newspapers always did when reporting murder trials. The fate of *Spartakists* was that of 'criminals pure and simple who without any self-restraint had long lost all power to distinguish between good and evil'. With the reassertion of such opinions under the aegis of the Socialist government, no enthusiasm for punishing what were considered to be society's executioners could have been expected. Though the issue was settled in the capital, *Spartakists*, at least in the eyes of their beholders, were still flickering wanly in the north and in Munich; there was little point in public sympathy for those who, though dead, were still kicking fitfully.

The news of the murder naturally did evoke sympathy and immediate outrage against the government from the articulate sections of the working population. Telegrams of protest came in from the Soviet Union and many other countries. The executive of the Communist Party, now underground, issued an appeal on 17 January written by Leo Jogiches, in which they asked their supporters to avoid 'terroristic attempts at revenge against the leaders of the treacherous government . . . the moment for the final battle has not yet come, and we warn you against rash attempts.'¹ The Independent leaders also issued an appeal, calling for a protest strike and warning their supporters that what the government was doing to the *Spartakists* today, it would do to all workers tomorrow.² A meeting on the same day of the Plenum of the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Council expressed their deep disgust for the murders and protested against the government's excessive use of terror following their successful defeat of *Spartakus*.³ But the workers were exhausted; the strike was feebly supported.

After the defeat of January, a new chapter in the relationship between *Spartakus* and the rest of society had begun. For with these murders, the abyss which the Communists had pictured in theory had become real and, unmistakably, it was the abyss of the grave; above the arguments about revolutionary theory and tactic towered the inescapable responsibility for the murder of the two great leaders, condoned if not actually encouraged by the SPD leadership.

Among Rosa's few close friends there was an irreparable sense

¹ *D. & M.*, Vol. III, pp. 85 ff.

² *Die Freiheit*, 17 January 1919.

³ *D. & M.*, Vol. III, p. 104.



(a) Rosa Luxemburg,
about 1910



(b) Karl Liebknecht,
probably just before 1914



Rosa Luxemburg's corpse, March 1919. Probably an official photograph

of loss and tragedy. Outwardly tough, as befitted a veteran revolutionary, Leo Jogiches sent Lenin a laconic telegram on 17 January: 'Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht have carried out their ultimate revolutionary duty.'¹ Clara Zetkin in Stuttgart wrote a letter on 18 January to Mathilde Jacob. She had read of Rosa's arrest in the papers on the 16th, of Rosa's probable death on the morning of the 17th. This good-hearted, loyal woman could hardly find words to express her sense of personal and political loss when the brightest star on the Socialist horizon was extinguished.²

Franz Mehring was in a sanatorium on the outskirts of Berlin, old and very weak; his friends hardly dared to bring him the news. Finally one of his and Rosa's mutual friends was charged with the terrible task.

You can imagine how he reacted to the terrible news. The old man did not want to believe that such a thing was possible . . . he wandered up and down his room for hours . . . until his old body sank exhausted into a chair. But then he immediately got up again and continued his restless pacing. His eyes were dry but his face marked with scorn and hatred. 'No government has ever sunk lower', he kept murmuring.³

His wife was ill herself and could not help him; a few days later Mehring contracted pneumonia and had not the strength to survive it. He died on 29 January 1919, in large part the victim of the death of his friends.

Jogiches was less demonstrative. But he more than anyone must have felt the whole point of his existence crumbling. As much as was possible for such a highly political person, he had lived these last weeks mainly to keep Rosa going—there was no longer a trace of discord between them. He himself had been arrested on 14 January but had managed to escape without being identified. Karl Radek saw him late in the evening of the 16th when he appeared at the secret flat looking ten years older. 'Feverishly he began to speak of the past, of our old quarrels. "Now that Rosa is no longer with us, we must reassemble all our old friends".' He was waiting more anxiously than ever for the return of Marchlewski from Russia which had been requested in December by Rosa Luxemburg and the KPD executive to help them in their work.⁴ The two men met again next day. Radek asked him whether

¹ Clara Zetkin, *Reden*, Vol. II, p. 444.

² *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 71.

³ Quoted by Schleifstein, *Mehring*, p. 76.

⁴ *Julian Marchlewski*, p. 92; Pieck, *Reden*, Vol. I, p. 547.

he had not thought of leaving for the south and safety, but Jogiches answered with a smile: 'Somebody has to stay, at least to write all our epitaphs.'¹

Jogiches and Clara Zetkin went to work on Rosa's papers, or such as were left after the soldiers had finished their searches in Rosa's flat in Südde. Though Jogiches now took over the leadership of *Spartakus*, his heart was in the past; he was above all concerned with the identification and punishment of the murderers and the saving of as much of Rosa's writing as possible. 'Now that she has gone, we must all stick more closely together', he told Clara Zetkin. They discussed the future almost exclusively in the context of the past. 'Much of this stuff could be thrown away, since Rosa changed her mind on all that', he is reported to have added, his mind on her certain immortality.²

Jogiches himself had not long to live. His own safety hardly mattered to him any longer. On 10 March he was arrested and this time identified at once. At police headquarters in the Alexanderplatz one of the detectives in charge was an ex-Sergeant-Major Tamschick, a notorious bully who had once been the terror of his recruits. He knew Jogiches as one of the leaders of *Spartakus* and shot him in cold blood at the first opportunity. No attempt to punish him was ever made.³

Pieck himself managed to escape after a few days. He was carrying false papers when arrested together with Liebknecht and Rosa, and was apparently not identified—indeed, he was hardly known. There was never any suggestion that he was in any way concerned with the arrest of the two leaders, but Pabst stated later that he was released because he had supplied information about other *Spartakus* personalities, which facilitated their arrest. Pabst's own statements are confusing and contradictory. However, there were sufficient grounds for suspicion to enable Thälmann, later the leader of the KPD, to bring charges against Pieck in retaliation for participating in an unsuccessful attempt to wrest the KPD leadership from him in 1928. A party Court of Honour was constituted in 1929 under the chairmanship of Kiepenberger, who

¹ Radek, *Diary*, pp. 139–40.

² *Ibid.*, also Clara Zetkin, *Reden*, Vol. II, p. 387.

³ Soon afterwards Tamschick also murdered Dorrenbach, one of the leaders of the People's Naval Division, in the same way—a shot in the back. Tamschick enjoyed a peaceful career with promotion in the Prussian police. For his military past, see the highly coloured memoirs of one of his recruits in *Neues Deutschland*, 13 June 1959.

was in charge of the Communist military apparatus and a member of the *Reichstag*. The findings were not disclosed and no further action was taken at the time. Kiepenberger later fell out with Ulbricht in exile in Paris and was among the first of many German Communists to be quietly executed in Russia in 1936.¹

On 25 January 1919 thirty-two comrades killed in the January fighting were buried with Karl Liebknecht. An empty coffin was placed at his side. Only on 31 May was the body of Rosa Luxemburg washed up unexpectedly at one of the locks of the canal, and was taken to its last resting place on 13 June. The government feared large-scale demonstrations, and Noske ordered the body to be kept at a local army camp pending burial. Although the train of mourners was large, the demonstration was silent and orderly. The funeral was at the Friedrichsfelde Cemetery, which in time became a common shrine for all prominent Communist leaders. On 13 June 1926 a memorial was unveiled to commemorate their last resting place: Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Franz Mehring, Leo Jogiches, and Julian Marchlewski, who had died in 1925 in an Italian sanatorium, a respected senior Bolshevik official.² The cemetery was razed to the ground under the Nazis and rebuilt after the war by the East German government; party members make organized annual pilgrimages at which they see much of Ulbricht and less of the shrine.

Both Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht had considered death in action to be the highest honour for a Social Democrat.

¹ This story is set out at length in Erich Wollenberg, 'Der Apparat; Stalins fünfte Kolonne', *Ost Probleme*, Vol. III, No. 19, 12 May 1951, pp. 576-8. This account, in a none too impartial journal, ties Kiepenberger's execution to a definite intrigue by Pieck, for which there is no other evidence. The fact that there was an investigation against Pieck proves nothing except the existence of a rumour and the methods of power politics inside the KPD; the campaign against Thälmann's leadership was based on a financial scandal involving not him but his brother-in-law. It was Stalin personally who overruled the KPD Central Committee's decision to remove Thälmann rather than any private intrigue by Pieck. The latter's reputation among his colleagues in the 1920s was that of a tough, resourceful, if devious militant.

None the less, Runge's own story—which Pieck certified as accurate (*Rote Fahne*, 11 January 1921)—contains the following rather odd passage (in italics). Runge had been ordered to shoot the *Rote Fahne* editor (wrongly thought to be Pieck) in the corridor of the hotel. 'I had doubts . . . the man from the *Rote Fahne* came up to me and said *he had a commission to carry out [Auftrag zu erledigen]*. He was led away into a room and when he emerged an officer instructed one of the guards: "Take this man away *and see to it that nothing happens.*"' (My italics.)

² *Die Rote Fahne*, 15 June 1926. Marchlewski's ashes were returned to Poland at the request of the Polish government in March 1950.

For Rosa it was a fitting end which helped to preserve her from Stalin's special form of Bolshevik dishonour. There was something larger than life about her ideas and the rigid prescription she had set herself in a life devoted to revolutionary politics, yet always combined with a deep respect for human values and culture. She died in the firm belief that her cause would win in the end; that she could advance it by dying as much as by living. At the time of her death she recognized a temporary defeat in Germany, but in the context of great advances there and in Russia. A truly Marxist party had been created under her auspices in Germany and, as far as she could, she had set guiding lines for its future development. Her eyes closed on a German revolution at last beginning to come into its own as the centrepiece of the international revolution in which she so fervently believed. Her presence in Germany for so many years, in a milieu basically anti-pathetic to her, seemed fully justified. Although she recognized the success of the Bolsheviks in Russia, she was not willing to accept their direction of the international movement, or to subordinate her party to the Bolsheviks. In the last two months she treated Lenin as a friend and an equal—no more. A hasty letter she wrote him in Russian on 20 December 1918 shows the respect of an equal but no deference. Eberlein carried it in his pocket.

Dear Vladimir,

I am profiting from uncle's journey to send you all hearty greetings from the family, from Karl, Franz [Mehring] and the others. May God grant that the coming year will fulfil all our wishes. All the best! Uncle will report about our life and doings, meantime I press your hand,

With best regards,

Rosa.¹

When the preparations for founding a new International were made in Moscow at the end of December 1918, she instructed the German delegates to vote against the creation of a new International at this time and in present circumstances. She considered it premature with only one Socialist party, the Bolsheviks, precariously on top in one country, and was afraid that, if formed, the new International would be entirely under Russian domination—as indeed it was.²

¹ *Pravda*, 15 January 1925; reprinted in facsimile in *Selected Works*, Vol. II, opposite p. 624. The 'uncle' is obviously a code name for Hugo Eberlein.

² Hugo Eberlein was the only German delegate able to make the journey. He found a haphazard gathering. Representatives of various nationalities who happened to be in Moscow constituted themselves as delegates of their countries.

After her death German Communist policy—in fact the whole party—was suspended in a vacuum for a time. The January rising in Berlin was followed by successful local insurrections in Bremen and Munich, while attempts were made in other cities. The government was able to deal with all these in turn; only in Munich had the forces of the Bavarian countryside to be thrown against the revolutionary capital, and here too the Communists took over a hopeless situation which they had originally opposed, and suffered the consequences. Eugen Leviné, who should have gone to Russia with Eberlein, was sent to Munich instead, and executed in June 1919. The leadership in Germany went underground. Only in February was *Rote Fahne* able to appear again. Its first concern was to identify the perpetrators of the murder. For a time, Communist political activity was confined to the periphery; Marchlewski worked in the Ruhr, and Clara Zetkin in Württemberg. After the death of Leo Jogiches the leadership of the party passed to Paul Levi and his main task for the next twelve months was the creation of an organization and the regrouping of Communist forces. Levi at any rate had learnt his lesson in January. When the activists made another attempt in March 1920 to raise the banner of revolt, this time with more careful ‘planning’ and better ‘organization’, but less popular support, he opposed them bitterly and eventually threw the weight of Rosa Luxemburg’s words against them by publishing her pamphlet on the Russian revolution and hinting at the disputes within the Communist leadership in January. Another in the series of dramatic exits from the KPD took place. Both Levi and the Central Committee claimed the authority of Rosa Luxemburg for their point of view, and fired suitable quotations from her writings at each other. This too was to become a habit of left-wing politics for the next ten years.

Communist leaders in Russia and elsewhere were well aware that German revolutionary Socialism had lost its outstanding

At the start, the Russians offered to meet the objections of the vital German party and treat the proceedings as preliminary rather than constituent. But Eberlein was soon under considerable Russian pressure not to oppose the plans of the Bolsheviks, and in the end abstained from the constituent vote of the International, rather than vote against it as instructed. See *Der I Kongress der Kommunistischen Internationale: Protokoll der Verhandlungen in Moskau vom 2 bis zum 19 März 1919*, Hamburg 1921, Vol. I, p. 131. The official Russian version emphasized the Russian party’s forbearance with Eberlein’s crisis of conscience and his spontaneous conversion rather than any Bolshevik pressure on him to swing the vital German vote into line. See report of G. Zinoviev, *Vosmoi s’ezd RKP(B), mart 1919 goda, Protokoly*, Moscow 1959, p. 135.

leaders. In Leningrad and Moscow meetings were held at which the Bolshevik leadership paid tribute to their German comrades. Inevitably this blow in Germany was bound to set back the hopes of international revolution. But for the Russians the event had its useful side, for with Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches there disappeared two determined opponents of Bolshevik control of international Socialism. Henceforth the Russians were the more easily able to impose their will on the German party, and after the adhesion of the larger part of the USPD to the KPD in the summer of 1920, a real mass base was at last available to the Communists. In spite of all the sects and personalities which were thrown off the main body of the party like sparks from a catherine wheel for the next twelve years, as the Russians tightened their grip and oscillated the orientation of German Communism to suit their present needs, the KPD never again lost its organizational hold on at least a part of the masses.

What would have happened if Rosa had remained alive? There was no doubt that the January fighting had ended the revolutionary phase of German post-war development which nothing could have revived for the time being. The government used its victory to impose its will and weight on all the revolutionary institutions in Germany, and in its shadow the army stood waiting, swollen with the support of the *Freikorps*, enthusiastic volunteers against the revolution. Now both lunged forward into the power vacuum. Rosa Luxemburg's sarcastic prediction that the *bourgeoisie* would soon rid itself of its Social-Democrat agents and assume power on its own account nearly came true in the Kapp *putsch* of March 1920; only the unexpected general strike called by the right-wing trade-union leaders she had always so heartily despised actually prevented the success of the military mutineers. All this was inevitable after January.

The fascinating question obviously is how a Communist leadership under Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht would have utilized the mass strength which came through the adhesion to the USPD. The terms for the merger were in fact dictated from Moscow, and probably would have been similar if Rosa had written them. Rosa Luxemburg always dreamed of this particular eventuality, pushing aside the Independent leaders and taking over their supporters. With such a mass base, she would have been better able to resist Zinoviev's take-over on behalf of the Third

International and the Russian party, but whether she could have revitalized the engine of revolution within Germany is another question. No doubt she would have resisted the further Communist attempts to seize power in March 1920 and in 1923, both carefully engineered and prepared—and hopelessly unsuccessful. But this is as far as we can go. Why should she have been able to stand out successfully against Stalinization when no one else could? Or would she have left with Paul Levi, if the March 1920 action had been imposed in the face of her opposition?

What of the long run? SPD or KPD, Nazi concentration camp or emigration—and if so, West or East? In 1933 the world of Stalin would have been grotesquely unfamiliar to a woman of sixty-three—and for this woman, dangerous. Would it have been Harvard, a special professorship, a thick black book of apologia, with all the aseptic admiration of young, neutrally academic professionals in their discreet bow-ties? Or perhaps sociology, that refuge of clever European Marxists? Or suicide, the last resort, with Marta Rosenbaum and so many others whose hearts were broken? We cannot tell, for Rosa had something in common with them all.

It is always convenient for biographers to take the death of their subject as the end of a period. Apart from the seductive convenience, it may sometimes even be justified. The principles for which Rosa Luxemburg stood and the influence she exercised might not have survived even if she had remained alive. Without a successful German revolution, the increase of Russian power and control over Communist parties everywhere was inevitable; there was no reason why Germany should have remained outside this development. The painful dislocation of loyalties which this brought about for so many Communist leaders was spared Rosa Luxemburg, though her ideas—largely the misrepresentation of her ideas—served as a football for the power game within the world Communist movement. Having died orthodox, she exercised a claim to be heard. She could never be written off as someone who had consciously departed from what was to be the correct course, like Trotsky or Bukharin or Karl Kautsky.

The long process of litigation over Rosa Luxemburg's intellectual and political heritage is itself a history of distortion. The truth, and Rosa's position in it, are simple enough. Marx left two great alternatives—one basic, one derived. The basic variable

was revolution—formal or real, objective or subjective, an event that happened or one that had to be made. (Extreme positions, these, with an infinity of possibilities in between.) The irreparable break, which transformed possibilities into irreconcilable alternatives, took place in 1910 with Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Kautsky holding the two sawn-off ends. (The revisionist controversy was about ‘how’, not ‘what’; about the small present, not the great future—really a second-rate dispute.) From this first break derived the second variable: Socialists *making* the revolution, or *leading* it. The pull of the Russian October revolution prevented any intermediate positions from developing and produced a new break right away—only Rosa Luxemburg’s death prevented her from developing and defending her leadership of an alternative revolutionary Marxist tradition against other claimants. But none the less, the position was rightfully hers—not the reward of those, including Trotsky, who later broke out of the Bolshevik collectivity, but of the forceful, perpetually foreign woman who belonged to many Socialisms and to none. Only Rosa Luxemburg was actively concerned with both the great divisions of modern Marxism, and partly helped to create them. That is her role in history, and the reason for this book.

XVIII

LUXEMBURGISM—WEAPON AND MYTH

WITH the explosive murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in January 1919 and the bullet in the back that destroyed Leo Jogiches in March, the young KPD lost its effective leadership. Mehring, too, was dead. The party—which was not a party but a group of intellectually incisive leaders looking for an enlightened and *engagé* following among the restless masses—had as yet no cadres, no collectivity, to roll forward the heavy stone of revolutionary Marxism on its own. The only thing was to carry on the policy of the dead leaders as closely as possible—in the manner in which it was understood. The men who took over the party were personally little known, and were wholly committed to the ideas of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. Most of the survivors of the KPD *Zentrale* had had some experience of clandestine activity during the war; in the second half of 1919 the situation was not unlike 1916, in the months after Liebknecht's and Luxemburg's arrest. Now, as then, it was a young leadership with Paul Levi at the head, supported by Ernst Meyer, Wilhelm Pieck, and Hugo Eberlein (then in Moscow to attend the foundation congress of the Third International). March 1919 did not bring an end to the casualties; Eugen Leviné, one of the strongest youngsters, was himself executed after the Munich uprising in the summer of 1919. Of the older generation, only Clara Zetkin remained; Julian Marchlewski had been specially sent from Russia to help and was dispatched to the Ruhr immediately upon arrival to supervise the incipient Communist organization in that great industrial centre. His old friends Rosa and Leo were dead; there was little for him to do in Berlin.

All the new leaders fully subscribed the guiding lines of policy laid down by Rosa Luxemburg in the foundation document of the KPD and subsequent policy statements in *Rote Fahne*. On nearly

all subjects her word was law. The messages of condolence from Russia all emphasized the outstanding importance and status of the dead leaders—in the very home of successful revolution Rosa was held as a shining example to follow.¹ And even after the personal element of tribute had gradually died away, her work was still the fount of all orthodoxy in Germany. In an evaluation of Rosa Luxemburg's theoretical contribution to Communism Thalheimer, writing early in 1920, lavished the highest praise on the entire corpus of her work. 'Her writings are the only ones which are still worth-while and fully valid today.' Even where she differed from Lenin—as over the national question—she was given full marks. *The Accumulation of Capital* still 'provided the key to imperialism'. Her critics (unnamed) were merely 'Marxist pharisees', among them even 'the good Marxist brains showed insufficient comprehension' of her ideas.² There was of course no question of confronting Lenin and Luxemburg; at a time when the Communist movement was growing together (in France and Germany the Left Centre was about to be absorbed) it was unthinkable to dig up the remote polemics of the movement's infancy.

The KPD leadership found itself pressed to the wall after the unsuccessful risings in Berlin, Bremen, and Munich, and had to go underground for almost a year. It used every means at its disposal to bring the murderers of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht to justice. Under Jogiches' direction *Rote Fahne* devoted much space and skill for six weeks to the unravelling of these crimes—in their personal as well as their political context. The consequence of finding itself outlawed and alone was that it laid the murders at the door of the SPD as the allies and protectors of the right-wing soldiers who had carried out the physical assassination. The SPD's policy accurately fitted this analysis; Noske's cold-blooded official dispositions for Rosa's funeral reflected reality more accurately than any hypocritical lamentations in *Vorwärts* or the sentimental tributes of Rosa's old political enemies—coupled as these were with head-shakings at her incomprehensible solidarity with such

¹ E.g. speeches at the session of the Petrograd Soviet, 19 January 1919, reprinted in German as Trotsky and Zinoviev, *Zwei grosse Verluste*, Petrograd 1920. Lenin's messages, too, were impeccably honorific. There was no sign of the later Communist tendency to decry the principle of *de mortuis nil nisi bonum* as decadent and *petit-bourgeois*.

² August Thalheimer, 'The theoretical work of Rosa Luxemburg', *Die Internationale*, 1920, Vol. II, Nos. 19/20, pp. 19–20.

blood-drenched propagators of brute force as the Bolsheviks.¹ As a political weapon against the SPD and the Independents, the murders overshadowed almost all other issues for a time. It was not until the end of 1919 that the leadership of the KPD tackled the problem of its future policy in a world in which immediate revolutionary perspectives had for the time being become obscured. The charismatic appeal of Karl and Rosa had gone; their voices could now only be reproduced from the grave. But whatever new problems had to be faced, the authority of Rosa Luxemburg's views was automatically sought and cited; in Germany she still provided the best, indeed the only, legitimation of the KPD. In the aftermath of the Bavarian Soviet Republic, to which the Communists had committed themselves only when the situation already looked hopeless, a clear distinction had to be made between the self-conscious and 'rational' policy of the new Communist Party and the 'confusion' of the other participants in this disastrous experiment. 'What we need', wrote Hörnle in 1919, 'are not [anarchists like] the Tollers and the Landauers, enthusiastic as they may be; what we need instead are clear heads and determined protagonists like Rosa Luxemburg, Leo Jogiches and Leviné.'²

Probably the most pressing task was the creation of party organizations at grass-root level. The high-pitched and superbly written appeals which had issued from Rosa Luxemburg's pen, designed to influence the masses still organized in the USPD, were silent now, and could not be replaced; the old policy of maximum publicity and openness at the centre was bound to give way—in a period, moreover, of illegality and clandestine activity—to quieter, more conspiratorial efforts at the periphery. The KPD *Zentrale* ceased for a time to be the old, splendidly volcanic source of ideas, and instead turned itself into a hive of organizational activity.

Even if the new German Communist leaders had not appreciated the full stature of their dead comrades, they were still being reminded of it by the tributes which continued to flow in from all over the world. The dead leaders had achieved truly international

¹ For Noske's dusty answer to posterity, see Gustav Noske, *Von Kiel bis Kapp: Zur Geschichte der deutschen Revolution*, pp. 72 ff. Among the SPD's tributes to Rosa one of the most touching was Eduard Bernstein's 'secret tenderness' for his old opponent and denigrator—even though she had fallen irrevocably 'into the mire of the illusionists [who believed in] a policy of force' (*Die deutsche Revolution*, p. 171).

² E. Hörnle, 'The Communist Party and the Intellectuals', *Die Internationale*, 1919, Vol. 1, Nos. 11/12, p. 226.

stature. Everywhere in western Europe Communism was now emerging as a closed, self-sufficient entity from the shattered womb of pre-war Social Democracy. It sought comfort from its traditions and now honoured its first martyrs. For some eighteen months after her death Rosa Luxemburg's name and work shone with the lustre of a twofold pre-eminence, the inspirer and theoretician of a European Communism still struggling for mastery in a capitalist world—and for its separate identity among the tentacles of left-wing opportunism—and the martyr whose death in action would serve as a torch for those who remained to carry on the struggle. As yet there was no conflict between these two roles. We shall see how subsequent history separated them and eventually brought them into conflict.

The first occasion on which Rosa Luxemburg's name was used for controversial purposes came in the debates in the KPD during and after the Kapp *putsch* in March 1920.¹ The leadership had found itself in conflict with the enlarged consultative body representing party members, and the subsequent full party congress endorsed the latter's opposition. The immediate issue of a temporary alliance with other left-wing parties against the military insurgents—it was still unthinkable for many to co-operate in any way with the SPD 'murderers' of Rosa Luxemburg—had escalated; for the first time since the spring of 1919 the KPD had to face an issue with national implications. Some basic disagreements on policy, already reflected in the foundation congress of the KPD, now rose to the surface in acute form. Both sides in the dispute laid emphatic claim to the most valuable party heirlooms—Rosa Luxemburg's words. Paul Levi emphasized Rosa Luxemburg's well-known aversion from anything that smelt of 'putschism', to which Frölich replied:

The principle in the *Spartakus* programme that we shall only take over power on the basis of the clearly expressed wish on the part of the great majority of the working classes—a principle the formulation of which I already opposed at the founding congress—is now being used . . .

¹ It would be irrelevant to expand this chapter into a narrative history of the KPD from 1919 onwards. Though no modern or really adequate history of the party during the entire Weimar Republic exists, readers should consult Ossip K. Flechtheim, *Die Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands in der Weimarer Republik*, Offenbach 1948—the most concise and balanced account covering the entire period.

by Comrade Levi as a means of complete [political] castration. For Comrade Luxemburg its purpose was to avoid Putschist tactics. Now however [it is being used] to hinder and weaken all action. Nobody would have contradicted such an unrealistic application of her phrase as sharply as Comrade Luxemburg, who herself stated with unmistakable clarity that [in one sense] revolutions can never come too soon but at the same time are always premature [in another sense]. . . . Rosa Luxemburg, with all her critical reservations during the January risings, herself provided a shining example of [the proper] tactic.¹

Meantime Lenin himself had attacked the extreme and abstentionist radicalism in vogue among influential sections of the German and Italian Communist parties. With the now classic characterization of this attitude as 'an infantile disease of Communism', he endorsed Levi's policy of making the most of the opportunities offered by society in order to increase popular support for Communism.² This salvo from Russia was useful but not, in those days, decisive; polemicizing against Levi's opponents in Germany, Thalheimer himself made use of Lenin's splendid phrase but was careful to point out that he was not leaning on Lenin simply for justification, and certainly not in order to refute those who quoted Rosa Luxemburg against him. 'We are not in the least concerned merely to justify ourselves by using the due authority of Lenin.'³ Far from it. But the occasion seemed to provide a necessary opportunity to take stock of Communist policy in Germany on the basis of the recent events. Levi followed the best traditions of Rosa Luxemburg in providing a general and up-to-date analysis and sharpening of accepted doctrine, which harmonized the dialectic with the latest experiences. 'There is not one Communist who does not regret that the creation of a [separate] Communist party did not take place long before the war; that the Communists, even though they were only a small sect, did not get together and found their own distinct army in 1903.' Once the masses were in action, however, and the process of revolutionary clarification had begun, 'the Communist party cannot be founded late enough'.⁴ In a revolutionary situation—as opposed to the preparations for one—separation became sectarian-

¹ *Die Internationale*, 1920, Vol. II, No. 24, p. 31.

² Lenin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXXI, pp. 1-97, May 1920.

³ *Die Internationale*, 1920, Vol. II, No. 25, p. 16.

⁴ Paul Levi, 'The Congress of the Communist Party', *Die Internationale*, 1920, Vol. II, No. 26, pp. 42-43.

ism. It was an unacknowledged but subtle combination of Leninism and Luxemburgism; the first and last of such attempts on the part of a leader of the Communist party—and one of which Rosa Luxemburg would almost certainly have approved. Historically speaking, both Lenin's insistence on separate organization at all costs and Rosa Luxemburg's doctrine of growing class-consciousness in action, of organization as a process, were dialectically combined and reconciled.

Levi was not to lead the party for long. He fell out with his colleagues over the preparations for the so-called 'March action of 1920' when Brandler and Thalheimer, strongly urged by the emissaries of the Comintern, unsuccessfully attempted an insurrection. Not content with disagreement Levi, convinced of his opponents' folly, moved on to open criticism and opposition and thus received the full weight of Lenin's—and consequently the Comintern's—hostility, even though Lenin admitted that Levi's factual assessment of the situation had been correct. The days when differences about party tactics could be fought out in public, which had been such a feature of pre-war Social Democracy, were over for good. In the continuing debate between Levi, now an outsider, and the Communist leadership, Rosa Luxemburg's ideas for the first time became live ammunition. Among other things, Levi now published Rosa Luxemburg's draft manuscript on the Russian revolution which contained the most systematic criticisms of the Bolsheviks and their October revolution—far more generally incisive than her various articles in the *Spartakus* letters during the war.¹ It was a moment of considerable embarrassment and annoyance not only for the German Communists but for the Russians as well. The position of Rosa Luxemburg now became a central issue. No less an authority than Lenin was obliged to enter the field with a polemic against Levi in which a characterization of Rosa Luxemburg's role and importance could not be avoided. Typically, he made no mealy-mouthed concessions.

Paul Levi now wants to achieve popularity with the bourgeoisie by republishing precisely those works of Rosa Luxemburg's in which her errors appear. We answer this with a short extract from a good old Russian fable: an eagle can sometimes fly lower than a chicken, but a chicken can never rise to the same heights as an eagle. Rosa Luxemburg was mistaken over the question of Polish independence. She was

¹ For the circumstances in which this was written, see above, pp. 697–8.

mistaken in 1903 in her evaluation of Menshevism, she was mistaken in her theory of the accumulation of capital, she was mistaken when, with Plekhanov, Vandervelde, Kautsky and others, she stood for the unification of the Bolsheviks with the Mensheviks in July 1914. She was mistaken in her writings from prison in 1918 (although after leaving prison she largely corrected her mistakes at the end of 1918 and at the beginning of 1919). But in spite of these mistakes, she was and is an eagle, and not only will she be dear to the memory of Communists in the whole world, but her biography and the *complete* edition of her works ([in the publication of] which the German Communists are [falling] incredibly behind, and they can only partly be excused by the enormous sacrifices of their struggle) will be a very useful lesson in the education of many generations of Communists.¹

Once more Lenin had produced a telling phrase: the homely parable of the chicken and the eagle was gratefully used by less talented Communist writers for some nine years. Rosa Luxemburg became the eagle—capable of plunging into surprising depths but always capable of soaring to the Olympian heights reserved only for very great Marxists. Levi—and other opponents to follow—were and would remain chickens scratching soullessly round their miserable, dung-filled yards. But the question was too important to be settled merely with an edict from Lenin's pen. This might by now do for the Russian party and the Comintern. Rosa Luxemburg, however, was also a specific German problem and it was necessary to answer Paul Levi on his own home ground as well. Accordingly, two old colleagues and friends of Rosa were now pressed into service to take issue with the revelations contained in *The Russian Revolution*. For the first time German readers were treated to textual exegesis and criticisms of Rosa Luxemburg's views—albeit much of it shamefaced and apologetic.² Adolf Warszawski, sitting in Moscow, managed his task by emphasizing Rosa Luxemburg's—and for that matter all the Poles'—conversion to the Russian revolution after the end of the war; if Rosa Luxemburg had criticized the Bolsheviks before, she was in good company and in any case all her criticism was 'good revolutionary work'. Clara Zetkin had recently returned from Moscow to Germany. Lenin had persuaded

¹ Written in February 1922, first published in *Pravda*, 16 April 1924; *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXXIII, p. 184.

² See Clara Zetkin, *Um Rosa Luxemburgs Stellung zur russischen Revolution*, Hamburg 1922; Adolf Warski (Warszawski), *Rosa Luxemburgs Stellung zu den taktischen Problemen der Revolution*, Hamburg 1922. For discussion of content, see above, pp. 716–18.

her with difficulty that Levi had to be punished as a renegade for his public opposition, however right his assessment might at one time have been. Moreover, Clara Zetkin was herself in trouble in the KPD as Levi's supporter and friend—and opponent of the Brandler executive. The choice between adherence to the movement to which she had given most of her life and possible disloyalty to her old friend was agonizing. She solved it reluctantly by criticizing Rosa Luxemburg where she could not be shown to have amended her views before her death. Clara Zetkin—of all people—thus wrote of Rosa Luxemburg's somewhat 'abstract and naïve' view of democracy. She followed Lenin closely in his characterization of Rosa's mistakes. Above all, she admitted that Rosa Luxemburg had failed to grasp the essence of proletarian dictatorship with its now well-established theoretical entronement of terror. But she too emphasized that Rosa Luxemburg had largely 'changed her mind', and this became the official Communist interpretation from then onwards.¹ Whatever Clara Zetkin's own feelings, the book earned her the contempt and hatred of Rosa Luxemburg's personal friends like Luise Kautsky and Henriette Roland-Holst. Angelica Balabanoff, though never close to Rosa, and now retained in Moscow in conditions of growing disillusionment with the hitherto greatly admired Lenin, also thought Clara Zetkin's capitulation spineless.

The best evaluation of Rosa Luxemburg, typical of this period, was made by one of the few men capable of grasping the implications of the whole and not merely an arbitrary selection of parts. In two essays published in January 1921 and January 1922 respectively, Georg Lukács confronted Rosa Luxemburg's most positive and most negative contributions. There was the author of *Social Reform or Revolution*, who had provided the best Marxist dialectical analysis and methodology to emerge from the flood of publications during the revisionist controversy.² On the other hand, a fundamental critique was badly needed of the other Rosa Luxemburg, who polemicized against Lenin and the Bolsheviks in 1917 and failed to grasp the essence of the doctrine of proletarian revo-

¹ The veracity of this claim is examined above, pp. 716–18. It is not untrue but certainly exaggerated; it would be more correct to speak of the irrelevance of this problem rather than its solution by any self-conscious change of mind.

² Georg Lukács, 'Rosa Luxemburg as Marxist', first published in *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, Berlin 1923, reprinted in a recent edition, *Histoire et Conscience de Classe*, Paris 1960, pp. 47–66.

lution as it evolved and came to be applied in Russia.¹ Lukács did not deal with Rosa Luxemburg's work of 1917 as a problem of limited cognition, excusable on account of the particular circumstances, as did Zetkin and Warszawski. He treated Rosa Luxemburg's ideas as a coherent whole with universal application. So for the first time Luxemburgism as a system now made its appearance—though not yet under that name. Lukács's work conceptualized the official, respectful view of Rosa Luxemburg in this period. He also provided a bridge to the future, when Luxemburgism would be acknowledged as a recognized but fallacious system of ideas, first to be 'paired' with other deviations like Trotskyism and then to be almost totally confused with them.²

With these events Rosa Luxemburg's status and authority in the German party began to change. The primacy of the Russian party in the International, and the growing deference on the part of struggling revolutionary parties in Europe towards the one and only successful revolutionary élite in Russia, all helped to invest Lenin's comments with the authority of dogma. Henceforward there were no more deliberate attempts to combine Lenin and Luxemburg into one single valid dialectic, much less any defence of her views against his. That she had made errors was now universally accepted. The question was: how many of them had she herself corrected—specifically or by implication? She could no longer compete with Lenin on any objective scale of wisdom or revolutionary righteousness; his only errors were those which he himself had admitted and corrected. Yet her 'errors' were still only a small part of her rich heritage—relevant only because renegades like Levi chose to scratch them to the surface at this time. For the rest Rosa Luxemburg was and remained an eagle. As Lenin had ordered, her works were to be collected and published in their

¹ 'Critical remarks on Rosa Luxemburg's critique of the Russian revolution', *ibid.*, pp. 309-32.

² It is interesting that Rosa Luxemburg's important and positive contribution in the revisionist debate was henceforth largely to be taken for granted. After Lukács there was no orthodox Communist analysis of *Social Reform or Revolution* and no effort to reprint it; anti-Communist Marxists, however, took it up strongly, and potentially deviant Communists like Gramsci kept referring to it. Gramsci also took up and specifically concentrated on the aspect of Socialist morality contained in so much of Rosa Luxemburg's work. See Aldo Garosci, 'Totalitarismo e storicismo nel pensiero di Gramsci', *Pensiero politico e storiografia moderna: saggi di storia contemporanea*, Vol. I, Pisa 1954. The connection between Rosa Luxemburg and Gramsci has been deliberately ignored by official Communist writers; both have suffered from immurement in official silence.

entirety as soon as possible. Paul Frölich, Rosa Luxemburg's former opponent and now one of the more eminent theoreticians of the German party, was charged with this task to which he devoted himself with considerable enthusiasm.¹

It was during this period, too, that Rosa Luxemburg's legacy in specifically Russian questions was finally eradicated. Many of her closest colleagues in the Polish party had joined the Bolsheviki after 1917 and had made important careers in post-revolutionary Russia. They accepted the Bolshevik thesis in all its variety except in one particular—the national question, more specifically the right to self-determination of the nations on the Russian periphery. The problem was still being strenuously argued at the highest level as late as the eighth congress of the Russian Communist Party in March 1919, when Marchlewski, entirely unrepentant, still insisted that Lenin's nationality policy was wrong.² In the end the whole thing had been settled not so much by party debate as by events themselves; it can certainly be argued that the policy actually carried out by Stalin and Ordzhonikidze was much closer to Rosa Luxemburg's than to Lenin's—whatever the official line.³ In the Polish Communist Party, where the nationality problem was almost at home, it was not until the second congress of 1923 that the anti-national platform was specifically revised and the official Russian line adopted. In one sense, it was obviously easier to Bolshevize the Polish party than the KPD. Outlawed and per-

¹ He even spent some months in Moscow to tackle her Polish writings, but found that Warszawski had insufficient time to help him as arranged. Frölich accordingly returned to Germany in the hope that the Polish part of the project could be tackled later. It never was. Between 1922 and 1928 three volumes of Rosa Luxemburg's collected works appeared. *The Accumulation of Capital* and the *Anticritique* (Vol. VI—1924), her writings against revisionism (Vol. III—1925), and finally her writings on trade unions and the mass strike (Vol. IV—1928). Two further volumes were in preparation. The publication of Rosa Luxemburg's writings on economics, particularly her *Introduction to Political Economy* (Vol. VIII), was endlessly delayed owing to litigation with Paul Levi who had first published this work in 1925; the other was the volume on imperialism (Vol. V) which was in proof in January 1933. The reception of the published volumes was a microcosm of the varying attitudes to Luxemburgism. The first two to be published met with cautious enthusiasm, and mere reference to the errors without much discussion. Vol. IV drew, *inter alia*, a long, officially inspired review by Z. Leder from Moscow who warned the editor, Paul Frölich, that it was dangerous to enthuse too much about Rosa Luxemburg in introductory prefaces—'qui prouve trop prouve rien'—even though Rosa herself had undoubtedly been 'a great personality'. (*Kommunistische Internationale*, 1929, No. 6, p. 313.)

² See O. B. Szmidt, *SDKPiL: Materiały i dokumenty*, Vol. III, pp. 335-7; also Lenin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXIX, pp. 152-3.

³ See below, Appendix 2, p. 859.

secuted at home, the Poles were almost totally dependent on Moscow, especially after the failure of the invasion, over which Marchlewski and Radek had been almost grotesquely wrong. The public washing of theoretical linen was largely unnecessary; events themselves confirmed Lenin's gloomy prognosis about Poland's readiness to embrace revolution exported by the Red Army. On the other hand, the Poles had the most intimate connection with the Bolshevik leaders. It speaks more for the importance of so many of 'her' Poles in the Russian movement than for any Russian sympathy with Rosa Luxemburg's views that the final and effective verdict on self-determination took so long. It was not until 1925, just before his death, that Feliks Dzierżyński, hitherto the bitterest and most distinguished opponent of national self-determination—and one of Stalin's chief assistants in turning Lenin's national policy inside out—officially recanted, admitting that the SDKPiL's opposition to Lenin's policy had been an error.¹

This period ends with the failure of the second and larger German insurrection in 1923. Lenin was now out of action and soon to die. A struggle was in progress for the succession in Russia; the victory of Stalin and his allies coincided with the temporary abandonment of revolution in Europe as a practical possibility and the acceptance of a period of capitalist stability. Accordingly, the international effort was replaced by more parochial preoccupations within the Soviet Union. Grandiosely—and certainly prematurely—these were to be called 'Socialism in one country'.

As a consequence, the relationship between the Russian party and European Communism necessarily changed. The latter parties were 'Bolshevized'. Not only was the Russian organizational model uniformly imposed, but the Russians obtained a tighter grip on the Comintern and through it on the policy and tactics of their European allies. From this it was but a small step to a fundamental

¹ See below, Appendix 2, p. 856.

Another major and painful Polish revision of Rosa Luxemburg's former policy was the peasant question: see Wera Kostrzewa (Maria Koszutska), 'Tezy agrarne' (Thesis on agriculture), *Pisma i przemówienia*, 3 volumes, Warsaw 1961-2, Vol. I, pp. 52 ff.

The difference between the Polish and German embrace of Leninism was simply that in the Polish party the problem was at this stage a genuine revision of previously accepted policies, while in Germany it was largely a reflection of current personal and political battles.

change in the very nature of these parties; from being autonomous if junior colleagues of the victorious Bolsheviki, they became increasingly the foreign executive arm of the Soviet state. Once revolution ceased to be an immediate possibility the purpose of their activity became closely tied to the foreign policy needs of the Soviet Union. After Rapallo much of the heat went out of Russo-German relations; a secret dialogue with the hated German militarists even became possible. It was the bleak dawn of *Realpolitik*; both Germany and Russia were international pariahs. But we must not look too far into the future. The relationship between the KPD and the Russian Communists was still a party relationship, not one between German party and Soviet state; accordingly, the complicated internal developments in the Russian party, where a protracted struggle for power was to be fought for nearly ten years, were mirrored with surprising faithfulness in the tussle for leadership and control in the KPD. Once more Rosa Luxemburg played an important if posthumous part. She had left the German Communist Party equipped with a proprietary prescription for revolution, competing with and in part contradicting the experience of the Bolsheviki. This now had to be specifically undone if the German party was to be truly Bolshevized—more so perhaps than was necessary anywhere else. Most of the other European Communist parties had already emerged in a state of theoretical as well as practical dependence on the Bolsheviki; all that was needed was to get rid of a few independent leaders and their fractious followers. Accordingly, it was inevitable that someone in Germany should sooner or later undertake a specific onslaught on Rosa Luxemburg's whole legacy. This task was to fall on Ruth Fischer and her close ally and friend Arkadi Maslow. It must be said that they carried it out with exemplary enthusiasm, even joy.

The 'ultra-Left' onslaught on and capture of the leadership in the main European parties—of which Ruth Fischer and Maslow were the German, and the most significant and violent, exponents—used as its theoretical battering ram an adulation of Bolshevism which went far beyond anything attempted hitherto. For the first time since the events themselves the entire history of pre-war Social Democracy was passed in critical review. Where previously the Bolsheviki had been seen to be right in their own context and with regard to their particular problems—organization, revolution,

dictatorship of the proletariat, the national question—their actions and ideas were now blown up to universal validity and favourably contrasted with everyone else's contribution. It was no longer a question of individual problems but of whole alternative systems. The most important of these faulty systems was Trotsky's—the Russian contender for power. Ranking it closely, however, a new system or theory now saw the light of day, an edifice of error which would have amazed its alleged author and her contemporaries—Luxemburgism.

As always in the political application of Marxism, the immediate tactical requirements of a given situation were closely but confusingly linked with quite fundamental theoretical formulations. This was the period of the great assault on Trotsky by the Stalin-Zinoviev-Kamenev *troika*, and it was Stalin who first conceptualized his policy—'Socialism in one country'—and then insistently hammered on its validity against the postulated version of his opponent, Trotskyism. A purely political contest for power was not respectable. One of Stalin's most important adaptations of Leninism was precisely the master's own well-developed habit of assaulting his opponents not so much as individuals but as spiders weaving a systematic web of errors. This massive confrontation of system against system rather than person against person was the essence of Stalin's elaboration at the fourteenth party congress in April 1925. It set in motion an echoing wave; the onslaught on Trotskyism in all its manifold shapes and forms was soon under way in Germany as well.

What Trotskyism was to Stalin in Russia, Luxemburgism became for the Stalinists or Bolshevizers in Germany: the local version of Trotskyite indiscipline and error. Throughout the spring and summer of 1925 Ruth Fischer and her immediate allies mounted a great offensive against the 'remnants of Social Democracy in the party'. These were people who, however much they had deplored the chauvinistic collapse of the Second International and later fought against the official Social-Democratic leadership as well as against the Independents, had none the less done so in terms of upholding pre-war Social Democracy against its betrayers and not as allies and supporters of the Bolsheviks. *Spartakus* was alleged never to have made a really clean break with the Second International. The only genuine and untainted Communists were the Bolsheviks—and since no one before 1917 in Germany could

conceivably claim to have followed the Bolshevik line in every respect, this left a small circle of those who in fact had not even been in Germany before the war. Ruth Fischer came from medical studies in Austria, Maslow was a Russian who had lived in Germany but had not been active in the *Spartakusbund*. For all the others, only a complete denial of their own past could now undo the taint of adherence to pre-war Social Democracy.¹

However important Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht may have been as personalities, the time had come to admit openly that 'even they have burdened us with great errors which we must eradicate'—as Ruth Fischer hectoringly told the tenth KPD congress.² Writing for party workers—the new élite cadre which symbolized the process of Bolshevization—she was even more outspoken, and referred to Rosa Luxemburg and her influence as nothing less than a syphilis bacillus.³ And, wherever possible, Ruth Fischer's supporters made a point of drawing an entirely false analogy between Rosa Luxemburg and Trotsky—thus bringing the particular and local German struggle against Luxemburgism in the KPD within the orbit of the Russian struggle against Trotskyism. The mere statement that while the Russian problem might be Trotsky the German one was Luxemburg was insufficient and undialectical; the relationship, if not proved, had to be at least constantly reasserted. It was necessary to show not merely that these were two historical versions of the same thing but that they were in fact logically and historically interdependent, two versions of the same evil. 'From the opposition to the [Bolsheviks on the part of *Spartakusbund* and pre-war Social Democracy] which in many cases (not in all) corresponds precisely to the opposition of Trotsky to the Russian Communist Party, the main defects in the German revolutionary movement may be observed.'⁴

The heat engendered by this onslaught was sufficient to singe even the hitherto sacrosanct personality of the dead leader. When

¹ Ruth Fischer, 'Our most important task', *Die Internationale*, 1925, Vol. VIII, No. 3, pp. 105-11.

² *Protokol X KPD Parteitag 1925*, p. 513.

³ I have been unable to trace the exact reference to this famous remark which was probably in an article in *Der Funke*, a Communist journal for party workers published in the mid-1920s, all numbers of which were not available to me. However, the remark itself is well attested; see below, p. 806, note 1. See also A. Maslow, 'Some comments on our party congresses', *Der Funke*, 1925, Nos. 13/14.

⁴ Ernst Schneller, 'Regarding Trotskyism in the German Communist Movement,' *Die Internationale*, 1925, Vol. VIII, No. 3, p. 119.

one writer declared that there were still 'comrades much in demand as speakers at public meetings who none the less are not wedded organizationally to their movement to an extent which earns them the confidence of comrades in their daily task', he had intellectuals specifically in mind, and no one more obviously than Rosa Luxemburg.¹

The technique of 'pairing' opponents, however ill-suited they might be, had been established Leninist practice and was now resurrected with enthusiasm. Not only were Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg 'paired' but they were joined by the discredited leaders, Brandler and Thalheimer—scapegoats for the unsuccessful uprisings of 1920 and 1923. Ruth Fischer, once more to the fore, wrote of the necessity for 'an unceasing struggle against similar opportunist deviations such as Luxemburgism, Brandlerism and Trotskyism'. It was a very loose and unjustified association.² One thing they did *appear* to have in common was that their doctrines were all doctrines of action (or further action) in contrast to Stalin's then official version of Leninism as a doctrine of discipline and stability. But neither then nor later could Communists ever admit to such an antithesis. Officially Leninism remained the doctrine of action *par excellence*.

It was in the process of this campaign and the systematization of a deviant doctrine that Rosa Luxemburg's individual errors first became converted officially into Luxemburgism. As a 'system' it made its public *début* in the course of 1925. The progression is easy to see: first a faulty view on certain problems (i.e. different from that of the Bolsheviks); then a distinct characterization of these differences into errors (i.e. judgement); finally the creation of a *system of errors* condemned by contrast with Bolshevism—then currently being refashioned into the autonomous dogma of Leninism.

What exactly was Luxemburgism in this period? *The Accumulation of Capital* had already been identified as the cornerstone of a deviant philosophy. 'The German party based its theory and practice in the main on the accumulation theory of Rosa Luxemburg, the source of all errors, of spontaneity theories, of false attitudes with regard to the problem of organization.'³ Bukharin

¹ J. Lenz, speech at the Lenin Circle, *ibid.*, No. 2, p. 95.

² *Ibid.*, p. 234. The fact that Trotsky eight years later agreed with Stalin and claimed Rosa Luxemburg as a potential supporter for the Fourth International does not justify this claim one whit.

³ Ruth Fischer, *Die Internationale*, 1925, Vol. VIII, No. 3, p. 107.

undertook to demolish Rosa Luxemburg's economic arguments in detail and with them the whole web of political mistakes which had been spun from this book.¹ And the most important element of error in *The Accumulation of Capital* was the theory of spontaneity. This was the heart of Luxemburgism. Its discovery was an essential aspect of Luxemburgism itself—in the relationship of base to superstructure; for nearly all the manifold errors which were to be thrashed out in the next few years were, according to the critics, finally anchored in this theory of spontaneity. We have already seen in our own discussion of Rosa Luxemburg's book how this interpretation was possible.² Briefly, *The Accumulation of Capital*, a logical vehicle driving inexorably to the destruction of capitalism as a system of *economic* relations, was interpreted in a *political* sense very much akin to Kautsky's inevitable Socialism; had it not been for Rosa Luxemburg's revolutionary actions and writings, the total analogy with Kautsky would have been irresistible. Instead of a theory of attrition, Rosa Luxemburg was credited with a theory of spontaneity in which the final steps in the long process of rational self-enlightenment would enable the masses to take the necessary and correct revolutionary steps when the situation demanded it. The party was a mere abstraction, neither distinct from nor related organizationally and politically to the proletariat—the class. Instead of a clearly defined relationship between party and class—a consensus of role expectations, in sociological jargon—all Rosa Luxemburg had produced was diffuseness and overlap; every man his own party.

The construction of Luxemburgism with its essential theory of spontaneity became a convenient organ on which the individual notes of Rosa Luxemburg's individual deviations could now be piped out as a massively heretical harmony. Her dispute with Lenin in 1903 over organizational questions was related to Luxemburgism—the undervaluation of the party's role; likewise her critique of the Russian revolution. Her false theory of capitalist accumulation fed a sustained base-note of theory into this political composition; her obtuse insistence on reconciliation between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks corresponded neatly to her failure to call for an open split between opportunism and radicalism in the

¹ N. Bukharin, 'Imperialism and the Accumulation of Capital', *Unter dem Banner des Marxismus*, Vienna/Berlin, 1925/1926, Vol. II, pp. 288 ff.

² See above, pp. 535, 542-3.

German party—a neglect of the party's role once again. Finally, and most important, there were the masses, that essential harmonic construction without which no Marxist music could be played but which for Rosa Luxemburg had become a substitute for all the precise tactical and strategic definitions on which Lenin had insisted. It will be obvious that any serious analysis of Rosa Luxemburg's writings would have cast more than doubt on this interpretation, particularly on the concoction of a coherent system of error; even less tenable was the identification with Trotsky. But for present purposes Stalin's example showed the way: political identification of all enemies as rooted together in the same fallacious, even dangerous, theory; extrapolation of all individual views into common systems. The process worked down from the top. Luxemburgism and Trotskyism were postulated as similar in origin and intent; there was then no more need to show correspondence in detail. As long as similar origins were authoritatively asserted, the elaboration of the various systems could be developed independently—for the moment.¹ And, of course, these 'wrong' systems were balanced by the 'correct' system—Leninism. Each depended on the other for its very existence.

Lenin himself would probably never have thought of ascribing to himself a distinct corpus of doctrine worthy of an 'ism' in its own right. He considered his writings merely to be the current application of Marxism, ever flexible and productive. What he had to say—indeed the entire process of revolution in Russia—

had to be admitted to have some fundamental significance on an international scale. Of course it would be a great mistake to exaggerate this truth and to apply it to more than a few of the fundamental features of our revolution. We must not make the error of forgetting that once the proletarian revolution has been victorious in at least one of the advanced countries, things will in all likelihood change very considerably, i.e. Russia will shortly cease to be the model country and become once more the backward country, in a 'soviet and socialist' sense.²

But with the general struggle against errors in the Communist movement, and the particular fight for the great man's mantle,

¹ For an interesting if slightly puckish argument in favour of the causal connection between Bolshevik policy and the elaboration of a suitable philosophic 'system', see A. MacIntyre, 'A Mistake about Causality in Social Science', in P. Laslett and W. G. Runciman, *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, Second series, Oxford 1962, pp. 48-70; particularly pp. 63 ff. for the period of the Stalin purges.

² Lenin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXXI, p. 1. This was written as late as May 1920

the creation and claim to exclusive possession of a distinct body of doctrine which could be ascribed to Lenin became inevitable. In April 1924 Stalin delivered a lecture at the Sverdlov University, which he called 'The Foundations of Leninism'.¹ From then onwards, for nearly thirty years, he would revert again and again to the elaboration of the doctrines of Leninism as a distinct entity. Stalin was a sufficient dialectician to allocate a finite historical role to his invaluable asset—'Leninism is Marxism in the age of imperialism'—but this did not make it any less valid. Indeed, everything Stalin did with it was to make it more sharply distinctive. And the international Communist movement accepted his thesis in proportion to his rise to power. Stalin was building on sound foundations of precedent once again; systematization—of his own and his opponents' views—had been Lenin's own weapon. He had elevated opposing views into a system because in this way they could be demolished more easily and more impressively than as a series of isolated blunders. In Stalin's hands the main features of Leninism became the necessity for Communist organizational autonomy; the permanent institutionalization of the party under a centralized directorate leading the masses—and not merely the most advanced expression of proletarian activity; the elevation of the dictatorship of the proletariat into an essential stage of the dialectic, during which the power of the state must grow greater and not less, rather than simply some vague transitory stage between the inception of revolution and its completion. Finally, the notion of revolutionary egoism: Socialism in one country and not some immediate causal linkage between revolutions in different countries. It is obvious that Luxemburgism could easily be shown to differ sharply from all this by implication even more than by actual quotation; the claim that Leninism was in fact the only valid Marxism of a new era consigned Luxemburgism at the very best to a lower stage of historical development. We shall see how the relationship between Leninism and Luxemburgism changed from a differentiation of stages—with the latter still justified as having limited but real historical validity—to the claim that Leninism had a timeless and ubiquitous validity which no longer admitted Luxemburgism even as a possible reflection of a particular historical situation. This made it a conscious, deliberate heresy. But in any case it is essential to recognize that Luxemburg-

¹ Reprinted in English in *Leninism*, London 1940, pp. 1-85.

ism was, right from the start, a function of Leninism; that as Leninism grew and changed, so Luxemburgism changed and diminished accordingly. All deviant doctrines were functionally correlated to Leninism; indeed it is possible (though probably excessive) to argue that Leninism—like Luxemburgism—was never an autonomous body of doctrine at all but merely the product of a need for a deterrent which in turn could only exist by conjuring up an opposing threat of the same magnitude.

The ultra-Left ascendancy was short-lived. With victory the anti-Trotsky *troika* in Moscow broke apart. At the fourteenth party congress in December 1925 Stalin and Zinoviev met head on, and the latter was defeated. Stalin's supporters now swarmed into the higher echelons of the party in increasing numbers. His new allies in the leadership were Bukharin, Tomsky, and Rykov; the so-called Right now had its brief day. The realignment soon made itself felt in the Comintern and of course in Germany. Ruth Fischer's venomous assault on the German party's cherished traditions had been bitterly resented and her opponents, encouraged by the change in Moscow, now openly hit back. At the meeting of the executive of the Comintern in February–March 1926 the German ultra-Left, already censured privately by Bukharin and the Comintern leadership, now came under public attack. Ruth Fischer was not only to be defeated but soon to be expelled altogether from the KPD.

Rosa Luxemburg was largely rehabilitated in the process. Instead of being the fount of all errors, she 'had been well on the way to creating a truly Marxist party in Germany and she would have created it had her death not made this impossible'.¹ Ruth Fischer was paid out specifically for some of her grosser slanders and no one was better qualified to do this than Rosa Luxemburg's old friend, Clara Zetkin. The campaign against Rosa Luxemburg had been nothing less than a combination of 'evil and slander . . .':

Comrade Fischer missed no opportunity to debase the tradition of the *Spartakusbund*, to extinguish all memories of its revolutionary importance, to degrade it and to sully it. . . . On the contrary Rosa Luxemburg belongs to the best traditions not only of the KPD but of the entire world proletariat. Lenin called her an eagle, but Ruth Fischer a syphilis

¹ K[arl] S[chmidt], *Die Internationale*, 1925, Vol. VIII, No. 10, p. 611.

bacillus. Apart from the tastelessness and indecency of this remark, it is incredibly scurrilous in a political sense as well.¹

Another speaker, himself at one time a member of the ultra-Left but shortly to be expelled from the party for right-wing deviation, added that 'a leadership capable of stigmatizing Rosa Luxemburg as the syphilis of the working-class movement—the person who had that printed is sitting here in the room—all one can say is that such a leadership is utterly out of the question.'²

But if Rosa's personal reputation was salvaged and restored, any rehabilitation of Luxemburgism was short-lived. For Ruth Fischer had not invented Luxemburgism, she had only exaggerated it and made it into a political battering-ram with which to pulverize her enemies—a German version of Trotskyism. Stalin's international policy had not really changed, only the allies who helped him carry it out—and Bukharin, the new Russian Comintern expert, certainly had no sympathy for Rosa Luxemburg's theoretical ideas. Indeed, Bukharin had eagerly seized the opportunity of making his own substantial contribution to characterizing and demolishing the concept of Luxemburgism (Chapter XII, p. 533). Ironically, the errors of Luxemburgism were now paired differently, with Ruth Fischer and the ultra-Left instead of with Trotsky—albeit cautiously and with subtlety instead of with the previous barrage of mud-slinging. Luxemburgism was now presented as 'the pre-stage to the recognition of the superior theoretical and tactical basis of Leninism'. Luxemburg and Lenin were presented as 'the two antipodes of revolutionary Marxism'; a choice between them was held to be consciously necessary and possible. The Left had chosen to develop not the correct possibilities of Leninism but the incorrect limitations implied in Luxemburgism. 'One must not use the errors and insufficiencies of a yet undeveloped situation in the revolutionary class struggle to create a wrong system of class policy . . . now that one sixth of the world is under the dictatorship of the proletariat, utopian-revolutionary hopes and aims are no longer good enough.'³

¹ *Protokoll, Erweiterte Executive der Kommunistischen Internationale, 17 Februar–15 März 1926*, Hamburg 1926, p. 249. See also *Rote Fahne*, Vol. IX, Nos. 43–66. The syphilis remark is also quoted by Otto Wenzel (*Die KPD im Jahre 1923*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Berlin 1955, p. 281), from the gleeful comments on the debate made by the SPD press (see *Sozialdemokratische Parteikorrespondenz 1923–1928*, Supplementary Volume, Berlin 1930, p. 434).

² Arthur Rosenberg, *Protokoll EKKI*, p. 186.

³ 'The Renaissance of Luxemburgism', *Rote Fahne*, 11 August 1926.

Luxemburgism is here presented as a system of ideas anchored in a particular situation. The right progress from it was Leninism—adoption of which was made all the easier by the subsequent historical developments which should have been plain for all to see. The pairing of the ultra-Left with Luxemburgism was thus not an inherent logical necessity—which was the way in which the ultra-Left had previously presented the relationship between Luxemburgism and the Brandler–Thalheimer leadership—but a deliberately wrong-headed development of Luxemburgism in unjustified directions. “The concepts [of Luxemburgism] are the same but the content has altered [into counter-revolution, utopianism and back-sliding]. The theoretical armament still has part of its old and brilliant fire but it has lost its use and has become valueless.”¹ Ruth Fischer’s ancestry could thus be traced to Rosa Luxemburg, but the latter could not be held responsible for the excesses and dangers of Ruth Fischer.

The strong reaction against Fischer–Maslow and the ultra-Left also proved of limited duration. By 1928 the temporary ‘Right’ course of the KPD gradually gave way again to a more left-wing one, without of course rehabilitating or justifying Ruth Fischer. By this time Ernst Thälmann had emerged as the strong man of the KPD—the ex-protégé of Ruth Fischer charged with her political liquidation. The reason for the change was Russian, not German.

Stalin began the great alteration of course which was to put an end to the relative ‘liberalism’ of the New Economic Policy and tighten the screws for the coming great leap forward into collectivization and the first five-year plan. In Europe also a sharper confrontation with society was called for, and in particular the knife-edge was levelled at Social Democracy once more. Within Communist parties this meant greater vigilance, sharpness, and ruthlessness. Brandler and Thalheimer, previously shunted aside from the leadership, were now noisily expelled. Rightism was the main enemy once more—and in the new circumstances a new thesis emerged: with the party itself fully to the left, no still-further left position was theoretically possible. Opponents who a few years before had been labelled ultra-Left now indiscriminately became Rightists—the only possible deviation. Ultra-Leftism became identified with right-wing opportunism—a preview of the later

¹ Ibid.

'pairing' in Russia of both Bukharin and Zinoviev with Trotsky as a single and largely undifferentiated group of counter-revolutionary traitors.

For Rosa Luxemburg and her 'system' this meant the old wind of criticism once more. The notion of Luxemburgism as a half step to Leninism was abandoned. A whole series of pseudo-scientific articles reviewed Rosa Luxemburg's work in the critical light of the new requirements. For the first time the well-established historical thesis of her change of mind during the German revolution was challenged; instead of raising herself painfully towards Leninism in the last weeks of her life she was now shown to have refused to make the required adjustment. The final proof was that she and her friends had deliberately neglected the recruitment of allies among the peasants, so clearly postulated by Lenin long before—the first, but not the last, reference to this particular failing.¹

In contrast to 1925 the task now was not to evaluate the importance of the Left radicals as a whole but to pinpoint their weaknesses; the partial rehabilitation of 1926 had led by implication to a tendency to promote the German Left as a system—naturally at the expense of the Bolsheviks. 'We do not want to diminish the importance of the honourable revolutionary work of the Left radicals before and during the war. . . . But we must avoid all demagogic confrontation of the Left with the Bolsheviks.'² In view of the current, more favourable view of *Spartakus*, it was for the moment safer to play down the importance of Luxemburgism as a system. But this temporary phase of 'unsystematic' discussion could not last. Without systematization even the sharpest criticism of deviants was little better than opportunism.

In actual fact the stimulus for the whole discussion was provided by a recent book—no theoretical elaboration without a handy text to criticize. Radek had republished his essays on the German revolution with a foreword in which he claimed that the object of the

¹ 'The Programme of the Spartakusbund', *Rote Fahne*, 30 December 1928. Either deliberately or more probably through ignorance, no reference was made to Rosa Luxemburg's own justification of this 'neglect' in terms of deliberate policy in her article on the national question in 1908. (See Appendix 2, p. 851.) But compare the late (1928) correction of this error in Germany, with its large revolutionary urban working class, with the much earlier correction in Poland (1921–1922).

² N. Lenzner, 'The German Left radicals and Bolshevism', *Kommunistische Internationale*, No. 11 (1928), p. 604. See also a long analysis of Rosa Luxemburg's errors about mass strikes by P. Langner, *Der Massenstreik im Kampf des Proletariats*, Leipzig 1931, particularly pp. 27–31.

German Left was 'to prepare the progressive workers of the Left for the immediate struggle for Socialism. . . . They could have learnt much from Bolshevism but they could not have been Bolsheviks. Owing to the war the shape of the revolution in Germany was different from that in Russia. In the course of eight months Russia moved from the democratic to the proletarian revolution.'¹ The German situation, however, was one in which Socialism had been imminent for some time and the tactics of the Left had therefore to be adapted to it. Considering the time and place, Radek's thesis was curiously heretical—and of course entirely accurate; it was instantly challenged in Russia as much as in Germany. For he implied that the German Left recognized the imminence of the final revolutionary stage in Germany, while the Russians seized an unexpected opportunity to turn a democratic revolution—to which all their tactics had been adapted—into a Socialist one.²

A combination of Russian politics and German loyalty to indigenous tradition (it is significant that beneath all the criticism Rosa Luxemburg had subtly acquired exclusive German nationality by this time) thus raised Luxemburgism to a new level of respectability, at least in the eyes of its enemies. It had all happened on the quiet; no one had dared to rehabilitate it officially. Perhaps—it was thought—Luxemburgism slipped in unseen with the ritual cleansing of the great revolutionary's personal reputation—a ceremony solemnly performed every 15 January and 5 March. The separation of Luxemburg from Luxemburgism between 1922 and

¹ Karl Radek, *Die Deutsche Revolution*, Leipzig 1926, Introduction, pp. 14–15.

² It was significant that Lenzner even marshalled Rosa Luxemburg's support for the Bolshevik tactics in the 1905 revolution against Radek, in order to destroy the latter's claim that the Left radicals were in advance of the Bolsheviks in their theory of imperialism before 1916 (Radek, Introduction, pp. 10–11). The reason and circumstances which induced Radek to publish this version at this particular time remain something of a mystery, but seem to indicate an attempt on the part of Trotsky's former allies to profit from Stalin's official adoption of the policy which they had previously advocated against Bukharin and the supporters of the New Economic Policy. The attempt proved short-lived—and merely made them conspicuous. Compare E. Preobrazhenskii, 'Marxism and Leninism', *Molodoya Gvardiya*, Moscow 1924 (special Lenin commemoration number), p. 217:

'If to our great loss Lenin had died before the outbreak of the first world war, it would not have occurred to any of us to talk about Leninism as a special version of Marxism. . . . Lenin's position in the battle against the Mensheviks *does not rise above the general framework* of the battle of revolutionary Marxism against opportunism.' (My italics.)

Stalin himself had already taken issue with Radek over the same question earlier: 'The October revolution and the tactics of the Communists', *Sochineniya*, Vol. VI, pp. 358–401.

1925 and after 1926 would have to be critically reviewed. More probably, however, the loyalty to indigenous tradition, especially among participants like Radek, Paul Frölich, and Ernst Meyer, was strong enough to reassert Luxemburgism whenever the official heresy-hunt was not in full cry. Accordingly the momentary state of peace and quiet could not be allowed to endure for very long; a return to a clash of systems became inevitable. Within a short time massive Russian support even had to be mobilized against new disagreements about how to interpret history in the German party.

In 1929 an authoritative article of Russian origin set out a new and, it was hoped, final version of Luxemburgism. Rosa Luxemburg herself was once more assigned an honourable place in the history of proletarian revolution. The thesis of choice up or down from her position was elaborated in a modified and critical form; one could either surmount her errors and reach Leninism, or follow an equally possible avenue down to the refuse pit where Kautsky reigned. But Luxemburgism, though still an historical stage, was no longer inevitable but deviant. Once more it became a system of errors, a blind alley—from which only a conscious effort of will could lead to Bolshevism. Any contemporary repetition of or insistence on her views led instantly to the pit of Kautskyism. For the purpose of current political requirements this downward path had been taken by Brandler and Brandlerism; the former in the process of physical expulsion, the latter in the process of elaboration and simultaneous dialectical destruction. What more convenient than comparing Brandlerism with Luxemburgism in its degenerate form? At least Rosa Luxemburg herself had avoided the ultimate indignity of descent. 'She herself has entered the balance sheet of history with a great profit balance.'¹ Person and system were shown as connected but still historically separate.

But the position did not rest there. After Brandler and Thalheimer it was the turn of the conciliators. Ernst Meyer, Ewert, Gerhard Eisler were winkled out of their positions in the party's Central Committee. The new Left course was fully established in policy and personnel. By 1930 the Stalinist campaign for collectivization in Russia was in full swing. There seemed no obvious theoretical or political need for a new campaign against Luxem-

¹ A. Martynov, 'From Rosa Luxemburg to Lenin or from Luxemburg to Kautsky', *Kommunistische Internationale*, No. 3 (1929), pp. 100-16, particularly p. 115.

burgism as the scapegoat for current deviations. Yet it was Stalin himself who now put the cat among the puzzled pigeons. In 1931 he wrote an open letter to the editor of the Bolshevik historical journal *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya* in which he accused the editors, and particularly Slutskii, of fostering deliberate falsification of party history, clearly inspired by Trotskyites. The immediate political causes of this onslaught, which was to have far-reaching consequences (including Slutskii's own liquidation in the first of the great purges) are still obscure.¹ Perhaps the official bridling of the excesses of collectivization signalled by Stalin's letter, 'Dizzy with success', to *Pravda* on 2 March 1930 had once more produced a reaction greater than had been intended—at least in the suspicious minds of Stalin and his close collaborators. In any case a new and hitherto unparalleled era of theoretical witch-hunting now began.

The immediate question raised in the journal had been the attitude of the Bolsheviks and the German Left to Kautsky and the 'Centre' before the war. Slutskii had pointed out what Lenin had himself admitted: that Rosa Luxemburg's indictment of Kautsky as a time-serving theorist preceded Lenin's by four years. However correct the Bolsheviks had been in the context of their own party struggle against the Mensheviks, they could not claim to have recognized opportunism with equal vigour in all its different

¹ Slutskii's article is in *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya*, No. 6, 1930, which presumably appeared in the summer of 1930. On 20 October 1930 the editors were forced into a public admission that Slutskii's article was an 'error'; the subject, however, was still 'timely and important'. Stalin's public assault on the editors and on current party history as a whole only saw the light of day more than six months later; no one quite knows why.

It has been suggested that in the course of 1930–1931 there was a massive return of exiled Trotskyites into state and party institutions. This allegedly caused Stalin to react sharply to any attempt to interpret his warnings against the excesses of collectivization as a general relaxation in the campaign against the various oppositional groups within the party.

An alternative explanation is connected with the international rather than the Russian movement. Trotsky and his supporters expected to sink into oblivion after his expulsion from the Soviet Union, but instead developed a lively counter-attack both in propaganda and organization. This was the period when Trotsky began his critical analysis of Communist policies in Germany and with regard to the Spanish revolution. There was considerable Trotsky support both in Germany, Poland, and elsewhere. Certainly Stalin's letter ushered in a new period of anti-Trotskyite exposures; in England the 'Balham' group was identified and noisily evicted in 1932. Stalin's particular identification of Luxemburgism with Trotskyism may have been due to an attempt to 'excuse' potential Trotskyites as being really Luxemburgists. In this analysis Stalin's letter makes sense as a command to deal with Trotskyites not in terms of verbal disputation but of physical expulsion ('Bash the Trots', as it was known in English Communist Party circles). Trotskyites were no longer to be excused as deviant Communists but to be pilloried as bourgeois spies in the Communist movement.

national manifestations. Stalin, however, denied this thesis most vigorously. Far from *following* the German Left, the Bolsheviki had *encouraged* the German Left to take their stand against Kautsky; without such encouragement Rosa Luxemburg might never have been pushed into her open polemic against Kautsky in the first place! The disagreements between Bolsheviki and German radicals before the war were due, according to Stalin, to nothing less than the recognition by Lenin and his colleagues that the German Left were not sufficiently vigorous in their fight against opportunism. The honour of leading this fight belonged without doubt to the Bolsheviki and to no one else. Any other version was Trotskyite slander and falsification. At the same time all the other mistakes of the German Left were paraded once more with heavy sarcasm—so much so that Stalin felt impelled to remind his readers that the German Left did have ‘some important and serious deeds to their credit’.¹

Stalin supplemented this entirely absurd but none the less authoritative revision of party history with an even more spurious answer to two queries which reached him from within the Russian party. The first of his correspondents suggested that it would be logical to simplify the whole process of historiography by postulating that Trotsky and his colleagues had never been anything but Mensheviks. Stalin, who had no love of simplification, rounded on Olekhnovich with the assertion that not only was this thesis untrue but that it implied that Lenin had permitted evident Mensheviks to join the Bolshevik party—either because he had been absurdly tolerant or because he was blind. No, Trotsky had joined the Bolsheviki and had acted as a Bolshevik in order to destroy and weaken the Bolshevik party with his clandestine opposition. On his eviction (by Stalin) he had returned to his previous open Menshevism.²

Aristov, the other correspondent, had not even tried to make clever suggestions about simplifying party history. His point was one of detail: surely Trotsky had invented the doctrine of permanent revolution and not Rosa Luxemburg—however enthusiastically she might (or might not) have subscribed to it? Stalin corrected

¹ ‘Regarding some problems of the history of Bolshevism’, *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya*, No. 6 (113), 1931, reprinted in Stalin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XIII, pp. 84–102.

² *Bolshevik*, No. 16, 30 August 1932, reprinted as ‘Answer to Olekhnovich and Aristov’, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XIII, pp. 127–32.

this appeal to the demonstrable facts with almost purposeless cynicism. It had been Parvus and Trotsky who had 'campaigned against Lenin with the theory of permanent revolution . . . Rosa Luxemburg remained in the background and preferred not to enter the lists . . . but the *theory* of permanent revolution was thought up [*sochinili*] by Rosa Luxemburg and Parvus . . . not Trotsky but Rosa Luxemburg and Parvus invented the theory . . . not Rosa Luxemburg but Parvus and Trotsky campaigned against Lenin in 1905. . . . Later Rosa Luxemburg too fought against Lenin's revolutionary concept but that was after 1905.¹ All that had been achieved was muddle—but muddle which perhaps effectively linked Rosa Luxemburg, Parvus, and Trotsky as joint creators and propagators of a heretical theory which happened to stand in the blackest contrast to the official enthronement of 'Socialism in one country'.

By this time Stalin's word was law—on history as much as anything else; a chorus of welcome for this clear and brilliant interpretation of history dutifully arose in the KPD as well as in the Russian party. But it is interesting to contrast the effect of Stalin's letter on Polish and German party historians. Rather than engage in elaborate acts of self-flagellation by reinterpreting their current work, the Poles preferred to shut up shop. Confined to Moscow, and largely dependent on Russian hospitality and aid, they were even more vulnerable than sceptical Russian party members. Marchlewski, Dzierżyński, most of their Bolshevik ex-colleagues, were dead. Accordingly *Z Pola Walki*, their equivalent of *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya* (the two journals had interchanged materials and brought out similar articles simultaneously), decided to discontinue publication even though the current number had already been set in proof. Future Polish articles on party history were confined to *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya* and followed the new line though without specific acknowledgement of any change; only impeccably meritorious Bolsheviks like Hanecki were allowed to go on writing at all.² Then, and afterwards, the Poles raised the art of oppositional

¹ *Sochineniya*, Vol. XIII, pp. 130–2.

² The last number of *Z Pola Walki* to appear was No. 11/12, Autumn 1931. This number contained a lengthy discussion of the SDKPiL in the 1905 revolution which still attempted to distinguish an autonomous and valid Polish line, though differences with the Bolsheviks were of course analysed to the latter's advantage—very much like German comment eight years earlier. The Poles, who had been in advance of developments in Russia and Germany for forty years, had now at last slipped behind.

silence to most sophisticated heights. The Germans on the other hand indulged in a festival of self-criticism and adulation for Stalin's historical perception.

Two illustrations from the mass of current literature suffice to show what was at stake and how it was dealt with. Following Stalin's personal involvement in the minutiae of party history and his elevation of such matters into a major political issue, the question could no longer be left merely to party historians. The big guns of the Central Committee of the Russian party fired off supporting salvos in all directions. On 1 December 1931 no less a figure than L. Kaganovich spoke specifically in support of Stalin's thesis. With all the strength and coarseness typical of the man, he hacked away at the remaining shreds of validity and authority which Stalin had left to Rosa Luxemburg. Where only two years earlier Martynov had still separated Luxemburg from Luxemburgism, Kaganovich now dissolved this artificial distinction.¹ Soon afterwards N. Popov, author of the official *Short Course of Bolshevik History*, made his own contribution. According to him Rosa Luxemburg had been simply a Menshevik in Russian matters (*vide* her 'intimate correspondence' with the Menshevik leaders in 1905 and also her attitude on the national question). In Germany, 'the Left did not have the courage to decide on armed uprising and preach the mass strike as the ultimate weapon. . . . They did not as a result struggle for the capture of the party machine or the party masses, they accepted for themselves the role of a powerless literary opposition allocated to them by the centrist party leadership.'²

Several important consequences followed. First, Luxemburgism was impugned not only as a postulated system of errors but as a living deviant tradition—deliberately propagated by Rosa's followers. Rosa Luxemburg was now indistinguishable from Luxemburgism. The role of the old German Left had been grossly overvalued. In the process of debasing it to its proper historical level the 'new' historians took a side-swipe at hitherto respectable Bolshevik historians. Yaroslavskii's official history of the CPSU, in which 'Rosa Luxemburg had never wavered with regard to centrism' (Volume II), was now pilloried as an inadmissible con-

¹ *Internationale Pressekorrespondenz (Inprekorr)*, 15 December 1931, Vol. XI, No. 117, pp. 2661-8.

² N. Popov, 'The idealization of Luxemburgism is the flag of our enemy', *Inprekorr*, Vol. XI, No. 117, p. 2678.

cession to Luxemburgism. According to Popov it was 'no wonder that a party led by pupils of Rosa Luxemburg, with Brandler and Thalheimer at their head, went bankrupt in 1923'.

Secondly, Luxemburgism was now no longer an important but specifically German deviant from Leninist orthodoxy but an international phenomenon which appeared to have validity—and therefore required destruction—in Russia as well. For if Leninism had been universally valid since the beginning of the twentieth century, then any doctrine specifically opposing it necessarily had equally universal—if pernicious—application. If, as Stalin said, 'Leninism is not merely a Russian but an international phenomenon rooted in the whole of international development', then Luxemburgism, too, had by definition to be equally broadly based.¹

Thirdly, Luxemburgism now became a general term of abuse and not, as hitherto, a specific set of doctrines which might be linked or paired but was not identical with already established official refuse-bins like Trotskyism or Menshevism—or for that matter Kautskyism. Thus the very intensity of the onslaught on Luxemburgism for a lurid moment elevated it to a unique level of significance—while at the same time debasing it with a lack of specificity which in practice robbed it of any particular meaning. It was a fate shared by all oppositional 'isms' in the Leninist tradition, from 'economism' to 'liquidationism'; but Lenin's essentially analogical attempts at pairing became in Stalin's hands a process of emptying all contents with a stomach pump.² It was to be peculiarly a feature of the Stalin epoch—and its excesses therefore finite; unlike Trotskyism, which has (as yet) retained its Stalinist diffuseness to this day, Luxemburgism reverted to increasing specificity after the war.

With such Olympian thunderbolts from Russia the German Stalinists had a field day. *Rote Fahne* reprinted substantial extracts from Kaganovich's speech, and turned the new artillery on to the immediate political preoccupations in the German party. There was, commented *Rote Fahne*, a close relationship between 'Leninist clarification of party history and the present tasks of the revolutionary movement'. These were the 'Bolshevization of our party

¹ Stalin, 'The Foundations of Leninism', *Leninism*, p. 1.

² Compare the relative specificity of Trotsky on Stalinism (and the regular ritual revisions in order to keep it specific) with the increasing emptiness and lack of meaning of Stalin on Trotskyism.

and the excretion of Social-Democratic, centrist, and Luxemburgist remains within the KPD'.¹

The most significant German contribution was a book which in effect elaborated the thesis hinted at by Olekhovich in Russia, but expanded it with German thoroughness.² Sauerland divided Marxism basically into two kinds: creative Marxism—Leninism—and dogmatic Marxism—which was everyone else. The unequivocal identification of all non-Leninist forms of Marxism with each other was elaborated into a specific thesis. The differences between opportunists, centrists, and the Left radicals now became mere shades of temperament and attitudes—in doctrine they were fundamentally the same. The whole of the Second International was one long spasm of opportunism; no positive contribution to the class struggle had been made at all. With such a theoretical approach, however, the *political* element of error now became of secondary importance. Sauerland, an intellectual snob, was much more concerned with showing the lack of theoretical contribution made by the Social Democrats, whom he paraded in review, than their political mistakes. This was partly his undoing. Sentences like 'Stalin thus facilitated my task', or 'we must not confine ourselves to quoting what Lenin and the Bolsheviki had to say about individual problems . . . concerning the theoretical and tactical errors of the German Left. We must go further . . . and apply Lenin's criticisms also to those theoretical works of the German Left which the Bolsheviki did not

¹ 'The Remains of Luxemburgism', *Rote Fahne*, 8 January 1932.

The history of the KPD now read as follows: the battle against the KAPD (left-wing deviation in 1919) = the practical defeat of Luxemburgist spontaneity theory and its negation of the party's role. Under cover of this, hidden centrists crept back into the party, especially after the Halle USPD congress (Däumig, Geyer, Adolf Hoffmann). In 1921 the party overcame the 'liquidators' (Levi) and the 'inverted opportunists' (Thalheimer, Brandler); 1923–1924 saw the final liquidation of Brandler-Thalheimer opportunism, 1925–1926 the defeat of the Trotskyite opposition of Fischer–Maslow–Urbahns–Korsch. In 1928 the 'foul Brandlerite enemies and conciliators' (Frölich, Meyer, Eisler) were removed. The threads of all deviations, Left as well as Right, led directly back to Rosa Luxemburg.

² Kurt Sauerland, *Der dialektische Materialismus: Schöpferischer oder dogmatischer Marxismus?*, Berlin 1932. Sauerland was the editor of *Der Rote Aufbau*, the journal of Willi Münzenberg's organization *Rote Hilfe*. Münzenberg's role in the party was that of an important 'outsider'; he had built up a small personal empire of his own and was in fact the first to develop in practice the use of fellow-travelling organizations for Communist purposes. Always viewed with respect but resentment by the official party leadership, he was finally liquidated under mysterious circumstances in France during his flight south from internment in 1940.

mention specifically', were not going to be passed over in silence.¹

Such an extreme simplification suited the German Communists as little as it had suited the Russians. The first criticism, which called Sauerland's work 'a political as well as a literary scandal', came from a man who had known the German radical leaders well. But he in turn went too far the other way, again reverting to objective conditions as a means of explaining—though not justifying—the divergencies from Leninism.² The pendulum had now swung too far to Left and Right in turn. 'Sauerland's extremism is the direct cause of reformist outbursts like those of Alpari.'³ The Russians had once more to 'define' the correct median for the Germans. Nor was the Russian dictate of a correct centre position an accident, or some objective search for truth. Unity in the German party had suddenly become at least as urgent as the exposure of error. This was the period of 'class against class', when Fascism became a convenient word with which to belabour all class enemies indiscriminately—Social Democrats as much as right-wing nationalists and Nazis. The warning bugle calls of a Nazi take-over in Germany, from the lips of the Communists' intimate enemies like Kurt Rosenfeld of the Socialist Workers' Party (SAP), were contemptuously dismissed with the snub: 'Fascism? But don't we already have the Fascism of Severing and the Socialist government in Prussia?'⁴ There were some in the KPD, like Heinz Neumann, who began to question the official disclaimer that National Socialism presented any special danger. Others, like

¹ Sauerland, p. 130. One of the interesting secondary features of Sauerland's contributions was his elevation of Karl Liebknecht to full intellectual parity with Rosa Luxemburg and Franz Mehring. Liebknechtism (hitherto unheard of) now became 'the foundation of the Left's strategy' (p. 179) which 'destroyed the basis of Marxism in the field of philosophy, economics and sociology' (p. 192). It is perhaps not without importance that in order to make this extreme assault on the contribution of the German Left Sauerland had to play down Rosa Luxemburg's role and elevate as well as distort those of Liebknecht and Mehring.

² J. Alpari, 'Critical Comments' (review of Sauerland), *Inprekorr*, 1932, No. 96, pp. 3081-6; No. 97, pp. 3109-18; No. 98, pp. 3147-53. Alpari was the editor of *Inprekorr*.

³ A. Martynow, 'Lenin, Liebknecht, Luxemburg', *Kommunistische Internationale*, No. 2 (1933), pp. 107-23, see particularly p. 107.

⁴ *Rote Fahne*, 15 January 1932. Incidentally, the author of this article quoted Rosa Luxemburg against Kurt Rosenfeld; in calling for a general strike against any Nazi government 'by order', he proved himself no better than an anarcho-syndicalist (see above, pp. 425, 496-7). But *Rote Fahne* hastened to add that it was the spontaneity theory which made such misuse of Rosa Luxemburg's correct tactics possible.

Sauerland, had carried Stalin's historical critique into the realms of practical abstentionism and political indifference. But officially the last hidden enemies and deviationists had been exposed and evicted in 1931; they were now all outside the party which could at last be pronounced united and pure. In its ideological assessment of itself and its past the KPD now reverted to the 1929 position: the theory of choice between two alternatives. According to Martynov there were two forms of true Leninist criticism of opponents: (1) for revolutionaries who made opportunistic mistakes, which included Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, and the early Kautsky, and (2) for non-revolutionaries who hindered the movement—Kautsky in his second period. Both forms of criticism were correct, but they were not the same thing and they had to be applied to the right opponents. The German Left was full of errors but it was revolutionary. It could not simply be equated with opportunism and centrism. Above all, one must not neglect its political activities on account of 'idealistic theoretical analysis'.¹

The SPD had followed the years of difficult Communist interpretation of Rosa Luxemburg's work with glee and self-satisfaction. By this time the German Socialists were happy to renounce all claim on her as their political ancestor. For a time in the early 1920s, after the publication of her book on the Russian revolution and Luise Kautsky's letters, she had been regarded as a misguided sheep who had strayed from the Socialist fold and who, had she lived, might well have returned to it. After 1928, however, the Communist policy of 'class against class'—total and venomous opposition to Social Democracy—made the possession of joint ancestry uncomfortable. The SPD had become acclimatized to the habits of political power and to corresponding respectability. *Vorwärts* celebrated the Communist battles over Rosa Luxemburg's legacy as a political dividend for itself.² But Social Democracy, too, had its 'Luxemburgist' non-conformists. In the early

¹ A. Martynov in *Kommunistische Internationale*, No. 2 (1933), pp. 107–23. See also M. Sorki, 'Confusion damaging to the party', *Kommunistische Internationale*, No. 2 (1933), pp. 134–51. One of the incidental aspects of all this reinterpretation was the renewed belabouring of Kautsky as a renegade. Sauerland's thesis of undifferentiated opportunism throughout the Second International had made Kautsky into a consistent theorist throughout his life, which in turn made Lenin's support of him until 1914 a flat contradiction of Stalin's version of Leninism. That of course is why the view of Kautsky as a renegade was, and still is, clung to so pertinaciously.

² See annual comments in *Vorwärts* on 15 January, the date of Rosa Luxemburg's and Karl Liebknecht's murders.

1930s a group of left-wing Socialists formed an independent party (SAP—Socialist Workers' Party) which also claimed direct ancestry from Rosa Luxemburg. One of the prominent leaders of this party was Paul Frölich, editor of and expert on Rosa Luxemburg, himself evicted from the KPD for right-wing deviation in 1928.¹ Here was a rival claimant for specific Luxemburgist ancestry.² Whatever the errors of Luxemburgism, when it came to a question of linear descent, Thälmann and the leaders of the KPD wanted to make it clear that in spite of all criticism Rosa Luxemburg belonged to the senior branch of orthodox revolutionary Marxism. Such a claim had been clearly authorized by the Russian 'adjudicators' in the Sauerland affair. Once more and for the last time Rosa Luxemburg herself, her personality, her career, and her martyrdom, were separated from the whole indigestible problem of Luxemburgism. The confusion caused by Sauerland—and of course by Stalin himself—was authoritatively resolved at last. Ruthless confrontation with Luxemburgism would henceforth be combined with the enthusiastic acceptance of Rosa Luxemburg herself. Ernst Thälmann devoted a substantial part of his speech to the full session of the Central Committee of the party in February 1932 to this problem. Even though the legal KPD was to have less than twelve months of existence in Germany, the apostolic tradition of the party was still a matter of first importance.

We have to speak absolutely clearly: in all those questions in which Rosa Luxemburg differed from Lenin she was wrong . . . [moreover] it is impossible to justify Rosa Luxemburg's mistakes by reference to the objective circumstances in Germany before the war. . . .

[But] we have not the slightest intention of lowering the importance of Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Franz Mehring and the other comrades who formed the left wing of pre-war Social Democracy. We have not the slightest intention of denying the importance of these truly revolutionary fighters and leaders, and their fine revolutionary tradition,

¹ Frölich was one of the most tenacious political activists. After his expulsion from the KPD in 1928 he was one of the leaders of the so-called Communist Party Opposition (KPO), which he left in 1932 to join the SAP. This minute group still continued to be active in France from 1934–1939. From 1950–1953 he led a somewhat uneasy and certainly marginal existence in the post-war SPD.

² The first historical claim for Rosa Luxemburg as ancestor of a specifically western, anti-Bolshevik, revolutionary Marxism was probably staked by Arthur Rosenberg, an ex-Communist himself and the most perceptive contemporary historian of the Weimar Republic and of Bolshevism itself (*Geschichte des Bolschewismus von Marx bis zur Gegenwart*, Berlin 1932).

or of leaving them to the Social Democrats and other desecrators. Rosa Luxemburg and the rest belong to us.¹

After this the problem of Luxemburgism officially ceased to be a clear and present danger. It had little relevance to the conditions of hazardous clandestine activity during the Third Reich, or to the emigration and purges in Russia during the late thirties. The problem of deviation was drowned in the wholesale slaughter of the old German and Polish leadership. Only when the war was over, and the KPD crept into power in the wake of Russian arms, did it open its Pandora's box of old problems once more.

The creation of the Socialist Unity Party in Germany at the end of 1946, out of 'progressive' elements of the SPD and the surviving Communists, raised the sensitive questions of deviation and social relationships in a very practical form. Germany was divided in two. The West German SPD, a reformist party in a bourgeois state, confronted the ruling SED in the East with the same venom and the same problems as in the 1920s and early 1930s. Though the division was now geographical, the old phraseology of intra-national class conflict was refurbished as good as new.

Both in Poland and East Germany the memory of Rosa Luxemburg was honoured with all the respect due to distinguished and martyred forebears. Streets and squares were named after her, several schools, and—in Poland—a large electronics factory. But matters did not rest with ritual honours. The struggle against the 'old' Germany continued across the dividing line created by the allied military occupation. In Communist terminology it was the German version of July 1917 over again—the longest July in the history of the world. All that had changed since then was that German imperialism was no longer an autonomous pillar of strength but merely an outpost of the new American imperialism. The analogy of conditions was carried to the extent that America's role in the destruction of the German revolution in 1918 was examined afresh and suddenly found to have been substantial; it was anyhow easier to relate past to present if conditions were postulated as being as nearly as possible identical.²

¹ Speech to full session of the Central Committee of KPD, 19 February 1932, reprinted in *Der revolutionäre Ausweg und die KPD*, Berlin 1932, pp. 71, 94.

² See A. E. Kunina, *Proval amerikanskikh planov zavoevaniya mirovogo gospodstva v 1917-1920 godakh* (The collapse of American plans for world conquest in the years 1917-1920), Moscow 1951—promptly translated into German the same year.

In 1951 a selection of Rosa Luxemburg's work was published at long last, with careful annotations underlining her errors.¹ Almost at the same time a critical biography, carrying the seal of the party's approval, was written by a senior member of the establishment.² Here for the first time was a specific and full-length analysis of the Luxemburgist system of errors—still treated of course as a system. The thesis of choices—up or down from a given stage of development—had survived. Luxemburgism had been in small part due to historical circumstances, in greater part to intellectual failure and perversity. Oelssner made a double contrast: Lenin and Luxemburg; Leninism and Luxemburgism. In the process Luxemburgism regained much of its specificity; it was no longer simply a synonym for Trotskyism, Menshevism, etc. More than this, the 'pairing'—though still adumbrated—became a matter of positive analysis and not merely assertion; subjective according to content and not just objective by the coincidence of deviation. But Oelssner followed Thälmann eighteen years earlier in distinguishing between Rosa Luxemburg's life and actions on the one hand and her writings on the other—as though these two led in different directions. The new generation of Socialists had to absorb both Luxemburg and Luxemburgism according to their merits—the one as a shining example, the other as a false doctrine related to but not justified by a particular period of the past; in any case worthy of critical study. The danger of Luxemburgism as a present force hardly seemed to exist.³ The worst that could now be feared was misunderstanding and over-valuation.

The younger generation of Socialist voters knows the name of this outstanding workers' leader, but not her life and works. It is therefore an unavoidable duty to transmit this knowledge to the masses. Of course there can be no question of 'only speaking well of the dead' in accor-

¹ Rosa Luxemburg, *Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften*, Berlin (East) 1951, 2 volumes.

² Fred Oelssner, *Rosa Luxemburg, Eine kritische biographische Skizze*, Berlin (East) 1951. The first edition came out before Kunina's book. In the introduction to the second edition (March 1952) the author wrote that in the meantime the 'superb book of the Soviet historian A. E. Kunina appeared. . . . These new facts make it necessary to incorporate the international connection of the events described.' The third edition of the book appeared in 1956 but it has since become too 'Stalinist' and has lapsed into obscurity. Compare the contemporary review by Paul Frölich, 'How the SED honours Rosa Luxemburg', *Der Kochel-Brief*, Munich, January/February 1953, Vol. IV, Nos. 1-2.

³ The official thesis was that Luxemburgism as a political factor had been effectually eradicated by Thälmann. Hermann Matern, 'The policy of the KPD and SPD during the Weimar Republic', *Forum* (Scientific Supplement), 15 September 1952.

dance with petit-bourgeois habits. Our duty is to present the historical significance of people in their objective reality, to enable the struggling generation of today to learn the correct lessons. . . . Great as Rosa Luxemburg's merits in the German workers' movement were, deeply as we bow down in tribute before her life of struggle, much as we love Rosa on account of her ruthless struggle for the cause of the workers, none the less we must never forget how great were her mistakes which led the German working class into error. Above all we must not lose sight of the fact that this [Luxemburgism] is not a matter of individual errors but of a whole system of wrong conceptions.¹

Much historical material has since been published in East Germany. Though the problem of Luxemburgism itself is no longer one of contemporary deviations, the interpretation of party history is still considered a narrowly accurate guide to ideological correctness. Thus, while no one is likely to be accused of Luxemburgism today, any historical over-valuation of Luxemburgism or spontaneity is likely to be indicted as opportunism or revisionism—both still serious crimes leading to expulsion. In being relegated to history, Luxemburgism has been finally encapsulated within the Communist tradition, a once serious *internal* deviation on which the books have now been closed. Revisionism, however, is not internal; it is an invasion of orthodox Marxist territory by the *foreign* agents of bourgeois philosophy. In Germany, divided and ideologically at war, the danger of such an intellectual fifth column is still felt to be acute; in the German Democratic Republic this leads to an ideological rigidity far stiffer than in other Socialist countries. In Rosa Luxemburg's own words, the extreme opportunism in Western Germany results in a corresponding rigidity among revolutionary Marxists.

Nevertheless, the post-Stalin thaw has had its effects. In Poland particularly the discussion of Rosa Luxemburg's role and views in 1956 simply ignored thirty years of Stalinist prohibitions—though the full freedom of 1956 has not yet been achieved again.² In addition, documentary material and objective analysis has been pouring out from the pens of a devoted group of Polish historians in Warsaw. Even in Russia, Rosa Luxemburg has recently become a proper subject of study. Snippets of her writings on revisionism and the

¹ Oelssner, *Rosa Luxemburg*, pp. 7–8.

² See the debate between Roman Werfel and Julian Hochfeld in *Po Prostu*, 17 February, 3 March, 24 March 1957, reprinted in Adam Ciołkosz (ed.), *Róża Luksemburg a rewolucja rosyjska*, Paris 1961, pp. 233–56. For a critical commentary on the debate, see Introduction, pp. 7–183. The latest official evalu-

mass strike have appeared, and a collection of her comments on literature.¹

In the German Democratic Republic, however, new questions have recently been asked, or very old ones reconsidered. Among these is the whole problem of the SPD before the First World War and its attitude to the war itself. The 1931 excesses of Stalinist misinterpretation have partly been corrected—a function of the demolition of Stalin's own political role. With care and perception it is possible to use chronology in reverse: the state of present official opinion on these questions corresponds to that of the KPD before 1928, before the Stalinist diversion. Though the answers on the whole are still orthodox, the very fact that these questions have been raised at all is in itself significant. Thus Kuczynski, a distinguished economic historian, in his own work on pre-war Social Democracy put forward the thesis that the betrayal of the masses by the leaders was to some extent a myth; the masses (regrettably) tumbled into chauvinistic support for the war largely of their own volition.² For this Kuczynski was severely taken to task; but again the very fact that he published his analysis at all is more reminiscent of the circumstances of 1926, when Radek wrote his version of these events, than of anything published in the twenty years after 1931.³ Behind this particular issue lurks the very *purpose* of

ation of the SDKPiL's historical role is in *Nowe Drogi*, 7(110), July 1963, pp. 25–36. As an ancestor of Communism, the SDKPiL fares far better than the *Spartakusbund*, and the whole discussion is much less stereotyped and narrow. Thus the SDKPiL is criticized for *underrating* the PPS-Left (p. 34), while the *Spartakusbund* if anything is said by German historians not to have dealt with the centrists harshly enough!

¹ *R. Luksemburg o literaturze* (Rosa Luxemburg on literature), edited and introduced by M. Korollova, Moscow 1961.

Recent Russian writing on pre-war German Socialism has very little new or interesting to offer. The subject seems to be reserved for hacks. Rosa Luxemburg should have insisted on the expulsion of Bernstein in 1899—the old revisionist controversy will certainly march on for ever (B. A. Chagin, *Borba marksizma-leninizma protiv filiosovskogo revisionizma v kontse XIX—nachale XX vekov*, Leningrad 1959, p. 156). *Spartakus* too is still censured for its un-Bolshevik and anti-Bolshevik attitudes (Z. K. Eggert, *Borba klassov i partii v Germanii v gody pervoi mirovoi voiny avgust 1914-oktyabr 1917*, Moscow 1957, pp. 408 ff.). But there is no life in it any more.

² Jürgen Kuczynski, *Der Ausbruch des ersten Weltkrieges und die deutsche Sozialdemokratie. Chronik und Analyse*. Publications of the Institut für Geschichte, Series 1, General and German history, Vol. 4, Berlin (East) 1957.

³ As late as 1964 the official version was still that any claim of mass enthusiasm for the First World War, and any consequent reduction of the leaders' guilt, was probably inspired by—and only of benefit to—anti-Communist writers who 'worshipped' Social-Democratic reformism. See Walter Wittwer, *Streit um Schicksalsfragen*, Berlin (East) 1964.

writing labour history in the German Democratic Republic. Are German historians to solve problems in a spirit of objective analysis with only formal obeisance to the party 'line', or are 'the historians of the DDR exclusively to carry forward the great task of moving over to the ideological offensive in the permanent struggle with West German imperialism and militarism'?¹ It is not merely, as before, a question of a 'new line' against established orthodoxy, but partly a matter of personal ambition and institutional rivalry as well; that is why the apparent neo-Stalinists are represented as much by young men like Dieter Fricke as by the older generation of established party historians, and why particular institutions and university departments tend to follow a particular line. However exaggerated such a total mobilization of historians in the fight against West Germany might appear, the tense situation of two Germanys prevents and will continue to prevent the establishment of elbow room for historians with fewer political overtones—such as now visibly exists in Poland, in Czechoslovakia, and elsewhere. The motivation of East German ideology is still partly that of a bad conscience. History has obliged with the opportunity for a repeat performance; the 1918 struggle is being waged all over again. Consequently the treatment of labour history is *simultaneously* both historical and contemporary. The bad conscience about previous defeats—even the very loss of Marxist supremacy to the Russians—still keeps the temperature at a relatively high level. Any partial victory in the present struggle dialectically becomes a victory gained in and over the past.

We thus have in Germany as elsewhere the now standard form of anti-Stalinist revision. Sometimes this consists of individual trial balloons which meet or do not meet with the approval

¹ Dieter Fricke in *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 1959, Vol. VII, No. 3, p. 712. This deliberate re-creation of the past in terms of the present can also be seen in the way that lapses, betrayals, and deviations from Marxism are always treated as both final and yet recurring. We have seen earlier how long German liberalism was a-dying in the eyes of Rosa Luxemburg (above, pp. 214–15). The same dead-but-living schizophrenia can be documented in the Russian Communist attitude to the SPD. Having 'died' as a Marxist party in 1914 (if not in 1898), repeatedly between 1918 and 1933, and yet again with finality in 1946, it was nevertheless still capable of 'discarding all the elements of Marxism' as late as 1959. See V. G. Vasin, *Godesbergskaya programma SPD—otkrytoe otrechenie ot marksizma* (The Godesberg programme of the SPD—An open renunciation of Marxism), Moscow, 1963. More generally see I. Viktorov, 'The Social Democratic Party of Germany', in *Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya* (1961), No. 8.

of the hierarchy.¹ At the same time, however—and particularly in the last two or three years—the official party historians have themselves been engaged on a collective and authorized revision of their own. The product of the need for an official guide to all these problems of history was the *Outline of the History of the German Working-Class Movement*, first published in 1962 and already twice revised. The importance of this document and its revisions can be seen by the fact that all the revision was submitted for approval to the full meeting of the Central Committee of the SED.²

Here the position of Rosa Luxemburg as the intellectual leader of the German Left is re-established.³ Her system still has its errors; as long as Leninism continues to exist and represent the correct adaptation of Marxism in the era of imperialism, Rosa Luxemburg will always remain subordinate and, since she was a contemporary and not a predecessor of Lenin, in error. But the distinctive contribution of the German Left in its unending struggle against opportunism is being increasingly acknowledged. From this follows the acknowledgement of the German Left as the ancestors of German Communism, to which Leninism supplied an organizational and theoretical corrective, though no longer the original spark of life. There are difficulties here too. The new pre-occupation with Bebel makes the conflicts between Bebel and the German Left at the end of his life difficult to explain satisfactorily.⁴ In part the explanation is the legitimate though un-Marxist one of the great leader's senility; but since the elevation of one neces-

¹ Compare the case of Professor Havemann in 1964 with that of Galileo; the question of 'truth' is subsumed by that of order and stability—and by that of ways and means.

² *Grundriss der Geschichte der Deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, first published in *Einheit*, Vol. 17, special number August 1962, pp. 58–186; first edition in book form 1963, second edition with alterations also 1963.

³ Cf. the relatively superior role allocated to Karl Liebknecht as late as 1959 (*Gründung der KPD*, Protokoll der Wissenschaftlichen Tagung . . . 22/23 Januar 1959, Berlin (East) 1959) with Ulbricht's deliberate warning against excessive down-grading of Rosa Luxemburg (*Einheit*, September 1962, the p. 38).

⁴ This situation has partly led to a favourable reevaluation of Bebel and his particular contribution. Here was someone whose statements were impeccably radical (anti-opportunist). At the same time, and unlike the German Left, Bebel had coped admirably with the vital problem of organization—if not in a Leninist sense, at least in a sense that recognized the importance of the problem, and that bears some resemblance to the functional bureaucracy of ruling parties today. Over-emphasis of this merit could of course lead to a confrontation between SPD organization and revolutionary Bolshevik organization—still out of the question; hence the approval of Bebel is personal and diffuse rather than systematic and specific. The way to avoid commitment is to publish not a Marxist work on Bebel and 'Bebelism' but a popular and purely

sarily diminishes the other, an awkward either/or remains. As recently as 1958 a distinguished survivor complained publicly that the Bebel cult was once more in real danger of subsuming the officially admitted role of the German Left. In a recent official publication there had been 'a page and a half for Bernstein, Hilferding and Kautsky but not a line for the German Left. . . . Not one line to show that there was a German Left and not only right-wing Socialism. . . . We must acknowledge the great struggle of the German Left against opportunism, and particularly that of Rosa Luxemburg. . . . It is my heartfelt wish to recall the most wonderful period of my life when as a young man I knew and worked with Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht and Franz Mehring.'¹ As long as these old men survived, Rosa Luxemburg had her personal defenders. Duncker even called for a new edition of her works, particularly *Social Reform or Revolution*.²

Problems remain, alive and unresolved. Future revisions of history can only help to justify Rosa Luxemburg still further, if not perhaps in her specific confrontations with Lenin, at least in her general attitudes. The whole notion of a spontaneity theory on which the concept of Luxemburgism is based is now (1964-5) under agonizing reappraisal and may soon be officially denounced as a slander. If so, Luxemburgism as a *system* of errors will collapse. We shall be back in 1922. Either Rosa Luxemburg will be presented as a Leninist with minor and unimportant deviations, or possibly—though less probably—the old heretical thesis that there were after all specific German conditions different from those of Russia may yet get official sanction. Perhaps it is

personal biography. (See *August Bebel, Eine Biographie*, Berlin (East) 1963. 'This is the first Marxist biography to appear in Germany. It does justice to the activities of the great German labour leader, August Bebel, the founder of the party and leader of the Social Democracy which emerged victorious from the struggle against the anti-Socialist laws. He remained to his death a loyal proletarian revolutionary.')

The Bebel cult is incidentally also a distinct revision of Stalinist history—though in this case at the expense of Rosa Luxemburg. For whatever the systematic faults of Luxemburgism, Rosa herself 'unmasked the chauvinistic tendencies in the central leadership of the SPD' (Martynow, *Kommunistische Internationale*, No. 2 (1933), p. 116). Bebel is specifically mentioned as one of the culprits in this connection.

¹ Hermann Duncker, speech at conference at Martin Luther University, 9-10 December 1957, reprinted in *Einführungen in den Marxismus*, Vol. I, Berlin (East) 1958, pp. 350-1, 357-8.

² In fact only two recent, rather limited, collections have appeared: *Rosa Luxemburg im Kampfe gegen den Militarismus*, Berlin (East) 1960; *Ich war, Ich bin, Ich werde sein*, Berlin (East) 1958.

useless to speculate further. No one can say how far the problems of the Lenin–Luxemburg controversies—or anyone else’s controversies with Lenin—will ever be genuinely re-examined.

But Rosa Luxemburg is not merely the unquiet spirit which possessed German Communists. Unlike Trotskyism, there is no formal Luxemburgist discipline in opposition to Communist ‘orthodoxy’. No organized sect, however small, bears her name. But this testifies to her importance, not to any lack of it: even without formal acknowledgement many of those who adhere to revolutionary Marxism, yet reject the strait-jacket of a Communist movement that could produce a Stalin as well as the sectarian disputations of the Trotskyites, look to Rosa Luxemburg’s work for inspiration. Her influence extends beyond Marxism. No uncommitted student of political thought can afford to ignore a corpus of ideas which combines without equal a complete loyalty to dialectical materialism with absolute insistence on the humanistic and self-liberating aspects of revolutionary democracy. Those who believe that the discipline of change and improvement must be largely self-imposed, that the modern industrial economy of the West is at once the harshest prison for the human spirit and the only key to its liberation; those in short who hold that the revolutionary steps to progress must lead directly from highly developed capitalism to Socialism without the historically retrograde control by a small élite which serves progress in relatively backward societies, will all find no better guide or inspiration than the life and work of Rosa Luxemburg. This is no outright denial of Communist achievements. The present changes in Russia which have partially dismantled Stalinism may well erode some of the presumptions that gave it birth. Just as Rosa reconnected directly to Marx in 1918, so the Russian leaders or Mao and their successors may one day reconnect to an early or even pre-Leninist conception in which the *process* as well as the *product* of Socialism is functionally related to the emancipation of humanity—with humanity that is is not merely a collective abstraction but the sum of the participating individuals. This problem exists everywhere in all societies. Rosa Luxemburg’s actual solutions may have been utopian. But if the validity of the European experience and its acceptance as a means to further progress are to be maintained, then her over-all contribution is highly relevant.

APPENDIX I

ROSA LUXEMBURG AS AN ECONOMIST

ROSA LUXEMBURG always said that, in so far as her talent lay in the field of the social sciences, it was in economics—and in mathematical economics at that. Mathematics may have been her *violon d'Ingres*—the thing at which she would rather have excelled than those in which she was in fact outstanding. It is quite a common nostalgia. The only evidence for her mathematical claim or wish are the recalculations of Marx's not very complicated compound reproduction formulae in Volume II of *Capital*. And here her calculations are capable both of fairly obvious refinement as well as fairly obvious contradiction.¹ But what is probably true is that the thin end of the wedge of her interest in the problem of accumulation, which gave rise to her remarkable book *The Accumulation of Capital*, was the mathematical difficulty Marx experienced in the 'proof' of accumulation, and which he left unresolved at his death.

Rosa Luxemburg's main talent as a writer and, above all, teacher of economics—the latter was the more important and enduring function—was her capacity to enliven the subject with vivid, unusual, and convincing illustrations. Her textbook on economics—political economy, to use the Marxist phrase for the specific economics of capitalism—was essentially a conducted tour through the historical stages of economic relations, from primitive Communism via the slave economy to feudalism and capitalism. As her friend and editor pointed out, these were lectures, written for oral delivery.² They were incomplete; Rosa worked on the manuscript from 1907 to 1912, and again in prison from 1916 to 1918. They were intentionally simple; the fact that most of the theoretical problems (value, surplus value, reproduction) are missing may have been due to her inability to complete the manuscript, but more probably to her reluctance to complicate her lectures with material

¹ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. II (Chicago 1907), especially Chapter 21, pp. 598 ff. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, London 1951, pp. 125 ff. For refinement, see Joan Robinson's introduction to this edition, p. 18; for contradiction, see, e.g., Tony Cliff, *Rosa Luxemburg*, London 1959, pp. 81 ff.

² Rosa Luxemburg, *Einführung in die Nationalökonomie*, Berlin 1925, edited by Paul Levi, Introduction, p. v.

partially dealt with in *The Accumulation of Capital*.¹ Whatever her preference for mathematical analysis, therefore, she was essentially an economic historian—naturally in a Marxist sense; her facts were chosen to illustrate a fundamental thesis. The fact that she, and in her time she alone, succeeded in enlivening this potentially grey subject is eloquently attested by her students at the party school, and by the many extramural lectures for which friends and party organizations were for ever pestering her before the war. Nor was clarity and strong colouring merely a mastered technique. One of the strongest points in her indictment of orthodox academic economics was its dryness, its obscurantism, its persistence in making an important and thrilling subject well-nigh incomprehensible—except to other professors.²

It is thus not surprising that Rosa Luxemburg's only piece of original academic research—in the formal sense of the term—was also a piece of economic history. Her doctoral dissertation for the University of Zürich not only gained her the required award of a degree but also achieved the much less usual distinction of instant commercial publication.³ It was widely reviewed in Germany, as well as in the Polish and Russian émigré press. Its originality lay in two distinct factors. Its thesis—a new one at the time—was Poland's economic integration into the Russian empire since the beginning of the century, resulting in the dependence of the Polish economy on the Russian market, and consequently the logical necessity of this continued integration. Though rigorously dependent on economic evidence, this thesis provided a secure base for the political contest against Polish national independence in the future. Those Socialists who argued for self-determination—no Socialist could play down the primacy of economic evidence—were thus left with arguments that might proliferate frothily on the surface of reality but had no roots in its economic laws. Try as they might, none of her critics was able to demolish her case.⁴ And history, too, proved her right, as the situation of the Polish economy between the wars showed all too clearly; chronic under-consumption and an oversized, unbalanced industry that tottered at the slightest whiff of crisis—with a *laissez-mourir*, not even a *laissez-faire*, government in charge.

¹ It is also possible that such notes as she made on this subject—if any—were destroyed when soldiers ransacked her flat and destroyed her papers in January 1919.

² *Nationalökonomie*, pp. 2 ff. Compare the similar accusation against the entire front rank of nineteenth-century economists in *Accumulation*, Section ii.

³ *Die industrielle Entwicklung Polens*, Leipzig 1898.

⁴ The most serious attempt at refutation was Res (Feliks Perl), *Kwestia polska w oświeceniu 'Socjaldemokracji' polskiej* (The Polish question as illuminated by Polish 'Social Democracy'), Cracow 1907. See also above, p. 173, note 2. Since the two versions of Polish industrial development—autonomous or integrally Russian—followed political lines, and acceptance of one or the other still follows them today, I must add that my own general preference for the validity of Rosa Luxemburg's thesis is based on what I hold to be the more correct interpretation of economic facts—not on any political alignment.

The other original aspect of her work was her sources. In the West no one had previously bothered with these (and Polish émigrés were far too politically minded for economics). At home it was not a subject that was encouraged at Russian universities. In the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Czartoryski Library in Paris Rosa dug up hitherto unknown material, and the use to which she put it opened up new lines of investigation into Polish and Russian economic history. Historians can and still do use her work with profit today. In addition, her early researches in 1893 and 1894 unearthed enough material not only for her own thesis, but for Julian Marchlewski's as well; his dissertation on the Polish Physiocrats and subsequent work on the Polish economy were largely due to Rosa's suggestion and indication of sources.¹

But all Marxists have to know a lot of economics; had it not been for *Accumulation*, Rosa Luxemburg's work would have remained merely a better and brighter-than-most dab at economic history. *The Accumulation of Capital* is a compound work of incidental genius—incidental because it achieved fame and importance in quite a different way from that which the author intended. It was intended to 'clarify' imperialism—but it did not; no more than the theory of relativity 'explains' light (which Einstein did not of course intend it to). It was intended to solve compound reproduction mathematically, but did not succeed—though Rosa Luxemburg admitted that this was not perhaps as vital as she had at first supposed.² Finally, it was meant to provide a rational (as well as logical) explanation of capitalist expansion in spite of the severely limiting parameters of Marxist economics, and at the same time identify the theoretical point of inevitable collapse—and though she did provide this, her analysis failed to find favour among contemporary or later economists, whether bourgeois or Communist. Instead it raised and partially answered a question about investment that was entirely new then and is still vital today. Instead of a tenable theory of imperialism Rosa Luxemburg offered a theory of growth which at least some economists today hold to be vital and valid. Her political heirs have relegated the work to the museum of primitive curiosities and have misused her economics to condemn her politically.³ It is her ancient enemies, on the other hand—the professional bourgeois economists, dressed up with much sophistication and technique since the days of Roscher, Schmoller, and Sombart—who have rediscovered the prophetic quality in her line of economic inquiry.

The mathematics are of secondary importance, and need not be discussed here.⁴ Nor do we have to pass judgement on how 'Marxist'

¹ The story is Warszawski's. See above, p. 106, note 4.

² *Accumulation*, p. 119.

³ See above, pp. 532–6.

⁴ For a discussion see Tony Cliff, *Rosa Luxemburg*, pp. 75–85. For other criticisms of technique, see N. Bukharin, *Der Imperialismus und die Akkumulation des Kapitals*; also Fritz Sternberg, *Der Imperialismus*, Berlin 1926.

a work Rosa Luxemburg's *Accumulation* really is. I would not presume to judge this *in vacuo*; an analysis by way of reference to later authorities is so politically loaded as to subsume the economic arguments completely. We are therefore left, first, with a confrontation of Rosa Luxemburg's intention against her achievement, and secondly with the incidental illuminations. I shall postulate neutrality between Marxist and non-Marxist methods of economic analysis, except to emphasize that Rosa's problems with Marx's own works were not merely technical, but fundamental.

Accumulation

In Marxist analysis of the capitalist economy, production is the primary function, and predominates over consumption and its derivative, demand. Distribution problems are of a technical nature only, and the proper functioning of distribution is assumed (concepts and assumptions which incidentally have been taken over into Soviet economies which in turn are actually rationalized capitalism but without capitalist criteria). Apart from the temporary dislocation caused by crises of boom and slump—from which Rosa Luxemburg deliberately abstracts—all production starts by being 'consumed', either literally by consumers, or as replacement of fixed capital by producers, or by the reinvestment of profits. As long as total production—annual national income, say—is 'consumed' in this way, and the stock of capital remains constant (investment just equals replacement), the economy remains in equilibrium. This is Marx's simple reproduction.

It is only a conceptual basis, however. Production dominates, not consumption; the *point* of capitalist enterprise is the maximization of profit—for reinvestment and further maximization. The stock of capital grows. The central point of Marxist economic analysis is that consumer incomes do not rise proportionately (the iron law of wages); it is the producer who has to absorb the bulk of the increased output as replacement of or addition to his fixed capital. The Marxist model in fact divides the economy into two departments, that of producer's goods and that of consumer goods. The one thus grows faster than the other. Since they are related (consumer goods produced for workers in producer's goods industries, producer's goods produced for the capitalists in consumer goods industries), disequilibrium results. Worse, it is progressive, not circular; it gets worse as accumulation proceeds. Accumulation proportionate to investment is consequently impossible, yet it happens—demonstrably. Accumulation is the capitalist's *raison d'être*, but why does he invest in the first place?

This then was Rosa Luxemburg's problem, as it had been Marx's—one of them. Before his death he had indicated various possible

approaches, but no definite or central solution. Initially the mathematics come in here. But neither for Marx nor Rosa Luxemburg was this a question of mere mathematical elegance. What was needed was a function of demand which would furnish, not the need, but the effective means of 'consuming' the cause of the imbalance, the additional output generated by the compulsive quest for profit.¹

To start with, Rosa Luxemburg examined the various possibilities adumbrated by Marx himself.² The most probable one, however, is referred to only in passing, as part of the problem itself and not of its solution.³ This is the thesis that the investment criterion is not the starting point of economic causality, but is a derived function of production—derived by that anarchic competition that enforces perpetual technical change, improvement, and *expansion* (to reduce unit cost). Without it a capitalist is forced quickly out of business—and joins the haggard army of the proletariat. Thus profits are still the object of capitalist activity, not by any act of will but from sheer necessity. It is either profits or economic death. Orthodox Marxist economists, both Soviet and anti-Soviet, have accepted this causality, and have developed it into a sophisticated rationality that serves to explain the entire process of capitalist growth.⁴

Why did Rosa Luxemburg bypass this solution, which became and has remained the mainstream of Marxist orthodoxy? For her, it never rises above the level of being a minor constituent part of the problem, an also-ran in the cause of competition and anarchy. Nor is it peculiar to the capitalist system, but has existed in all forms of productive relations from first to last.⁵ But if this is so, then it cannot begin to provide a solution to the specific problem of capitalist accumulation. Technological change and economies of scale were merely *additional* complications imposed by real life.

Having searched in Marx, Rosa Luxemburg then looked at the Marxists—or rather at all the important economists from Sismondi and Ricardo to the Russian 'legal' Marxists who were concerned with this problem. In the process of extracting what was relevant they were unceremoniously buffeted about, called to account and then contemptuously dismissed—for none of them provided the answer. It is clear that

¹ This analysis of the problem is admittedly over-simple. For a more detailed and rigorous one, see Joan Robinson's introduction to *Accumulation*, pp. 14-19.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 139-55.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁴ Naturally in terms of production and consequent consumption, not in terms of growing *per capita* consumption or real wages, either relative or absolute. This is, of course, the central difficulty of reconciling such analysis with the absolute historical growth in real wages in developed countries over the last decades—with the rate of growth apparently rising.

⁵ *Accumulation*, pp. 40-41.

Rosa never expected that they would.¹ She was much less than fair to many of their ideas. For she thought she had the answer even before she started on them.

The balancing factor is the existence of pre-capitalist economies—and the pre-capitalist enclaves within capitalist economies, mainly agricultural. It is the ‘capitalization’ of these areas which provides the justified growth drive of capitalists, the expectation of growing profits and continuous investment. The process, and with it the entire capitalist system, can continue just as long as such areas exist. When they have been gobbled up, capitalism will have to rely on its internal resources, accumulation will become self-defeating, capitalism will collapse. Voluntary abstention is impossible by definition; those writers like von Kirchmann who appeared to suggest it are berated most severely by Rosa Luxemburg.

Rosa Luxemburg asserts this solution and describes it—convincingly; she does not prove it in the way she disproves the theories of her opponents.² This does not of course invalidate it. Capitalist consumption goods go out to pay for ‘cheap’ raw materials from colonies. Capital is also exported to exploit ‘cheap’ labour. The process was then and is now familiar enough—the classic indictment of imperialism, before and since political independence (old *political* as opposed to new *economic* imperialism). The question is whether this is a *feature* of capitalism or the mainspring of its continued existence. And this problem remains open. But curiously enough it remains open only in the non-Communist world, among politicians as well as academic economists.³ At least it is

¹ Ibid., pp. 173–329.

² Ibid., pp. 348–454.

³ See J. R. Hicks, *Value and Capital*, 2nd. ed., Oxford 1948, p. 302, quoted in Introduction, p. 28. An interesting variant of the analysis of foreign capitalist penetration of backward societies is to treat the functional coexistence of a primitive economy and a foreign enclave of technologically advanced capitalism (generally in extractive industries like oil or plantations) as *the* definition of underdevelopment. This view shifts the centre of attention from the [economic] colonizer to the colonized; underdevelopment is thus defined in terms of such coexistence and analytically distinguished from western pre-industrial economics in the eighteenth century. *By itself* imperialism does not therefore lead to any capitalistic transformation of colonies; this requires special policies of economic accommodation and adjustment between the primitive and the foreign capitalist sectors in underdeveloped societies—by specific adjustment of the indigenous secondary industrial sectors catering for the consumption demands of the foreign enclaves. See Celso Furtado, *Development and Underdevelopment*, Berkeley (California) 1964, pp. 129–40. This thesis finds unexpected confirmation in modern Soviet analysis. ‘It cannot be denied that the development [of the Venezuelan petroleum industry] has exerted a definite influence in undermining the old, semi-feudal relationships in the country. But this “progressive” role . . . is performed only to the extent that is convenient and necessary for the imperialist companies to intensify the extraction of oil . . . they get along peacefully with the landlord-latifundists, from whom they rent a large amount of land. For this reason, the petroleum sector in the Venezuelan economy . . . has even “immortalized” the decay of the backward economic structure of the

an arguable case. Among orthodox Marxists, however, the thesis is a manifestation not the cause, and the reasons for this demotion are in the last resort more political than economic.¹

country.' A. Shulgovskii, 'Imperialism and the Ideology of National Reformism in Latin America', *Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya*, 1961, No. 8, pp. 48-49.

¹ See above, pp. 531-6. Rosa Luxemburg's analysis of accumulation met severe economic criticism at the time and later. This can be divided into three categories:

(i) *Technical*. It was not difficult to find contradictions in her argument, as well as lacunae. See the review of *Accumulation* by G. Eckstein in *Vorwärts*, 16 February 1913; also F. Sternberg, *Der Imperialismus*, Berlin 1926, especially pp. 100 ff. Bukharin's essay, 'Der Imperialismus und die Akkumulation des Kapitals' in *Unter dem Banner des Marxismus*, Vienna/Berlin 1925/1926, Vol. I, is a systematic attempt to demolish Rosa's thesis, both conceptually and technically.

(ii) *Conceptual*. A number of writers refused to accept the central analysis of the capitalist dilemma, among them primarily Lenin (*Leninskii Sbornik*, Vol. XXII). Bukharin expanded Lenin's brief comments in his articles. Some misunderstood or misrepresented her basic argument. See Otto Bauer in *Neue Zeit*, 1912/1913, Vol. II, pp. 871 ff. It was to answer these 'fundamental' critics that Rosa rewrote her main arguments in simpler language and more popular form in prison during 1915 (*Die Akkumulation des Kapitals oder was die Epigonen aus der Marxschen Theorie gemacht haben. Eine Antikritik*, Leipzig 1921).

For a modern criticism of Rosa Luxemburg's central thesis, see Paul Sweezy, *The Theory of Capitalist Development*, New York 1942, Chapter XI, pp. 202-7. This, however, is based not so much on disagreement as on failure or refusal to follow Rosa's argument, and presents the latter not as fallacious but as nonsense.

(iii) *Personal*. The notion that a middle-aged woman, clever but not uncontroversial, should (yet again) set out to amend and correct Marx gave widespread offence, especially to experts like Kautsky and Plekhanov. The following cynically amused but not really hostile letter captures this feeling very well. Ryazanov was a clever and courageous Marxist scholar, outside the factional alignments within the RSDRP at the time, and a political supporter of Jogiches' 'conciliation' within the Russian party.

'Many thanks for Rosa's book. I have only read the introduction so far. I was stunned and amazed. Such devilish speed, with which she produces a book like this, can only amaze a ponderous man like myself.

'The Reichstag elections finished—Summer 1912. Rosa suddenly remembers that she owes Brutus [Molkenbuhr] a book. Sits down—February 1912—and throws together a popular introduction—she gets stuck in the middle (*Einführung in die Nationalökonomie*) suddenly—March or April 1912—*ni tpru, ni ku* as the Russians say. It turns out that Marx is responsible. The old man died too soon and left a few things unsolved or badly solved. So Rosa has to dash off to her cauldron and brew up some new solutions. *Aus fünf und sechs so sagt die Hex mach sieben und acht so ist's vollbracht*. Then—May 1912—the brew is ready. Gets hold of Brutus again, alters the contract and delivers a completely new manuscript; the epitome of science which has hitherto been hidden from the whole world. And in December 1912 the preface signed and finished! Oh, fairest muse!

'Read the preface of the distinguished Moses Hess. The comparison is, as Baedeker puts it, "worthwhile". Really, if one can reach such heights of *mania grandiosa litteraria* then a cool shower is the only solution.'

D. Ryazanov (Goldenbakh) to Luise Kautsky, 1913, IISH Archives, D XIX, 217. The letter is an extraordinary hotch-potch of different languages and very typical of Ryazanov's incisive style. The chronology is obviously incorrect. The reference to Brutus Molkenbuhr is due to his post as an editor of *Vorwärts* which had its own publishing house of which Molkenbuhr was a director. This firm was to have published Rosa's economics lectures given in the party school.

Imperialism

The only explicit *political* analysis in *The Accumulation of Capital* is the last chapter, which purports to prove the *economic* necessity of militarism—but fails to do so. By this time, the internal logic and beauty of Rosa's analysis made her overreach herself; it began to run wild.¹ But of course imperialism is the necessary consequence of Rosa's whole concept of capitalist accumulation. If one capitalist economy must capture and cannibalize pre-capitalist society in order to survive, then the other capitalist economies must be kept out of 'captured' areas. The whole apparatus of militarism, the sharpened social tensions that were so typical of it, thus had two causes: the need to wrest colonies from their indigenous rulers, and then to keep and if possible extend them at the expense of other people's colonies. As a matter of logical causality, imperialism follows from the moment the problem of accumulation is identified and 'solved' by Rosa Luxemburg.

As already emphasized, the whole political and historical development of imperialism as a specific internal condition of society is absent from the analysis in *The Accumulation of Capital*—implied but not described. In Rosa Luxemburg's political writings of the period it is the effects of imperialism on class relations that are stressed—again not described; the essence of imperialism, *das Ding an sich*, is absent—the missing step already referred to.² This leaves an apparent vacuum for followers and critics to fill in as seems best to them. Lenin, at the time unaware of her political writings on this subject, assumed that for psychological reasons Rosa wanted to exorcise the problem of imperialism from home and export it to the colonies, thus belittling its importance among the manifold preoccupations of Social Democracy. This notion is nonsense—though a hostile and isolated reading of *The Accumulation of Capital* makes it conceivable. If anything the opposite is true. Though the location of capitalism's centre of gravity moves to pre-capitalist societies or areas, at least from the theoretical moment of internal repletion of imperialist societies, these are never anything but passive objects. They can neither arrest nor alter the process of their own transformation. The stimulus comes wholly from the colonizers,

¹ Chapter xxxii, p. 454 ff.

² See above, p. 532. Were it not for Rosa Luxemburg's contempt for Kant, his technique as much as his admirers, I would be tempted to deduce from her avoidance of all 'essential' discussion of imperialism a rigid adherence to the Kantian methodological postulate that *das Ding an sich* cannot be described—one of its peculiar features. This has nothing to do with occasional Communist criticism, especially in the 1930s, of the pre-war German Left as infected by neo-Kantianism; a 'formal' method of indicting idealism and 'insufficient' dialectic materialism.

the imperialists.¹ And though Rosa Luxemburg shared with Lenin the recognition of a need for *political* action to hasten the end of capitalism through revolution, she was much closer to the Mensheviks and Kautsky in her belief that the economic laws of capitalism should not be short-circuited, much less held up. Hence her emphasis on the inevitability of capitalist agrarian relations after the 1905 revolution (which she considered progressive, while Lenin feared they would make revolution in Russia well-nigh impossible). The same reasoning applied to her consistent opposition to tariffs and duties in Germany; these would impede, not assist, full capitalist development.²

As with the Russian peasants, Rosa Luxemburg had no vision of eventual colonial independence in a capitalist world. Though she recognized the tendency for industrial investment in colonies, she saw this merely as an extension of 'home' capitalism looking for cheap labour and the procurement of raw materials—without any local response other than misery and suffering. Thus she did not look for any revolutionary potential in the exploitation of colonial peoples—however vividly she described that exploitation. She came very close to laying down the axiom that any colony fighting for independence did so because it had inherent imperialist ambitions of its own—an indictment similar to recent Chinese characterizations of Nehru's 'imperialist' India. The honour of the incorporation of the nationalist-colonial struggle into revolutionary Marxism—and the acquisitive peasant struggle—fell to Lenin. But again it must be said: *The Accumulation of Capital* was intended as an economic theorem, not an analytical text of political revolution. This makes a confrontation between *The Accumulation of Capital* and Lenin's work on imperialism three years later—after the outbreak of the war—not so much impossible as pointless.

And if one wants to extrapolate Rosa's arguments into a political context, as her later critics have done, a more meaningful result than theirs can be achieved. First, an objective case can certainly be made for the pre-eminent importance of colonial 'spheres of influence' for thriving capitalist economies. The classical trade pattern of exports of cheap manufactures to colonial dependencies in return for imports of artifi-

¹ Writing in the context of the national question, Rosa Luxemburg produced an ingenious differentiation between two forms of colonialism. One was imperialistic control of colonies developed by émigrés from the mother country. Here the demand for national independence was 'progressive' and historically justified (United States, Australia), especially where the mother country failed to keep up a satisfactory rate of capitalist progress (South America vis-à-vis Spain and Portugal). In the other case, where backward countries were developed through colonization of backward people, any Socialist participation in local bourgeois efforts at self-determination and independence was reactionary and absurd (India, Africa, and—as ever—Poland by implication). 'The question of nationality and autonomy', *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, 1908; *Wybór Pism*, Vol. 11, pp. 143–5.

² See 'Miliz und Militarismus', *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 20–22 February 1899.

cially cheap raw materials is accurate, though not of course complete. Physical domination is not necessary; post-independence control is today called 'economic imperialism'.

Secondly, the classic economic theory that the rationalization of foreign trade which follows this pattern (expanded production of desirable staple exports with all the resultant internal economies of scale) enriches the exporting country is now seriously questioned.¹ In spite of such trade and much aid, the poor countries get poorer and the rich richer, at least comparatively—and this divergence is linked, not discrete.² This development (which incidentally is endemic in capitalism, and has only recently been 'discovered') follows from Rosa Luxemburg's *Accumulation* far more naturally than some of the technical criticisms and assumptions made by orthodox Marxist-Leninists like Oelssner, drowning in the minutiae of formal and politically loaded concepts.³

Thirdly, once the notion of colonial exploitation becomes central and is brought up to date, the basic confrontation between rich and poor societies—which is today's real dialectic—subsumes the 'old' form of class conflict within society. In this context we are witnessing a curious resurgence of nationalism in ex-colonies; to coin a suitable Leninist formula: 'Neutralism is nationalism in the age of imperialism.' Instead of conflicts *within* colonial societies against imperialist domination, linked to class conflict at home, there is a line-up of poor countries against rich, with the former assuming the role of the international proletariat. This alignment, moreover, cuts across the 'Leninist-Stalinist' division into capitalist and socialist camps; what matters is wealth or poverty and the relative growth of wealth or poverty. This then is an 'international' or 'class' line-up that cuts across national boundaries or rather makes these boundaries into mere markers of autonomy rather than absolute isolation—as Rosa Luxemburg actually advocated. This too follows from her emphasis on colonizers and colonies as basic protagonists in a developing capitalist world. *Accumulation* may be an abstract but is by no means a barren work.

Though no reference is made to Rosa Luxemburg's work, modern Soviet writing on imperialism has perforce had to adjust in part to this redefinition of relevance. Imperialism is no longer the highest stage of capitalism, but a specific condition of distortion which cuts

¹ See Gunnar Myrdal, *Economic Theory and Underdeveloped Regions*, London 1957.

² The same is true, for partly similar and partly different reasons, of disparate regions in the same country—Rosa's pre-capitalist enclaves. See A. O. Hirschman, *The Strategy of Economic Development*, New Haven (Conn.) 1959, pp. 125–32, 187–96. See also p. 833, note 3, above.

³ See the critique of Rosa Luxemburg's economics in Fred Oelssner, *Rosa Luxemburg*, pp. 164 ff.

across the 'normal' articulation of class relationships. 'Inasmuch as imperialism impeded the development of factory manufacturing, very few of the ruined peasants and artisans became modern workers connected with big, mechanized production . . . they were forced to linger on through the intermediate stages of proletarianization and to become not so much capitalist workers as semi-proletarians—semi-paupers . . . an army of hired labour . . . [with] a specific colonial character.' Or 'the European bourgeoisie by no means went into overseas countries in order to implant there the prevailing capitalist production relationships.'¹ 'Normal' capitalism is represented by the domestic 'national bourgeoisie' which thus finds itself in conflict with foreign imperialism. 'The economic interests of the national bourgeoisie are inimical to the interests of imperialism. . . . Everywhere the bourgeoisie tries to attain independent capitalist development, just what imperialism hampers. This is an apparent paradox . . . but imperialism cannot function without colonial or semi-colonial exploitation . . . and will try to keep the exploited countries in a state of rural backwardness; i.e. to preserve that very state of underdevelopment which all nationalist forces, including the bourgeoisie, are trying to remedy. Hence the struggle between them will be sharpened. . . .'²

This is no longer either Lenin or Luxemburg. It is Leninist in so far as it relates to current strategy of focusing on American economic imperialism as the main enemy, and thus accepts the very un-Luxemburg notion of (temporarily) better and worse capitalisms. But it is Luxemburgist in so far as it retransfers attention to the 'third world' of underdeveloped or colonial countries, and locates the final struggle of Socialism and capitalism in that arena, thus once more connecting the future of capitalism with the colonial rather than the domestic scene. Soviet writers are making this concession painfully and slowly—under the pressure of Chinese competition.

Investment and Capitalist Expansion

The confinement of Marxist economics has already burst apart in the previous section; we shall now leave it behind altogether in an attempt to identify the mechanism of Rosa Luxemburg's model.³ If production and profits rather than consumption and income are the prime motives

¹ L. A. Gordon and L. A. Fridman, 'Peculiarities in the Composition and Structure of the Working Class in the Economically Underdeveloped Countries of Asia and Africa', and R. Avakov and G. Mirskii, 'Class Structure in the Underdeveloped Countries', in T. P. Thornton (ed.), *The Third World in Soviet Perspective*, Princeton 1964, pp. 158, 278.

² Avakov and Mirskii, loc. cit., p. 300 (translated from the original in *Mirovaya Ekonomika*, 1962, No. 4, p. 79).

³ This section follows closely the argument of Joan Robinson in her Introduction to *The Accumulation of Capital*.

of economic action—this is central to Marxism—then the difficulties of compound reproduction necessarily lead to the question: ‘Why do capitalists continue to do something which is incapable of successful achievement?’ We have already seen *what* they do (exploit colonies and other pre-capitalist segments of the economy); the problem now is *why*. More specifically, whence do they anticipate a demand which leads them to increase production—in short, to invest?

It is here that orthodox Marxist economics fails us—as it failed Rosa Luxemburg, otherwise she would not have written her book. Marx himself was aware of the problem, though he (and subsequently all orthodox Marxists) dealt with it by assuming that investment was a function of, and limited by, the needs of technology and size which would enable a producer to remain viable, to stay in the game.¹ This minimal viability is not growth. But historically growth has taken place in capitalist economies over the last sixty years—growth, not merely concentration. And, though Rosa Luxemburg nowhere suggests even for a moment that genuine *growth* of capitalist economies (in our sense of that word) is possible or important to analyse, her analysis is in fact close to some modern growth models. It is only necessary to abstract from her two limitations—the lack of an adequate banking system to channel one man’s savings to another man’s physical investment, and the rather more fundamental assumption that effective demand cannot come from a rise in workers’ real wages. Once this is done, the capitalists’ search for investment and the whole analysis of cumulative growth of investible savings (surplus) in conditions of technical progress and of a rising rate of capital exploitation, provide the right basis for a modern growth model. Rosa Luxemburg asks—unintentionally—the right question (we can easily alter ‘why does he invest’ to ‘how can he be induced to invest’). She also provides some elements of an answer, by looking for a new and additional source of demand and defining its theoretical quantity. It is better than merely *postulating* investment, however illogical, and then measuring it empirically without explaining it. Instead of starting this problem at the end, Rosa Luxemburg begins at the beginning.²

Beyond all doubt, *The Accumulation of Capital* is a work of uneven, flickering genius, ill-confined within the strict limits of the author’s self-imposed task. Its explicit quality is considerable, but the real impact comes from the incidentals. Given freer rein than in the immediate political polemics which occupied most of her attention, Rosa Luxemburg’s mind plumbed hitherto dark or barely explored depths.

¹ See above, p. 832.

² For a detailed analysis of Rosa Luxemburg’s model, see Joan Robinson’s Introduction, pp. 20–22, 24–26.

The questions asked are more interesting than the solutions offered. But in economics, as in all social sciences, this is the bigger hurdle.

One aspect that is frequently overlooked in discussing Marxist economics—and confronting it with the various economic techniques evolved since classical equilibrium theory began to be demolished—is the very fundamental difference in the ground covered. All too often we assume that we are merely dealing with a different set of techniques, that we shall get answers to what are essentially similar problems. This is not so. For the last 150 years economics has narrowed, like a pyramid, towards increasing specialization—a concentration in depth. Marxist economics was syphoned out of the scientific mainstream of economics at a time when specialization had not passed beyond emphasis—a focus of interest on a particular aspect of the social sciences, but not an abstraction from them as irrelevant or ‘different’. It retained this quality of emphasis within totality; all Marxist analysis does. Marxism *means* scientific totality. The Marxist word for over-intensive specializing is ‘vulgarization’, and bourgeois economics are vulgar economics. Interlocked as they are, the techniques of Marxism have not plumbed any new depths in their particular spheres for many years—however much they may push forward the validity of the whole system.

Rosa Luxemburg subscribed whole-heartedly to the interlocking totality of Marxism; all or nothing. Indeed, she went further in this than most contemporaries. She emphasized that the science of Political Economy—the name itself is a concession to totality—would become extinct when capitalism, its subject of study, disappeared.¹ Probably the same fate would befall all the other tools of Marxist social analysis, originating from and confined as they were to the historical class dialectic they claimed to illuminate.² Socialist revolution would wipe away the tools for studying reality when it destroyed that reality itself.

It is this context of the *function* of science that lights up *The Accumulation of Capital* with a luridly non-conformist fire. Intentional or not, the work achieves and (more important still) *demand*s a validity for its analysis that has nothing to do with the author’s usual acceptance of severe limitations of purpose. In spite of the handicap of loaded and often ill-defined concepts—blunt tools for a precision job—Rosa

¹ *Einführung in die Nationalökonomie*, pp. ix, 77–78.

² This notion of the finite nature of Marxism as a social science—in its beginning as well as its end—was later held to be one of Rosa’s minor scientific ‘errors’. See Oelssner, *Luxemburg*, p. 168. It will be recalled (cf. pp. 410–11) that Rosa Luxemburg despised the self-importance of social science in asserting that it was valid *per se*, i.e. without intimate connection with the political struggle. This contempt applied even to the most ‘Marxist’ interpretation of scientific analysis. Hence much of the anger against Kautsky—quite different anger from Lenin’s attacks on Kautsky’s ‘politics’.

Luxemburg surrenders herself freely to the search for basic, objective causalities. For the moment revolution and politics hardly matter. Not that this was deliberate. The point is that, given stimulus and the right circumstances, she was capable of thinking in this extended, scientific manner. Marx certainly was. Lenin, for instance, was not. That is why Marx and Rosa Luxemburg (though not of course to the same extent) have provided scientific techniques quite separate from and valid outside their political doctrines, while Lenin and Kautsky and Plekhanov have not. It has nothing to do with ability, but with the depth of mind and analysis.

And this may be ultimately why *The Accumulation of Capital* has been Rosa Luxemburg's *livre maudit*. It is unique among her own writings, in scope even more than in quality. Marxists have dealt with it either by making it subsume all her other writings ('the fount of all her errors') or by treating it as a fascinating deviation—into a blind alley. Among non-Marxists it takes its place in the procession of contributions to scientific analysis. To enable it to do so they have stripped it of its relevance to totality, emphasizing depth rather than breadth. In both cases, however, the book's unquiet spirit continues to haunt a world still inhabited by the obstinate problems with which it deals. That alone is the best measure of its importance.

APPENDIX 2

THE NATIONAL QUESTION

ROSA LUXEMBURG did not invent the notion that Socialism and national self-determination might be conflicting ideas. The difficulty of finding the right emphasis and relationship between them in practical politics already bedevilled Polish Socialists in the early 1880s (Chapter II). In the Polish context it is as old as Socialism itself. It even goes all the way back to Marx and Engels. Though Marx hailed the re-establishment of Poland as progressive and worthy of the First International's support, his motives were not simply based on some concept of abstract right or justice. Karl Marx, with his long-range vision of history, worked out a correspondingly long-range revolutionary strategy—aimed largely at defeating Russia, then the geo-political heartland of European reaction. In general Marx's and Engels's conception of the national-geographical rearrangement of Europe was based on four criteria: the development of progress, the creation of large-scale economic units, the weighting of approval and disapproval in accordance with revolutionary possibilities, and their specific enmity to Russia.¹ Their attitude to Poland—with all due allowance for the persistent intrusion of this particular issue—fits into their general framework and in fact illustrates it.

In order to move the German revolution forward it was necessary to separate Germany from Russia. The creation of a democratic Poland was the first pre-condition for the creation of a democratic Germany. The fact that this formulation contradicted the absorptionist policies of the Prussian government with regard to non-German minorities suited Marx all the better.² The fact that Marx stressed that Germany's honour was at stake in the need to re-create Poland may be taken as much as a propagandistic weapon as evidence of any genuine attachment to such unmaterialistic motivations. Once in exile in London, the stress on right and honour largely disappeared. The anti-Russian accent grew stronger. The desirable political constellation of East Europe became the celebrated anti-Russian *cordon sanitaire* of containment.³ Reflecting on the new post-revolutionary situation in Europe,

¹ See Wehler, *Sozialdemokratie*, p. 15.

² See *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, 12 July, 12 August, 20 August 1848.

³ K. Bittel (ed.), *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, new edition, Berlin (East) 1955, No. 2, February 1850, pp. 116 ff. See also F. Engels in *Sozialdemokrat*, Zürich, 13 March 1884.

Engels wrote to Marx in May 1851: 'The more I reflect about history the clearer it appears to me that the Poles are a *nation foutue*, useful as a means only until Russia herself is drawn into the agrarian revolution. From that moment on Poland has absolutely no more *raison d'être*.'¹

This subordination of any autonomous interest to the wider strategical necessity of defeating or at least containing Russia was partly eroded by the widespread support for Polish national aspirations among many of Marx's associates, particularly in England. In the course of the rising of 1863 Marx again came out more strongly in favour of an historical reward for so much revolutionary effort.² But it is noticeable that even during this resurgence of interest in Polish self-determination there is no attempt to broaden support for a reconstituted Poland into any general doctrine of self-determination. Nor did Marx's various attempts to commit the First International to a specific Polish policy meet with universal enthusiasm in that organization.³ 'Marx and Engels were interested in the "20 million heroes between Europe and Asia" not as a nation but as a revolutionary and strategical potential.'⁴ Engels especially was concerned to emphasize the functional role of Poland as a vehicle for revolution; a role limited in time to the dawn of revolutionary incandescence in Russia itself. When in the late 1870s the Narodniks first gave signs of a revolutionary potential there, the importance of Poland rapidly declined in his conception.¹

But at the same time the very decline of Poland's functional role caused Engels to examine the specific question of Polish nationality somewhat more generously. As a separate Polish Socialist movement began to emerge in the 1880s Engels was exercised by the tactical problem of giving it as wide an appeal as possible. He developed a more precise thesis about the relationship between revolutionary progress and national states. The national unit was the 'normal political constitution of the European bourgeoisie' in which it could best develop. 'No great

¹ Letter dated 23 May 1851. See also W. Conze's Introduction to W. Conze and D. Hertz-Eichenrode (eds.), *Karl Marx, Manuskripte über die polnische Frage (1863-1864)*, s'Gravenhage (Holland) 1961, pp. 25 ff. (hereafter cited as 'Conze').

² See letter from Marx to Engels, 2 December 1856, and letters of 13, 17, 19, 21 February 1863. A resolution on the subject is in Leon Wasilewski, 'Karl Marx und der Aufstand von 1863', *Polen*, Vol. I, No. 27, Vienna 1915, reprinted in Conze, pp. 91-96.

³ See N. Rjasanoff, 'Karl Marx and F. Engels on the Polish question', *Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und der Arbeiterbewegung*, 1916, No. 6, pp. 192 ff., 210 ff. See particularly Marx's arguments at the first conference of the International, *ibid.*, pp. 194 ff.

⁴ Wehler, *Sozialdemokratie*, p. 21. The phrase quoted here comes from Paul W. Blackstock and B. F. Hoselitz (eds.), *The Russian Menace to Europe, by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels*, Glencoe (Illinois) 1952, p. 108.

⁵ Helmut Krause, *Marx und Engels und das zeitgenössische Russland*, Giessen 1959, pp. 37, 78 ff.; Conze, pp. 23 ff.

people can seriously discuss its internal problems as long as national independence is absent.' In order to avoid any discrepancy between Socialist policy and the obvious desire for national unity and independence, it was necessary for Polish Socialists to 'place the liberation of their country at the head of their programme. An international proletarian movement . . . can only grow out of the existence of independent nations.'¹

Thus both Marx and Engels established some sort of a tradition of proletarian support for national self-determination—at least of major peoples—in general and for Polish self-determination in particular. This tradition was taken over and developed by the leaders of Social Democracy in Germany, Austria, and elsewhere. Wilhelm Liebknecht especially became the major protagonist of this thesis both in its general and Polish aspects. But in the course of time the motivations changed. The revolutionary strategy, according to which Poland was a cog in the anti-Russian policy of containment and destruction, became emasculated. With the emergence of a Socialist movement in Poland and following Engels's narrower preoccupation with the resurrection of Poland as desirable *per se*, the question of right and justice altered the wider strategy. Wilhelm Liebknecht—and to some extent his colleague Bebel—based the ideological legitimacy of his leadership of the growing German Social-Democratic movement on specific negation of the expansionist policies of the Prussian state and German empire. The occupation of substantial Polish areas was a flagrant example; it was thus natural that support for Polish self-determination became an integral part of the 'mortal enmity' which was ritually (and annually) hurled at existing society and its political superstructure.² Liebknecht himself also subscribed fully to Marx's early views on Poland as a necessary bastion against Russia. For German Social Democracy, particularly after the end of the anti-Socialist laws, the problem was not merely part of the permanent confrontation with the government. In the 1890s the Poles in Germany were being organized by their own new Polish Socialist party; the relationship between it and the SPD became a practical problem to which the intellectual commitment to Polish independence had to be accommodated (Chapter IV). The relationship between traditional commitment to a concept and its application to sensitive but intractable questions of organization at home provided a fruitful source of trouble in the future.

¹ See letter from Engels to Kautsky, 7 February 1882, in Friedrich Engels, *Briefwechsel mit K. Kautsky*, 2nd ed., Vienna 1955, p. 50. This was to be exactly Kautsky's attitude for the rest of his life.

² For Liebknecht's position, see his article 'The process of education', *Neue Deutsche Rundschau*, 1898, No. 9, pp. 396–406; see also his speech in the *Reichstag* (Sixth legislative period, first session, Volume I, p. 422, 17 December 1874).

At the end of 1892 the foundation of the PPS completed the emergence of organized Polish Socialism in all three areas of occupation. Each of the three parties in Austrian, German, and Russian Poland was committed to fight for the revival of a Polish state. The fact that three separate parties had to be founded was no more than a temporary concession to the factual division of Poland. The three separate parties did their utmost to collaborate closely and founded an organization in London to co-ordinate their efforts.

When Rosa Luxemburg and a small group of friends broke out of the PPS of Russian Poland in 1893, it was the national question which soon emerged as the main bone of contention between them. No doubt it had played a major part in causing the split but there were other issues as well, more personal and less suitable for public polemic. The national question was as much a means of differentiation as its cause; the reason for digging a moat and also the tool with which it was dug deep and insurmountable. Ends and means snowballed until the national question had become the accepted touchstone of their differences.

It was not until 1895 that the first full theoretical justification for the SDKP position on the Polish question was published.¹ Between 1895 and 1897, in a series of articles, Rosa Luxemburg elaborated the theoretical foundations of her anti-nationalist position, and extended it beyond the context of Poland. It was not yet a full-blown condemnation of national self-determination as an historically dated—and therefore reactionary—concept, but an extension of the Polish experience, and above all of the method of analysis, to other areas. We have already discussed her case in some detail (Chapter III). It was based on two main assumptions. First, that national and Socialist aspirations were incompatible and that a commitment to national self-determination by Socialist parties must subordinate those parties to bourgeois nationalism instead of opposing one to the other. A programme of national self-determination thus became the first of Rosa Luxemburg's many indices of an opportunism which tied Socialism to the chariot of the class enemy—a concept that was to be elaborated and refined during the revisionist debate. To this extent Rosa Luxemburg invented the concept of modern Socialist opportunism, its characterization and its identification as a bourgeois (i.e. hostile) influence within the Socialist movement. Secondly, Rosa Luxemburg attacked the premises of national self-determination in the particular context of the Russian question. Far from being the bulwark of reaction, to be destroyed or contained by independent states carved out of the Tsar's empire by nationalist revolution, Russia was itself moving into the era of social revolution—not yet the possible epicentre which it was to become after

¹ M. Rózga, *Niepodległa Polska a sprawa robotnicza*, Paris 1895.

1905 but already a link in the chain of growing European capitalism in which bourgeois and finally proletarian revolution could ripen. Russian Poland as well as other non-Russian areas in the Tsarist empire now depended for their release, not on nationalist separation from Russia, but on the proletarian revolution within Russia itself. National separation was in fact a retrograde step. Revolution in Russian Poland would come more quickly if Polish industrial development could flourish in its all-Russian context; by cutting off Polish industry from its Russian markets Poland's industrial development—and hence the development of the class struggle—could only be retarded.¹

The furore raised by this argumentation was due not so much to the argument itself but to the fact that it was a self-conscious amendment and revision of Marx and Engels—at least of the current conception of their views. According to her critics, Rosa Luxemburg grossly over-emphasized the revolutionary potential of Russia. The revolutionary flicker of the later seventies and early eighties had largely died out; in any case it had hardly been an organized mass effort of the type likely to endear itself to men like Wilhelm Liebknecht or Victor Adler. The PPS tried hard to contradict Rosa Luxemburg's economic argumentation. They asserted most tellingly that her policy played straight into the hands of the hated Russian autocracy; no one but the Russian police could benefit from it. The stigma of alliance between SDKP and Colonel Markgrawski of the Warsaw Gendarmerie—whether coincidental or more than that—was exploited to the utmost in the rumour-prone circles of Polish and Russian emigration. To the Germans Rosa Luxemburg's analysis seemed in addition to everything else a betrayal of their moral obligation towards the underprivileged Poles in the Reich.

On a deeper level the argument turned on the general question of self-determination. Rosa Luxemburg claimed that it was not Social Democracy's duty to found minute new capitalist states that could never be viable. Contemptuously she cited the example of the North German coast; if every group possessing its distinct dialect could now claim the right to its own state, Europe would lapse into truly feudal anarchy.² The days when national self-determination was indeed progressive had long since passed. But it had had its historical importance; correct application of Marxist techniques brought up to date must surely lead Socialists to call for national self-determination in hopeless multi-national units like Turkey which had proved incapable of any economic

¹ The economic argument was developed in Rosa Luxemburg's doctoral dissertation, *Die industrielle Entwicklung Polens*, Leipzig 1898.

² If she had been more receptive to English history and social circumstances, she might have picked on what is in fact the classic illustration of her thesis—the failure of Wales and Scotland to develop nationalist mass movements against the dominant bourgeois tendency for economic integration with England since the industrial revolution.

development and progress, instead of helping to shore up these archaic monsters against Russia.¹ However much Rosa Luxemburg stressed her own orthodoxy in applying Marx's techniques to a changed situation, Liebknecht, Kautsky, and Plekhanov all dismissed her amendments as inadmissible if not downright sacrilegious. Rosa Luxemburg had turned Marxist strategy exactly upside down. Marx had called for an independent Poland and a strong Turkey in order to weaken Russia, while this argumentative hen in Zürich ridiculed the possibility and value of Polish independence and called for the break-up of the Turkish empire instead. The fact that much of Marx's thinking had been strategic, and abstracted from the development of a revolutionary situation in Russia itself, was ignored. The independence of Poland had suddenly become a Marxist object unto itself, like a meteor falling into the deliberations of the astronomers.

Rosa Luxemburg could not fully evaluate the dynamic process of Marx's and Engels's thought since she lacked most of the material available to us today. She *felt* herself to be the innate continuator of Marx's method, which did not in the least depend on retaining the concrete historical phenomena of any particular period. The issue thus confronted a dynamic conception against a static one; Marxism as a process of historical analysis versus a corpus of sacrosanct *obiter dicta*.

In the heat of the argument, Rosa Luxemburg no doubt adopted an extreme and uncompromising position. Though publicly committed to autonomy for Poland, she began by confessing in private that even this was a concession; she would have preferred also to do without autonomy.² Some of her colleagues, like Marchlewski, though they shared her basic position did not follow her all the way—especially not in her insatiable appetite for public polemics on the subject.³ But in general Rosa Luxemburg provided both stuffing and framework for the view that Social Democrats must take the geography of Europe much as they find it, that self-determination is a tactical and intellectual concession to the *bourgeoisie*, and that Polish Social Democracy must find the satisfaction of its proletarian aims within the framework of a Russian revolution. To this position she adhered strenuously until her death. It provided the mainstay of twenty years of polemic against the PPS, the most important criticism of the Bolsheviki after the October revolution, and a steady prop for the extreme internationalism with which

¹ For Rosa Luxemburg's articles on the Turkish question and contemporary replies, see Chapter III, p. 100; also bibliography, p. 879, Nos. 156–8.

² 'I have even managed to frown a little on autonomy [in the proclamation].' Jogiches letters, 11 April 1894, *Z Pola Walki*, Moscow 1930, Nos. 9/10, p. 127. There are various references to the 'concession to autonomy' in this period.

³ For a note of Marchlewski's writings on this question, see J. Kaczankowska, *Bibliografia prac Juliana Marchlewskiego*, Łódź 1954. See also above, Chapter III, p. 98.

she confronted the patriotic capitulations during the First World War. 'In the era of rampaging Imperialism there can be no more national wars. [The assertion of] national interests can serve only as a means of deception, of betraying the working masses of the people to their deadly enemy, Imperialism.'¹

In 1908 Rosa Luxemburg's views on the national question in general, refined by many years of political campaigning in the German, Russian, and Polish parties, were treated to a systematic exposition for the first time.² It was a self-conscious exercise in deduction, arguing from an established theory to the many scattered instances and facts. She put forward her thesis essentially as the product of the present historical epoch; any other view was wrong because it was out of date. For in this one sector the general advance of social relations and Marxist analysis of them in the course of the past fifty years had left a curious pocket of pre-scientific, utopian idealism. 'Social Democracy, which has based its entire policy on the scientific method of historical materialism and the class war, cannot make exceptions in the question of nationality.'³ Now that the gap had been discovered, it had to be made good at once. The whole basis of Rosa Luxemburg's thesis on the national question was that, far from raising the dialectic to new and possibly insecure levels, she merely brought scientific Socialism (as Marxism was usually called) up to the level it had attained everywhere else. Words like 'right', 'ethics', 'duties', and 'obligations' were clear evidence of outdated modes of thought. The most telling analogy was with the right to work:

In the 1840s the formulation of a 'right to work' was the dearly beloved postulate of French Socialism, providing an immediate and total solution of all social questions. After the briefest attempt to put it into practice during the 1848 revolution, however, this 'right' ended in a complete fiasco. . . .⁴

The entire notion of abstract rights was contemptuously characterized as being like Chernyshevsky's 'right of every man to eat from golden platters'—a notion to which only anarchists subscribed. The identity of Socialists who propagated the right of nations to self-determination, with anarchists, who specialized in the achievement of so many other abstractions, was constantly asserted.⁵ This dashing method of 'pairing' the unlikeliest opponents—in this case bourgeois nationalists and anarchists—puts Rosa Luxemburg right in the mainstream of classical

¹ *Die Krise der Sozialdemokratie*, appendix, fifth thesis; quoted from Rosa Luxemburg's *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 395.

² 'The question of nationality and autonomy', *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, August 1908, No. 6, reprinted in *Wybór Pism*, Vol. II, pp. 114–66. As far as I know it has never been translated into any other language.

³ *Wybór Pism*, Vol. II, p. 114.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

Marxist polemic. She was herself to be a distinguished victim of the method a few years after her death (Chapter XVIII).

One of the most interesting aspects of Rosa Luxemburg's argument was the hint that the very concept of 'nation' was temporary. Instead of being an absolute and permanent standard of measurement she suggested that it might be no more than the particular form in which bourgeois society encapsulated its structural arrangement—and that it would pass away with the end of the capitalist phase of history. This moment was coming closer, and it behoved Marxists to grasp the future and not cling to the past.

Speaking of the right of nations to self-determination we dispense with the idea of a nation as a whole. It becomes merely a social and political unit [for purposes of measurement]. But it was just this concept of nations as one of the categories of bourgeois ideology that Marxist theory attacked most fiercely, pointing out that under slogans like 'national self-determination'—or 'freedom of the citizen', 'equality before the law'—there lurks all the time a twisted and limited meaning. In a society based on classes, the nation as a uniform social-political whole simply does not exist. Instead there exist within each nation classes with antagonistic interests and 'rights'. There is literally no social arena—from the strongest material relationship to the most subtle moral one—in which the possessing classes and a self-conscious proletariat could take one and the same position and figure as one undifferentiated national whole.¹

The historical limitation to the concept of nationality and nation was only hinted at. Orthodox Marxism, Kautsky's as well as Lenin's, preferred to *equate* the national interest with that of the proletariat rather than, like Rosa Luxemburg, *subsuming* the one by the other. In any case events proved Rosa Luxemburg's prognosis incorrect—at least in its application to the immediate future; the outbreak of war showed clearly that when the crunch came class antagonisms were swept aside by national solidarity. Perhaps this is why Lenin preferred to equate rather than subsume, and why in 1914 Rosa Luxemburg felt that so much of her entire philosophy had shattered into a thousand fragments.

The claim that national self-determination was an historically superseded Utopia seemed specious, but Rosa Luxemburg proceeded to clothe it with historical examples. Though unaware of the extent of Marx's and Engels's own strategic approach to the problem of Polish nationality (most of the private correspondence between them had not then been published), she was perceptive enough to recognize that Marx was far too good a practitioner of his own methods to fall into any sentimental commitment to abstract or natural rights. Rosa Luxemburg

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 147–8.

emphasized that particular predictions of strength and weakness for any of the national movements in the middle of the nineteenth century had proved extremely fallible and that the validity of Marx's own analysis did not in the least depend on his—as it turned out—erroneous support for the hopeless Turkish empire or his derogatory prognosis for Czech nationalism.¹ By now Rosa Luxemburg was careful not to rely too much on the Polish example (no one in the Second International would have accepted any general analysis based on Poland). But she did illustrate the progress from utopian nationalism to scientific internationalism from her own Polish experience.

The mystic sentimental Socialism which ran wild in Germany in the 1830s, represented by Karl Grün and Moses Hess, emerged in a suitably messy version after forty years in the ideas of Limanowski—the *Lud polski* at the beginning and the *pobudka* at the end of the 80s of the last century; a striving for all that is fine and beautiful. Mr. Limanowski, the later leader of the PPS, united Polish Socialism on the basis that Socialism is undoubtedly a beautiful idea and patriotism a no less beautiful idea; hence 'why should not two such beautiful ideas unite together?'²

All along Rosa Luxemburg confronted idealism and beauty with the pessimism of historical necessity. Certainly the revolution would finally liberate the innate potential of human nature; but right now her task was not to stress the moral aspect of Marxist revolution against its bourgeois detractors and their 'law and order', but on the contrary to emphasize the often harsh necessities of historical laws. Cheap propagandistic appeals to potential but temporary allies of the working class could only prove fatal. In any case it was strictly against the tradition of scientific Socialism.

Marx and Engels in reality paid no tribute at all to party or class egoism and certainly did not sacrifice the needs of Western European democracy to [the concept of] nation, as might have appeared at first glance. It is true that it sounds far more big-hearted and attractive for the exuberant imagination of young intellectuals when Socialists announce a general and universal amnesty for all presently subjected nations. But such an attempt to bestow on all nations, countries, groups and on all of human creation the right to freedom, equality and happiness with a single stroke of the pen typically characterizes only the adolescence of the Socialist movement—and even more the boastful phraseology of anarchism.

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 123–8. It should be noted that this was written almost at the end of the period when Rosa thought that German history was the precursor to the history of her neighbours.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 150–1.

The Socialism of the modern working class—scientific Socialism—does not go in for merely generous-sounding solutions of social and national conflicts. . . . Social Democracy does not distinguish itself through the magnanimity of its programmes and is in this respect constantly outstripped by Socialist parties which are not tied by any scientific doctrine. These always have their pockets full of attractive gifts for everyone. Thus for example in Russia the Socialist Revolutionaries leave Social Democracy far behind in their solution for agriculture, seeing that they have at their disposal a recipe for the benefit of the peasants—the instant partial introduction of Socialism into the countryside without any [of our] dull attendance on the growth of the right conditions for the elimination of industrial capital through revolution. In comparison with such parties Social Democracy is and always will be a poor party, just as Marx was poor in comparison with the generous and all-promising Bakunin. . . .¹

This was perhaps the only occasion when Rosa Luxemburg underpinned the neglect of the peasants by the SDKPiL and the later *Spartakusbund* with full theoretical justification. Yet this position follows logically from her entire analysis of the national question. Just as nationalism was an unsuitable bed-fellow for Socialist aspirations, so peasant discontent could only divert the energy of working-class Socialism into petit-bourgeois channels. In Rosa Luxemburg's view the primary role of the proletariat in the Russian revolution of 1905–1906—a conception shared fully by the Bolsheviks—necessarily led her to refuse alliances with peasants and nationalists just as firmly as with the bourgeois liberals. It was a logical enough conclusion, but for Lenin its very logic made it abstract and dogmatic. He was to oppose Rosa Luxemburg's concept with logic of a different kind: autonomous role of the proletariat, yes—but alliances with all elements who historically had to move forward (in a revolutionary sense) before they moved back; no alliance on the other hand with liberals who had already reached the fullest extent of their revolutionary push and who, whatever they *said* they were doing, were in fact already moving back.

Rosa Luxemburg's argument was at its weakest when she tried specifically to apply it to Russia. The last section of her article is a curiously garbled *reductio ad absurdum* of the deep and personal impact which this question had made on the thinking of all those concerned with the revolutionary future of Russia. Each paragraph begins with 'suppose that . . .'²—evidence that abstractions are about to be substituted for realities.² It is perhaps tactically significant (and no more) that Rosa Luxemburg quoted and criticized a Menshevik formulation of the national question rather than a Bolshevik one, even though on this there

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 156 ff.

was for once little difference between them. And it certainly did not save her from a generous discharge of Lenin's wrath; unerringly he picked out the weakest point of her argument—though not until six years later, when it suited him for other reasons to splash a little mud on the Berlin Poles.

No doubt we have here the most extensive and extreme version of the denial of the right of national self-determination. The argument is sufficiently general and consistent to count as a doctrine—and as a doctrine it was to be attacked. Nevertheless it was not a philosophic essay *à la* Kautsky or Plekhanov but a theoretical superstructure to an urgent, continuing struggle in Russia, Germany, and Austria. Her thesis could never be divorced from its practical Polish application, however much she claimed universal validity for it. The extension into a doctrine was the consequence of an intellectual need to be respectable, to assert the universal rather than knit a pragmatic whole from the political needs of the moment—another difference in emphasis between Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin (but not between Luxemburgism and Leninism). Even worse would have been practical action without any attempt at theoretical justification—opportunism of the most classic kind.

In practical terms Rosa Luxemburg's opposition to the PPS and its policy of self-determination made her the most efficient ally of the SPD's policy of organizational integration for minorities in Germany (Chapter V). She was equally committed to integration into the all-Russian party—at least in theory; but here the state of the Russian party itself and a reluctance to dissolve the SDKPiL as a going concern prevented any application of this policy. Such failure to match words with deeds provided suitable ammunition to her PPS opponents, and much of Rosa Luxemburg's writing had to be devoted to an elaborate attempt to justify the SDKPiL's continued independence as a party. But though her tactics fitted into the general orientation well enough, the precise relationship between party policy and national policy was never explored. As usual, Rosa was silent as soon as it came to the logic of organization. She might oppose the policy of self-determination, and berate those parties advocating it, but she obstinately defended her own party's resistance (and by implication that of all other parties) to being submerged into supra-national wholes. Thus she attacked the Austrian party and its leaders for advocating national self-determination in a socio-political context, while the Bolsheviks attacked them for the opposite reason—giving the national right of self-determination concrete organizational expression in party terms. The Austrians clearly succeeded in pleasing nobody. But more important is the fact that both the SDKPiL's and the Bolsheviks' positions contained serious and self-destructive contradictions. The Bolshevik dichotomy party/society was to lead them into some very awkward adjustments after 1917, with

Stalin almost destroying the old party in order to break the excessive traditional distinction between them. But at least Lenin recognized the need to justify the separation and hammered away at the dialectical unity between national self-determination in its social context and absolute organizational subordination to the centre in a party context. Rosa Luxemburg saw neither problem nor contradiction, and merely combined party independence with its denial for aspiring nations. The notion that party organization could be functionally related to the theoretical or practical solution of social problems, could even set a precedent for post-revolutionary society, was entirely unreal for her. To anyone who believed that the most significant meaning of the revolutionary process was the equation, the fusion, of party and society, the organizational subordination or independence of one Socialist party from another could not be a matter of any importance—and therefore did not need to fit into any theory of revolution.

Rosa Luxemburg made little attempt to distinguish between the positions of those who disagreed with her. As Lenin at one time dumped his various opponents into a few collective dustbins simply marked liquidators and opportunists, so Rosa Luxemburg created the over-simplified category of nationalists or social patriots. Just as the later Communists steadily refused to see any significant difference between Centrism and Reformism after 1914, so Rosa Luxemburg refused to distinguish in the Polish movement between the open nationalism of the right-wing PPS and the policy of the PPS-Left; between those who in the wider context promoted national self-determination to an absolute priority and those, like Lenin and Kautsky, who gave it conditional and limited support.¹ In her argument with Lenin, particularly, a number of entirely different questions became entangled. These can roughly be divided into two categories. First the question of self-determination as an element of revolutionary policy, secondly the question of party relationships in a multi-national situation.

Until 1914 Kautsky acted as the chief interpreter of Marxism in the national question as in almost all others. In most of his substantial writing on the national question Lenin based himself on Kautsky first and foremost—and Rosa Luxemburg, too, considered him the weightiest of her opponents. Her attempts to confuse their views with those of the PPS were often deliberate mystification. In fact Kautsky and Lenin both differentiated sharply between overt nationalism and the Socialist policy of self-determination which, though it admitted the

¹ Rosa Luxemburg's role as a pioneer of polemical methodology is marginally interesting. She did not invent Marxist 'pairing' (Marx himself did that) but she was an expert practitioner years before Lenin. Opportunism in the Second International was partly her discovery—certainly she conceptualized it, and she 'invented' social patriotism.

validity of national aspirations, subordinated these formally and at all times to the demands of the class struggle. In 1903 Lenin and Martov, preparing a platform for the second congress, both stated clearly that their acceptance of the right of self-determination implied not one whit less attachment to, and concentration on, the Socialist revolution. For Lenin, particularly, the national question had a twofold importance. It was an untapped source of revolutionary potential to weaken and destroy the Tsarist autocracy. He did not in the least accept Rosa Luxemburg's abstracted caricature of his policy as a utopian guarantee of national self-determination for ethnic groups who, for geographical and other reasons, obviously could never build a separate state and had never had one in the past (Chapter VII). But at the same time Lenin certainly went further in his national policy than any mere canalization of revolutionary energy in this direction—as with the peasants. He had a real feeling for the iniquity of great Russian chauvinism which went beyond tactical considerations. The evidence suggests that on this subject Lenin was anchored to a personal view of right and wrong that did not just switch on and off as required.¹ By insisting on the inclusion of the right of self-determination in Paragraph 7 of the Russian party programme—where it remained for fifteen years until it was incorporated into the constitution of the Soviet Union—Lenin was following his deep convictions as well as the obvious tactical requirements of a Russian revolution. It was this point more than any other that had separated him from the Narodniks in the 1890s and was to bring him into continual conflict with the Socialist Revolutionaries in the new century.

But there was a sharp difference between Lenin's views on the national question as a programme for revolution and the relationship of different parties within the RSDRP. On this Lenin made no concession whatever. It was the *Bund's* insistence on party autonomy more than any claim for Jewish national separateness which inspired *Iskra's* manoeuvres to force the *Bund* to withdraw from the second congress. Though prepared to accommodate the Poles temporarily, Lenin also refused to enter into any federal party commitment with them. In 1906 at Stockholm a compromise was reached, which left Poles and Letts intact as separate member parties of the RSDRP, but Lenin never found this

¹ Even at the very end of his life Lenin was prepared to enter into a conflict with his closest followers on this question. At the end of 1922 he was ready to conduct a one-man campaign against the collective nationality policy of the party, had his second stroke not incapacitated him. See his notes in *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXXVII, pp. 553–9, first published in the Soviet Union in 1956. His final indictment of Stalin's character was partly based on the latter's handling of the Georgian Bolsheviks. See I. Deutscher, *Stalin, A Political Biography*, London 1949, pp. 241 ff. For a short but accurate summary of Lenin's attitude to and policy on the national question, see Alfred G. Meyer, *Leninism*, 2nd ed., New York 1962, pp. 145–55, particularly pp. 152 ff. for his earlier arguments against chauvinistic tendencies in the leadership of his own party.

situation comfortable; he was only too pleased to exorcise these sometimes useful but unreliable allies from *de jure* participation after 1912. There was thus a significant difference between self-determination as a propagandistic weapon of revolution and its application as a form of party structure; in party matters Lenin was and continued to be rigidly unitarian and centralistic.

How were the two opposing views to be combined after the revolution, once the revolutionary potential of self-determination had played its required part? Lenin did not throw overboard the promised right of self-determination; indeed he insisted on it in 1917 and 1918 against the murmurings of many of his colleagues.

The right of self-determination [if necessary secession] is an *exception* to our general policy of centralism. This exception is absolutely necessary in view of great Russian arch-reactionary nationalism. The slightest renunciation of this exception is equivalent to opportunism—it is a simple-minded capitulation into the hands of great Russian arch-reactionary chauvinism.¹

But this did not give the formerly oppressed border nations the right to choose any loose form of association with the Soviet Union. Either they exercised the right of self-determination and seceded, or they stayed in the Soviet Union; no intermediate form of partial association—the best of both worlds—was possible. Where the Communist parties of these countries were concerned, there could be no concession to the federal principle whatever; democratic centralism was the only possible party relationship. If they came to power and chose to integrate with Russia—the logical step which Lenin freely expected them to take—then the relationship of party to society would solve itself. Bolshevik Russia's 'generosity' could only help the fortunes of its local allies.

The difference between Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin in practical matters was thus not nearly as great as the polemics over fundamentals indicated. Lenin insisted much less on the universal validity of his thesis than Rosa Luxemburg on hers. All he wanted was to be left alone to apply his own views in his own party; though he believed in the universal right of national self-determination, he did not campaign for its adoption by every party.

No Russian Marxist ever thought of blaming the Polish Social Democrats for being opposed to the secession of Poland. These Social Democrats err only when, like Rosa Luxemburg, they try to deny the necessity of including the recognition of the right of self-determination in the programme of the *Russian* Marxists.²

¹ Lenin, letter to S. G. Shaumyan, *Sochineniya*, 3rd ed., Vol. XVII, p. 90.

² Lenin, 'On the right of nations to self determination', *Sochineniya*, Vol. XX, p. 400.

Three years later, between the first and second Russian revolutions, the permissive freedom for other parties to display whatever views on self-determination might seem most suitable to them was now sharpened into a dialectical alternative.

They [the SDKPiL] have a perfect right to oppose Polish separation, but they fail to understand that in order to propagate internationalism we need not all repeat each others' exact words. In Russia we *must* stress the right of separation for subject peoples while in Poland we *must* stress the right of such nations to unity.¹

The 'may' had become a 'must'; the pronoun 'we' applied both to Russia and Poland. By this time a powerful group of Poles had joined the Bolsheviks for better or for worse, and it seemed natural to speak of 'we' in both Russian and Polish contexts. Different tactics might still apply to different national areas but one and the same policy clearly emanated from the single Bolshevik centre. Of course the Poles did not approve of Lenin's more sympathetic formulation either—nor would Rosa Luxemburg, imprisoned in Wronke, have done so; loyal Bolsheviks like Dzierżyński, Marchlewski, and Hanecki continued to propagate the old unadulterated SDKPiL thesis within the Russian party.² Only the patent failure of the invasion of Poland finally put paid to this view in the Russian as well as the Polish parties. Dzierżyński, perhaps the bitterest opponent of all to self-determination for Poland, did not publicly recant until almost the end of his life.³

All this puts Lenin's onslaught on Rosa Luxemburg over the national question in 1914 into a particular perspective. The harshness of his attack on her compared with the tone of his simultaneous polemics with Radek and other *rosłamowcy* had little to do with the national question itself. Lenin was hitting not so much at Rosa Luxemburg but through her at second-rank opponents in his Russian orbit—a fact that he admitted quite deliberately in his article.⁴ Besides, Rosa Luxemburg's

¹ Lenin's speech on the national question at the 7th all-Russian conference of RSDRP (Bolsheviks) on 29 April (12 May) 1917 in reply to Dzierżyński; see *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXIV, p. 265. My italics.

² The same problem was chewed over again in much the same form at the eighth party congress in March 1919, when Lenin uttered one of his fiercest denunciations of latent chauvinism in party circles; *Protokoly VIII s'ezda RKP(B)*, Moscow 1933, p. 107. In the particular Polish context Lenin and Marchlewski argued the same toss all over again, with Marchlewski still claiming that the Poles were going to succeed against the policy of self-determination where the Russians had failed. Lenin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXIX, pp. 153–4.

³ Feliks Dzierżyński only talked of 'the mistake about self-determination' as late as 3 October 1925, 'Do robotników Dolbysza', in *Pisma Wybrane*, Warsaw 1952, p. 416.

⁴ Lenin, 'On the right of nations to self-determination', *Sochineniya*, Vol. XX, p. 365. See also 'Critical remarks on the national question', *ibid.*, pp. 1–34.

offending text had been written in 1908 and had certainly been read by Lenin long before 1914; it was the high point of their co-operation and Lenin was writing for *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny* and pressing Rosa Luxemburg to write for *Proletarii* (Chapter XIII). Lenin himself admitted that Rosa Luxemburg's criticism of the Russian party programme on the national question had no tactical significance at all.

When the Poles entered [our] party in 1906 they *never* . . . brought a single motion to alter paragraph 9 [at the time paragraph 7] of the Russian programme!! This is a fact. And this fact proves clearly, contrary to all assertions and assurances, that Rosa Luxemburg's friends considered the debate in the programme commission of the second congress as resolved by the resolution of that congress, that they silently admitted their mistake and made it good when in 1906 they entered the party after having left the party congress in 1903, without making a single attempt to reopen the question of revising paragraph 9 in *the proper party manner*.

Rosa Luxemburg's article . . . appeared in 1908—naturally it does not occur to anyone to deny party writers the right to criticize the programme—but even *after* her article *no single* official body of the Polish Marxists reopened the question of revising paragraph 9.¹

As Lenin recognized, 'Rosa Luxemburg consistently loses herself in general comments about self-determination . . . without ever posing the clear and precise question that is at issue—mere juridical definitions or the experiences of the national movements of the whole world.'² The harsh manner of Lenin's attack is no more than a significant instance of his 'pairing' technique: Rosa Luxemburg as a means of demolishing other opponents, the national question as a stick with which to beat Jogiches and the hostile Polish Central Committee. Rosa Luxemburg was not popular in Bolshevik circles at the beginning of 1914.

Thus the Russian national question was organically divided into tactical considerations, which could be adjusted to the varying circumstances of different countries, and questions of strategy which would always be centrally controlled by a united, cohesive party. The dialectical connection between these two aspects was obvious as long as it was a question of preparing the revolution. But as soon as it had succeeded, the complementarities became paradoxes, and the theoretical paradox soon grew the sharp teeth of political incompatibility. Lenin obstinately retained his formulation and his assumptions in the face of all practical difficulties and opposition from his colleagues. But without these assumptions his thesis, suitably interpreted, now provided a means

¹ *Sochineniya*, Vol. XX, pp. 416–17.

² *Ibid.*, p. 366.

of dealing with the national question quite differently from the way he had intended. In writing on the national question under Lenin's guidance and direction before the war, Stalin had attacked the federal party of the Austrians:

In this way a united class movement has been broken up into separate national streams. . . . This only helps to aggravate and confuse the problem by creating conditions which actually favour the destruction of the unity of the working-class movement, which foster national division among the workers and intensify friction between them.¹

This emphasis on party cohesion if necessary at the expense of national separation was to be significant. By 1918 Stalin, now the established party expert on the question of nationalities, had redefined Lenin's thesis even more ominously—and almost like a caricature of Rosa Luxemburg.

All this leads to the necessity of interpreting the principle of self-determination not as a right for the bourgeoisie but [exclusively] for the working masses of the nation concerned. The principle of self-determination must be an instrument in the struggle for Socialism and must be subordinated to the principles of Socialism.²

Self-determination had now lost its specific meaning. So many of Stalin's linguistic efforts emptied useful and fairly precise words into a series of flat slogans which all had the same generalized lack of content (Chapter XVIII, pp. 803, 815). Henceforward it would not be difficult to label a demand for secession as bourgeois and contrast it with the progressive demand for unity with Russia coming from the (assumed) working masses—and call both the latter as well as the former self-determination. In this way a minority could be held to speak for the masses and Russia could confidently refuse the desire for secession—or even too much autonomy—by any border nation on the grounds that such a demand could only be bourgeois and therefore not the will of the masses.

¹ Stalin, 'Marxism and the national question', *Sochineniya*, Vol. II, pp. 331–2.

² Stalin, 'Report on the national question (1918)', *Sochineniya*, Vol. IV, pp. 31–32. Rosa Luxemburg had frequently stated that if national self-determination were made completely subordinate to Socialism, if only such self-determination were admissible as really furthering Socialism—then self-determination was self-liquidating because it had no meaning at all. The argument seemed sterile precisely because no one held such an abstract view of self-determination.

Whereas Stalin reinterpreted Leninism while claiming devotion to it, others tried more honestly to reformulate Lenin's official thesis, and therefore clashed with him publicly. See *Protokoly VIII s'ezd RKP(B)*, pp. 88 ff., 92 ff.

And this is what happened in practice.¹ But of course it is not what Rosa Luxemburg wanted. The abandonment of the national right of self-determination had to come autonomously from Poles and Letts, not be dictated by Russia. The Bolshevik encouragement of self-determination had produced a serious weakening of the revolutionary heartland in 1918 which Rosa Luxemburg repeatedly lamented at the time (Chapter XV). In *The Russian Revolution*, she foresaw that just this self-imposed weakness might eventually lead to Bolshevik harshness and rigidity in order to overcome the problem they had themselves helped to create. Already the terror, the suppression of all other papers and parties, were the derived results of Lenin's fatal policy. She preferred an open campaign of argument against the outdated right of self-determination to Stalin's over-subtle but repressive reinterpretation of this right in the throes of necessity. The ultimate effects of both Stalin's and Rosa Luxemburg's policy might have been similar—cultural and local autonomy for different nationalities but administrative and political inclusion in the Soviet Union with central control—but certainly Rosa Luxemburg would never have accepted the methods by which this was ultimately achieved. It was in her acute, almost visionary, characterization of the methodological consequences of Bolshevik nationality policy that Rosa Luxemburg rose to greater intellectual heights—not in her persistent denials of the strength and revolutionary potential of nationalism. Perhaps it was historically insoluble, like the peasant question; probably Lenin's policy could only lead to Stalin's practical application, and Rosa Luxemburg's campaign for a revolutionary Socialism without nationalism was doomed to the realm of theory.

Rosa Luxemburg's extreme and assertive internationalism has puzzled many commentators. Communist history sees it as an aberration—one of many; an aberration, however, that can only be understood in relation to 'correct' Leninism. The fact that it was not singled out for more precise attack in the early 1920s speaks as much for the importance of so many of her ex-colleagues in the Russian party as for any sympathy with her views as such. Non-Communist (or ex-Communist) writers like Paul Frölich have tried to connect Rosa Luxemburg's anti-nationalism with her social origin as a member of an underprivileged minority. Occasionally attempts have been made to discover a specifically Jewish aspect in her philosophy.

¹ The best treatment of Soviet nationality policy in practice is in Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1954; E. H. Carr, *A History of Soviet Russia*, London 1951, Vol. I, part 3. For a comprehensive treatment of the problem up to the present, see Walter Kolarz, *Communism and Colonialism*, London 1964.

This is not a simple question. First there is the denial of a specific Polish right to self-determination—not the same as a denial of Polish nationality. She always recognized this distinct national identity (Chapter VI). Though Rosa Luxemburg herself probably gave more weight to Polish autonomy for tactical reasons than she initially wanted, the assertion of her own Polish background was a constant means of differentiation from the Germans whom she so disliked. This assertion was always Polish rather than Jewish. Though fond of using pithy Yiddish shorthand, she had no time for self-conscious Jewishness, either as a pattern of behaviour or as a basis for personal identity. One of the first things to annoy her *chez* Kautsky was the Jewish atmosphere of pointless stories and too much good food (Chapter IX). In 1917 when many of her friends were looking for a rationalization of their despair she rapped Mathilde Wurm sharply over the emotional knuckles:

Why do you come with your special Jewish sorrows? I feel just as sorry for the wretched Indian victims in Putamayo, the negroes in Africa. . . . The 'lofty silence of the eternal' in which so many cries have echoed away unheard resounds so strongly within me that I cannot find a special corner in my heart for the ghetto. I feel at home in the entire world wherever there are clouds and birds and human tears.¹

So we must distinguish between national consciousness and patriotism. One was permissibly personal, a qualitative selection of characteristics which Rosa liked or disliked in others—and, one presumes, liked and disliked in herself. She was given to unrestrained generalizations in this: person *x* was typically German, quality *y* typically Russian. Scandinavians were hell; the English too, on the whole—and such dissimulators into the bargain. Lenin's intransigence was 'Tartar-Mongolian savagery'. And so on. But this never interfered with politics, either overtly or subconsciously; none of her German biographers seems even to have been aware that she disliked the men and *mores* of a society for which she laid down her life. What turns national into patriotic consciousness is conceptualization of personal feelings into policy, connecting discrete personal sensations into a coherent system of beliefs and attitudes. The distinction may seem artificial because it is unfamiliar. For most people a strong and critical sense of attributes turns automatically into a system of patriotic consciousness. But not in the case of Rosa Luxemburg. The notion of a national fatherland, even of a special cultural home, was entirely alien.

Was Rosa Luxemburg then the first world citizen able to conceptualize an internationality with the same profound and personal meaning

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, pp. 48–49, dated 16 February 1917.

that nationality has for ordinary mortals? This has been the usual answer. I believe it to be false. Such internationalism, where it does exist, is usually a negative not a positive quality, a revolt against national disappointment rather than an embrace of a wider, more diffuse unity. Most rebels of this sort seek a fervent new nationalism, some a millenarian (or other) religion, a few become citizens of the world—but always in negation. It is easier for Marxists—new hatreds and new loyalties. Communists objectify their personal relations with a tight collective. The emotions that usually find fulfilment in patriotism become stunted, and in the resultant desert others proliferate instead. But many of the patriotic characteristics and attitudes remain. Lenin combined a precise and specific hatred of Russian chauvinism with full acceptance and manifestation of Russian culture and attitudes; was he an internationalist? Rosa Luxemburg's 'patriotic' emotions remained precise and concentrated—but they did not happen to be rooted in the *Gestalt* of geographical boundaries or ethnic similarities.¹ She, more than any other Marxist, succeeded in transposing her loyalties from *nation* to *class*—intact.

The public prosecutor went to town in his closing remarks on the subject of the German citizen, the patriot, whose function it is to guard the honour and decency of the German Reich against me, a creature without a home. As regards the question of being an expatriate, I wouldn't swop with the public prosecutor on any account. I have a dearer, greater home than any Prussian prosecutor. . . . What other fatherland is there than the great mass of working men and women? What other fatherland is there than the improvement of life, the improvement of morality, the improvement of the intellectual strength of the great masses which constitute a people?²

Rosa Luxemburg transferred all the energy and satisfactions of patriotic consciousness to class consciousness—to the working class. This was neither an effort of the intellect nor a ritual of ideological purification, but a genuine objectification of class as a focus for personal loyalties.³ Loyalties must necessarily be limited in every person; unless the human personality is totally reconstructed there can be no reserve

¹ For an analysis of the concept and reality of 'nation' as limited to the fading bourgeois era, see 'The question of nationality and autonomy', *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*; above pp. 848–9.

² Rosa Luxemburg's speech at Freiburg in *Volksmacht*, Freiburg, No. 57, 9 March 1914, reprinted in *Rosa Luxemburg . . . gegen . . . Militarismus*, p. 97.

³ The fact that such a transfer is possible seems to me to invalidate the this-far-but-no-further neo-Marxist sociology of Ralf Dahrendorf and his school. Class—still the basic tool of his social analysis—is there defined as the social unit exercising the function of authority, or having authority exercised over it. This is fine. How does one develop quasi-patriotic loyalty to an objective social function, or lack of one?

fund of loyalties to new concepts or structures. All that is possible is transference; taking from one and giving to another—a form of substitution. Either some loyalties wither at the expense of others, or they are transferred intact to a different set of relations. This is what Rosa Luxemburg achieved. Not only she, but the whole group of ‘her’ Poles—some Jewish, some distinctly not—with whom she was associated for so long. We see it in Marchlewski’s periodic immersions in a working-class life so ill-suited to his patrician personality. We see it in Dzierżyński’s persistent refusal to accept the Bolshevik policy of national self-determination in spite of his fervent embrace of all other Bolshevik doctrines. We see it finally in Radek’s impish desire to *épater les bourgeois* in the Germany which he hated and to which he always longed to return—with all its self-conscious stress on national virtue. In their various ways they were all immediately sensitive to manifestations of patriotism, in institutions as much as in individuals. Their campaign against nationalism was as much against the latent, intangible, purely personal patriotism of their contemporaries as against any manifest policies of parties.

Is it possible to be a Marxist without achieving not only a substitution of class consciousness for patriotic consciousness, but an immersion in class *instead* of nation? Have any of the leading Marxists in Russia or China achieved it today? Or is the whole substantial return to the national unit as fact and concept the most retrograde step of all? Rosa Luxemburg stands at the apex of the attempt to make operational the Marxist concept of class as the primary social referent, and to break once and for all the old alternative stranglehold of nation. In this respect her contribution is second to none.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A comprehensive bibliography of contemporary and subsequent writing on all the questions discussed in this book would be a major research task for an entire team. My present efforts will therefore be selective. The bibliography is divided into three sections covering, first, all Rosa Luxemburg's own writings as far as they are known; secondly, the most important biographical material on Rosa Luxemburg; finally, a section setting out other works referred to in the text. Works consulted but not referred to are excluded from this last section.

The following abbreviations of the main journals are used; the others are repeated in full.

<i>Cz.Sz.</i>	— <i>Czerwony Sztandar</i>
<i>LV</i>	— <i>Leipziger Volkszeitung</i>
<i>NZ</i>	— <i>Neue Zeit</i>
<i>PSD</i>	— <i>Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny</i>
<i>SAZ</i>	— <i>Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung</i>
<i>SDK</i>	— <i>Sozialdemokratische Korrespondenz</i>
<i>Spr.Rob.</i>	— <i>Sprawa Robotnicza</i>

Reports of SPD annual congresses in this bibliography are referred to as, for example, *Protokoll . . . 1910*.

The arrangement is as follows:

I	WRITINGS BY ROSA LUXEMBURG	page 864
	A—Letters	864
	B—Speeches	868
	C—Articles	876
	D—Pamphlets and Books	910
	E—Main Collections of Writings	916
II	BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIAL	918
III	GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY	920

SECTION I

WRITINGS BY ROSA LUXEMBURG

PART A—LETTERS

(i) *Published letters* (in chronological order of publication)

1. *Briefe aus dem Gefängnis*, Berlin 1920.
To Sophie [Sonia] Liebknecht, wife of Karl Liebknecht, from 1914 to 1918.
2. 'Ein neuer unveröffentlichter Brief Rosa Luxemburgs aus dem Gefängnis', *Jugend-Internationale*, 1921, Vol. I, No. 5.
To Mathilde Wurm, dated 7 February 1918.
3. *Briefe an Karl und Luise Kautsky (1896-1918)*, Berlin 1923. English translation, *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, New York 1923 (translated by Louis P. Lochner).
4. 'Aus den Briefen Rosa Luxemburgs an Franz Mehring, [edited by] F. Schwabel', *Internationale*, 1923, Vol. II, No. 3, pp. 67-72.
Selections from the letters of Rosa Luxemburg to Franz Mehring.
5. 'Brief aus der Zelle', *Tagebuch*, 26 April 1924, No. 17, p. 556.
6. 'Unveröffentlichte Briefe', *Tagebuch*, 4, 11, 18 October 1924, No. 40, p. 1410, No. 41, pp. 1447-9, No. 42, pp. 1484-6.
To unknown addressees and Hans Diefenbach.
7. R.L. 'Ein unveröffentlichter Brief. Aus dem Berliner Weibergefängnis Barnimstrasse', *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 28 December 1924, No. 355, p. 5.
To unknown addressee, dated 9 April 1915.
8. 'Unveröffentlichte Briefe von Karl Liebknecht und Rosa Luxemburg', *Unter dem Banner des Marxismus*, 1925, No. 2, pp. 416-25.
Letters between Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht during 1915, regarding the Junius theses.
9. 'Ein unveröffentlichter Brief Rosa Luxemburgs aus dem Berliner Frauengefängnis Barnimstrasse', *Aktion*, 15 January 1925.
10. 'Pismo tov. Rosy Luksemburg tov. Leninu', *Pravda*, 15 January 1925.
To Lenin, dated 20 December 1918.
11. Postcard to Karl Liebknecht at Luckau [penitentiary], *Rote Fahne*, 15 January 1926, No. 12, Supplement No. 2, p. 1.
Facsimile dated 8 August 1918.
12. 'Unbekannter Brief Rosa Luxemburgs. Als Rosa aus dem Gefängnis kam . . .', *Rote Fahne*, 18 July 1926, No. 165, Supplement p. 1.
13. *Niedersächsische Arbeiterzeitung*, 7 August 1926. Reprinted in

Germanskoe Rabochee Dvizhenie v novoe vremya, Moscow 1962, pp. 402-4 (to 'an unknown addressee').

To Karl Moor in Switzerland, dated 12 October 1914.

14. *Internationale*, 1 March 1927, No. 5, pp. 154-5, quoted in Ernst Meyer, 'Zur Loslösung der Linksradiكالen vom Zentrum in der Vorkriegszeit'.

15. 'Letters to Potresov, Axelrod and Dan, 1904-1905', *Sotsial-Demokratischeskoe dvizhenie v Rossii, Materialy*, Moscow/Leningrad 1928.

16. Franz Mehring, *Zur Literaturgeschichte von Calderon bis Heine*. Berlin 1928, p. 10.

To Franz Mehring, dated 27 February 1916.

17. *Illustrierte Geschichte der deutschen Revolution*, Berlin 1929, p. 62.

To Clara Zetkin, dated early 1907.

18. *Z Pola Walki*, 1929, Nos. 7/8, pp. 184-90.

To Warszawski, dated August 1903.

19. *Rote Fahne*, 15 January 1929, No. 12, Supplement 2, p. 1.

To Leo Jogiches, dated 8 December 1915, regarding Zimmerwald conference.

20. *Volksstimme* (Chemnitz), 15 January 1929.

To Mathilde Wurm, dated 18 July 1906 and 16 February 1917.

21. *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya*, July 1929, No. 7, pp. 160-1.

Extract from letter to Clara Zetkin dated 3 July 1913.

22. 'Listy Rózy Luksemburg do Leona Jogiches (J. Tyszki) 1893r.-1896r.', *Z Pola Walki*, 1930, Nos. 9/10, pp. 108-62 (Jogiches letters).

To Leo Jogiches, dated 1893-1896.

23. 'Listy Rózy Luksemburg. Rok 1905', *Z Pola Walki*, 1931, Nos. 11/12, pp. 178-267.

To Leo Jogiches, P. Akselrod, and A. Warszawski, dated 1905 (Jogiches letters).

24. *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya*, 1931, Nos. 2-3, pp. 119-34.

To Leo Jogiches, dated March-August 1910.

25. 'Aus Briefen Rosa Luxemburgs', *Internationale*, June 1931, No. 6, pp. 277-9.

To unknown addressees, dated 18 October 1910 and September 1911.

26. *Protokoly Soveshchaniya rasshirennoi redaktsii 'Proletariya' Iyul' 1909g.*, Moscow 1934, pp. 260-1, 263.

Extracts from letters to Leo Jogiches dated August 1909.

27. Roland-Holst van der Schalk, *Rosa Luxemburg. Haar leven en werken*, Rotterdam 1935, pp. 294-316.

To Henriette Roland-Holst, dated 27 October and 17 December 1904, 2 October 1905, 30 January 1907, August 1911.

28. Rosa Luxemburg, *Briefe an Freunde*, Hamburg 1950. (Nach dem von Luise Kautsky fertig gestellten Manuskript, herausgegeben von Benedikt Kautsky.)

To various correspondents.

29. 'Einige Briefe Rosa Luxemburgs und andere Dokumente', *Bulletin of the International Institute of Social History*, Amsterdam 1952, Vol. VIII, No. 1, pp. 9-39.

30. 'Aus einem Brief Rosa Luxemburgs vom 17 November 1914 an Konstantin Zetkin zur Vorbereitung der Reichstagssitzung vom 2 Dezember 1914', *Dokumente und Materialien zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, Berlin (East) 1958, Vol. I, p. 56.

31. 'Nieznane listy do Roberta i Matyldy Seidlów z lat 1895-1908', *Z Pola Walki*, 1959, No. 1(5), pp. 63-90 (Seidel letters).

To Robert and Mathilde Seidel, dated 1895-1898.

32. 'Korespondencja Róży Luksemburg i Juliana Marchlewskiego z działaczem czeskiej socjaldemokracji Antoninem Nemcem', *Z Pola Walki*, 1959, No. 3(7), pp. 130-9.

To Julian Marchlewski regarding the problem of Czech Social Democracy at the Copenhagen International congress.

33. *R. Luksemburg o literaturze* (Sostavlene, perevodi, vstupitelnaya statya i primechaniya M. Korrallova), Moscow 1961.

Collection of various letters including letters to Konstantin Zetkin, dated March 1907 to May 1912; to Clara Zetkin, dated October 1915 to April 1918.

34. 'Listy do Leona Jogiches (J. Tyszki)', *Z Pola Walki*, 1961, No. 3 (15); 1962, No. 1(17); 1962, No. 2(18); 1962, No. 4(20); 1963, Nos. 1/2(21-22); 1963, No. 3(23); 1963, No. 4(24); 1964, Nos. 1(25), 3(27), 4(28); 1965, No. 1(29) (Jogiches letters).

To Leo Jogiches, dated from May 1898 to Autumn 1899. (*Z Pola Walki* is continuing the publication of all the available letters of Rosa Luxemburg to Leo Jogiches. Between the completion of this manuscript and publication several further numbers of *Z Pola Walki* with more letters will have appeared. Reference to these letters in the text is made as follows: where printed, the relevant issue and page number of *Z Pola Walki* is given, otherwise the reference is to the unpublished originals in IML(M), see below, p. 867.)

35. W. Blumenberg, 'Einige Briefe Rosa Luxemburgs', *International Review of Social History*, Amsterdam 1963, Vol. VIII, Part 1, pp. 97-108.

36. Ralph H. Lutz, 'Rosa Luxemburg's unpublished prison letters 1916-1918', *Journal of Central European Affairs*, October 1963, Vol. XXIII, No. 3, p. 305.

37. Max Hochdorf, *Rosa Luxemburg*, Berlin n.d., appendix.
Facsimile of letter to J. Dietz dated 28 July 1916, from the Barnimstrasse prison.

(ii) *Unpublished letters*

Rosa Luxemburg was a very indifferent keeper of letters and records—as haphazard as Leo Jogiches was punctilious. Her own papers were ransacked by soldiers immediately after her final arrest on 15 January 1919. For several years the KPD, particularly Paul Frölich, made considerable efforts to reassemble letters and other documents—on Lenin's personal instructions. At this time much acrid correspondence and public denunciations took place between the KPD and some of Rosa's non-Communist friends over possession of letters, nearly leading to litigation about publication rights (those affected included Mathilde Jakob, the Kautskys, Paul Levi and others). It was at this time also that the last of Rosa Luxemburg's *personalia* in the possession of her family in Warsaw were acquired. When Paul Frölich left the KPD, he retained part of the material he had assembled, but the cases containing it were lost when he hurriedly emigrated to France after 1933. A further effort was made after the Second World War, both by official institutes and by private individuals. Considering the repeated depletions, the quantity of surviving material, published and unpublished, is remarkable.

The biggest archival collection of Rosa Luxemburg's letters is in the Institut Marksizma-Leninizma, Moscow (IML(M)), Fund 209 (Rosa Luxemburg). This collection contains over a thousand items. Other letters from and to Rosa Luxemburg are to be found in other related funds like Franz Mehring (Fund 201). Most of the original recipients of these letters later became Communists.

Further archival collections are in the Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus, East Berlin (IML (B)), and Archiwum Zakładu Historii Partii, Warsaw (ZHP). Individual items from these collections have been printed (see above in the published collections).

A substantial collection of 125 letters from Rosa Luxemburg to Mathilde Jacob and others covering the period 1916–1918 is in the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace at Stanford University, California.

The bulk of the collection of the letters at the International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, has now been published (see above, Nos. 29 and 35). There are still a few unpublished letters in various collections of papers at Amsterdam, e.g. the Guesde Archives.

A collection of letters is in the Archive of the SPD, Bonn—mostly addressed to contemporaries who remained in the SPD after the war. The letters to Alfred Henke and Wilhelm Dittmann form the most interesting part of this collection.

There are also collections of letters in private hands, most of which have been published but a few letters still remain, including a private collection of letters of Jewish Socialists in Israel.

PART B—SPEECHES

These are based on the reports in newspapers and official published proceedings. Included in this section are resolutions put forward verbally—those submitted merely in writing appear in the section on articles—and such letters as refer to the speeches in question, i.e. corrections, interpretations, etc.

1893

38. *Internationaler Sozialistischer Arbeiterkongress in der Tonhalle, Zürich, vom 6 bis 12 August 1893, Protokoll. Hrsg. vom Organisationskomitee*, Zürich 1894, p. 15.

SDKP mandates at Zürich International Congress, 8 August 1893. (See Nos. 123 and 657.)

1898

39. *Volksmacht*, Breslau, 6 June 1898, No. 129, p. 3.

Election speech at Breslau, 5 June 1898.

40. *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Parteitages der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands. Abgehalten zu Stuttgart vom 3 bis 8 Oktober 1898*, Berlin 1898, pp. 99–100, 117–18.

At SPD congress in Stuttgart on 3 and 4 October 1898.

1899

41. 'Der jetzige Kurs und die Socialdemokratie' (The present course of Social Democracy), *Vorwärts*, 14 February 1899, No. 38, Supplement 2, p. 2.

At Charlottenburg on 9 February 1899.

42. 'Über die Aufgaben des Parteitages' (The tasks of the party congress), *LV*, 30 August 1899, No. 200.

Report of speech on 29 August 1899 in Leipzig.

43. *Vorwärts*, 7 September 1899, No. 209, Supplement 1, p. 2.

In 3rd electoral district about the party congress on 5 September 1899.

44. 'Eine Richtigstellung' (A correction), *LV*, 9 September 1899, No. 209.

Letter to *Vorwärts* relating to speech No. 43.

45. *Protokoll . . . 1899*, pp. 171–5, 219, 222, 265–7, 290–1.

Speeches and comments during SPD congress at Hanover from 11 to 14 October 1899.

1900

46. *Gazeta Robotnicza*, 13 January 1900, No. 2, pp. 2-3.
In Upper Silesia on 31 December 1899.
47. *Gazeta Robotnicza*, 28 April 1900, No. 17, p. 3 and 5 May 1900, No. 18, p. 3.
At the fifth Prussian PPS congress on 15 and 16 April 1900.
48. *Gazeta Robotnicza*, 11 August 1900, No. 32, p. 3.
At Trzcianka on 29 July 1900.
49. *Protokoll . . . 1900*, pp. 116-17, 124, 126-7, 130, 165, 193, 194-5, 199-200.
Speeches and comments during SPD congress at Munich from 17 to 19 September 1900.
50. *Cinquième Congrès Socialiste Internationale tenu à Paris du 23 au 27 Septembre 1900*. Compte rendu analytique officiel, Paris 1901. Soc. Nouvelle de Librairie et d'Édition, pp. 31-32, 94, 105; unofficial, pp. 43-46, 181-5, 187.
Speeches at fifth International congress at Paris.

1901

51. 'Agitation und Organisation', *Volkswacht*, Breslau, 12 June 1901, No. 134, p. 2.
At the second Poznań provincial SPD congress on 9 June 1901 at Bydgoszcz.
52. 'Weltpolitik und die Arbeiterklasse' (World policy and the working classes), *Vorwärts*, 20 June 1901, No. 141, p. 4.
Meeting in the 1st electoral district in Berlin on 18 June 1901.
53. *Gazeta Robotnicza*, 22 June 1901, No. 25, p. 2.
Resolution at second SPD congress of the Poznań province at Bydgoszcz on 9 June 1901.
54. 'Bürgerliche Sozialreform und Sozialdemokratie' (Bourgeois social reform and Social Democracy), *Volkswacht*, Breslau, 25 June 1901, No. 145, pp. 1-2.
At Breslau on 24 June 1901.
55. *Protokoll . . . 1901*, pp. 108-9, 127-8.
Speeches and comments during SPD congress at Lübeck from 22 to 23 September 1901.
56. 'Interview przedstawiciela Redakcji "Kuriera Poznańskiego" z panią Różą Luksemburg. Rozmowę przeprowadził R. T.' (Interview with Rosa Luxemburg regarding Polish/German party relations), *Kurier Poznański*, 28 September 1901, No. 442, pp. 1-2.

1902

57. 'Sozialreform und Sozialdemokratie' (Social reform and Social Democracy), *Vorwärts*, 2 March 1902, No. 52, p. 4.
In 1st electoral district on 26 February 1902.

58. 'Sprawa polska w Ks. Poznańskim' (The Polish question at the Poznań congress), *Kurier Poznański*, 7-9 March 1902, Nos. 110 and 114.

At Poznań on 5 and 7 March regarding agitation among the Poles.

59. 'Die Arbeiterklasse und ihre bürgerlichen Freunde' (The working class and their middle-class friends), *LV*, 21 April 1902, No. 88, Supplement 1.

At a party rally of 12th and 13th Saxon electoral districts on 17 April 1902.

60. *Protokoll . . . 1902*, pp. 87, 149-51, 154-5, 161.

Resolution 91 and speech on Polish question at SPD congress at Munich on 16 September 1902.

1903

61. *PSD*, April 1903, No. 4, pp. 145-6.

Resolution at third congress of SPD in the province of Poznań on 8 and 9 March 1903.

62. *LV*, 11 June 1903, No. 131.

At electoral rally in 17th electoral district in Saxony: on 6 June at Glauchau, on 7 June at Mülsen, on 8 June at Meerane.

63. 'Zayavlenie predstavitelei SDKPiL' (SDKPiL statement of intentions), *Vtoroi ocherednoi s'ezd RSDRP*, Geneva 1903, pp. 388-90.

Declaration of SDKPiL delegates at second RSDRP congress on 6 August 1903 written by Rosa Luxemburg but submitted by Warszawski.

64. *Protokoll . . . 1903*, pp. 277-9.

Regarding Polish question at the SPD congress at Dresden on 16 September 1903.

1904

65. *La Réunion du Bureau Socialiste Internationale*, Brussels 1904, pp. 5, 10-11.

Resolutions and speeches regarding the SDKPiL and Russian revolutionaries in Germany at the International Socialist Bureau on 7 February 1904.

66. *Sixième Congrès Socialiste International tenu à Amsterdam du 14 au 20 août 1904. Compte rendu analytique* Brussels 1904, pp. 148, 173-4 (German edition, pp. 49, 64).

Speeches and declarations at sixth congress of the International in Amsterdam on 17, 18, 19 August 1904.

67. *Cz.Sz.*, December 1904, No. 22, p. 12.

On 26 July and 25 October 1904 at Zwickau.

1905

68. *Le Bureau Socialiste International*, Brussels 1905, pp. 10, 14-15.

Mandate and representation question at the International Socialist Bureau on 15 January 1905.

69. 'Freiheitskämpfe der Vergangenheit und Gegenwart' (Freedom struggles of the past and present), *LV*, 25 March 1905, No. 70, Supplement 5, pp. 1-2.

At party rally on 24 March 1905 in 12th electoral district of Leipzig.

70. *Protokoll . . . 1905*, pp. 256-7, 269-71, 320-1.

Speeches and comments during SPD congress at Jena on 21 and 22 September 1905.

71. 'Der politische Massenstreik' (The political mass strike), *LV*, 8 November 1905, No. 259.

Lecture in Leipzig on 7 November 1905.

72. 'Der politische Massenstreik' (The political mass strike), *Vorwärts*, 8 December 1905, No. 287, Supplement 2, p. 1.

At a party meeting in Berlin on 6 December 1905.

1906

73. *Protokoll . . . 1906*, pp. 260-2, 315-16.

Speeches and comments during SPD congress at Mannheim on 26 and 28 September 1906.

74. 'Rosa Luxemburg über die russische Revolution' (Rosa Luxemburg on the revolution in Russia), *LV*, 29 September 1906, No. 226, Supplement 4; *Vorwärts*, 29 September, No. 227; and *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, 8 December 1906, No. 235.

At Mannheim on 25 September.

75. 'Genossin Dr. Rosa Luxemburg wegen Aufreizung zu Gewalttätigkeiten auf der Anklagebank' (Comrade Luxemburg accused of inciting to violence), *LV*, 13 December 1906, No. 288, Supplement 3, p. 1; also *SAZ*, 13 December, No. 288, Supplement 1, p. 1; and *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, 15 December, No. 193.

Before provincial court at Weimar on 12 December 1906.

1907

76. 'Die Lehren der letzten Reichstagswahl' (The lessons of the latest Reichstag elections), *Vorwärts*, 9 March 1907, No. 58, Supplement 2, p. 1.

Electoral speech on 6 March 1907 in Berlin.

77. *Vorwärts*, 16 April 1907, No. 88, Supplement 1, p. 2.

Tribute at funeral of I. Auer on 14 April 1907.

78. *Protokoly Londonskii s'ezd*, pp. 83-89, 284-91, 321-4.

At fifth London congress of RSDRP on 16, 25, and 27 May 1907.

79. *Vorwärts*, 18 August 1907, No. 192, Supplement 2, pp. 1-3; also *LV*, 20 August, No. 192, Supplement 3, p. 2.

First international conference of Socialist women preceding seventh International congress at Stuttgart on 18 August 1907.

80. *Septième Congrès Socialiste International tenu à Stuttgart du 16 au 27 août 1907. Compte rendu analytique*, Brussels 1908, pp. 91–92, 152–5. Speeches, protests, and resolutions at seventh International congress at Stuttgart between 16 and 27 August 1907.
81. 'Die zweite Vortragsreihe über die Nationalökonomie' ('The second series of lectures on political economy'), *Vorwärts*, 20 October 1907, No. 246, Supplement 2, p. 1.
Lecture on economics in Berlin on 18 October 1907.

1908

82. *Vorwärts*, 26 January 1908, No. 22, Supplement 1, p. 3.
Protest resolution against police action in Berlin on 24 January 1908.
83. *Protokoll . . . 1908*, pp. 230–1, 267–9, 363–5.
Speeches and comments during SPD congress at Nürnberg on 14, 15, and 17 September 1908.
84. *Sprawozdanie z VI zjazdu Socjaldemokracji Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy*, Cracow 1910, pp. 179–80.
Letter to sixth congress of SDKPiL, 2 December 1908.

1910

85. 'Der Wahlrechtskampf und seine Lehren' ('The suffrage struggle and its lessons'), *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, 7 April 1910, No. 80, p. 1.
86. 'Der preussische Wahlrechtskampf und seine Lehren. Vortrag gehalten am 17 April 1910 im Zirkus Schumann zu Frankfurt am Main. Stenographischer Bericht' ('The Prussian suffrage struggle and its lessons. Lecture on 17 April 1910 in Schumann Circus, Frankfurt on Main. Stenographic report'), *Volksstimme*, pp. 16 ff.
87. *Huitième Congrès Socialiste International tenu à Copenhague du 18 août au 3 Septembre 1910. Compte rendu analytique publié par le Secrétariat du Bureau Socialiste International*, Gand 1911, pp. 233, 247, 254–5, 418–19, 424, 426–7, 433–4.
Discussion and speeches on various organizational mandate and political questions at eighth International congress at Copenhagen on 29, 31 August and 1 September 1910.
88. 'Monarchie, Kaiserrede und Sozialdemokratie' ('Empire, the Emperor's speech and Social Democracy'), *LV*, 13 September 1910, No. 212, p. 2.
At Schopfheim and Lörrach (Baden) on 10 and 11 September 1910.
89. *Protokoll . . . 1910*, pp. 181–2, 304–7, 426–30.
Speeches and comments during SPD congress at Magdeburg on 21 and 23 September 1910.

90. 'Berichtigung' (A correction), *Vorwärts*, 8 November 1910, No. 262, p. 3.

Comment on report of Rosa Luxemburg's speech at Spandau on 4 November 1910 reported in *Vorwärts*, 6 November 1910, No. 261, p. 3.

1911

91. 'Unser Kampf um die Macht' (Our struggle for power), *LV*, 15 June 1911, No. 137.

92. *Protokoll . . . 1911*, pp. 204-7, 247-9, 348-9.

Speeches and comments during SPD congress at Vienna on 11, 12, and 14 September 1911.

93. *Bulletin Périodique du Bureau Socialiste International*, Brussels 1912, No. 8, p. 129; *LV*, 28 September 1911, No. 225, p. 2.

Discussion on breach of privilege in International Socialist Bureau, Zürich, on 23 September 1911 and comment in *LV*.

94. 'Dem Weltkrieg entgegen' (Towards the world war), *Schwäbische Tagwacht*, Stuttgart, 9 October 1911, No. 235; also *Vorwärts*, 10 October 1911, No. 237, Supplement 1, p. 1.

Mass rally against colonialism at Stuttgart on 7 October.

95. 'Die politische Lage und die Sozialdemokratie' (The political situation and Social Democracy), *LV*, 4 December 1911, No. 280, pp. 2-3.

At Leipzig on 1 December 1911.

96. 'Im Kampfe um den ersten Berliner Reichstagswahlkreis' (The struggle in the first Berlin electoral district), *Vorwärts*, 20 December 1911, No. 297, Supplement 1, pp. 2-3. 'Zuschrift' (Comment), *Vorwärts*, 22 December 1911, No. 299, Supplement 3, p. 2.

Electoral campaign for *Reichstag* speech in Berlin on 18 December 1911.

1912

97. *Vorwärts*, 2 April 1912, No. 78, Supplement 1, pp. 2-3; *Internationales Jahrbuch für Politik und Arbeiterbewegung*, Berlin 1912, p. 116; *LV*, 2 April 1912, No. 78.

At general meeting of the association of Berlin SPD electoral districts on 31 March 1912.

98. *LV*, 30 October 1912, No. 253, Supplement 3, p. 1.

At International Bureau on 28 October 1912, about the Balkan war.

1913

99. *LV*, 13 June 1913, No. 134, Supplement 3, p. 1.

At party rally at Wilmersdorf, Berlin, regarding mass strike.

100. 'Der politische Massenstreik' (The political mass strike), *Vorwärts*, 24 July 1913, No. 187, Supplement 1, p. 1; also *LV*, 26 July 1913, No. 171, Supplement 3, p. 1.

At 4th Berlin electoral district on 22 July 1913.

101. 'Der politische Massenstreik' (The political mass strike), *Vorwärts*, 11 August 1913, No. 205, p. 3, and 12 August, No. 206, Supplement 1, p. 1.

Speech and resolution at the electoral district of Niederbarnim on 10 August 1913.

102. 'Über den Parteitag in Jena' (On the party congress at Jena), *Vorwärts*, 17 August 1913, No. 211, Supplement 3, p. 2.

At Mariendorf on 15 August 1913.

103. *LV*, 26 August 1913, No. 197, Supplement 3, p. 1; also *Vorwärts*, 24 August 1913, No. 218, Supplement 1, p. 3.

On 22 August 1913 regarding mass strike.

104. *Protokoll . . . 1913*, pp. 194-5, 197-8, 288-93, 485-7.

Resolutions of Rosa Luxemburg and others regarding mass strike and government budget at SPD congress at Jena on 14 and 20 September and speeches in support.

105. *Protokoll . . . 1913*, pp. 543-4.

Speech at SPD congress at Jena regarding Radek.

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115. *KPD Bericht*, pp. 10-11, 17-18, 18-42. (See below, p. 933, No. 274.)
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PART C—ARTICLES

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The following bibliography of Rosa Luxemburg's published works is chronological according to date of publication, not writing. A brief summary of content is attached to those items where the title is no guide. This section is based on the excellent Polish research published under the title of 'Bibliografia pierwodruków Róży Luksemburg', *Z Pola Walki*, 1962, No. 3(19), pp. 161-226, by Jadwiga Kaczanowska under the supervision of Feliks Tych. I have cited Rosa Luxemburg's pseudonym where applicable; anonymous publications are referred to as such, and articles without any specific mention appeared under Rosa Luxemburg's full name.

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134. Anon.: 'Ruch robotniczy za granicą' (The workers' movement abroad), *Spr.Rob.*, March 1894, No. 9, pp. 2–3.
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1906

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1909

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1913

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625. 'Der Anfang' (The beginning), *Rote Fahne*, 18 November 1918, No. 3, pp. 1-2.

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633. Anon.: 'Parteitag der Unabhängigen SP' (The party congress of

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1919

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649. 'Die Ordnung herrscht in Berlin' (Order reigns in Berlin), *Rote Fahne*, 14 January 1919, No. 14, pp. 1-2.
650. 'Die Rote Fahne. Polnische Arbeiter-Marseillaise. Übersetzt von Rosa Luxemburg' (The Red Flag. Polish workers' song. Translated by Rosa Luxemburg), *Jugend-Internationale*, August 1919, No. 13, p. 2.

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1928

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Regarding tactics of German Social Democracy in 1907.

PART D—PAMPHLETS AND BOOKS

1892

654. Pamphlet.

R. Kruszyńska: *Święto Pierwszego Maja* (Celebration of the 1st of May), Paris 1892.

655. Pamphlet.

Anon.: *Święto 1 Maja 1892 w Łodzi* (Celebration of the 1st of May 1892 in Łódź). [Place unknown] 1892.

1893

656. Pamphlet.

Anon.: *Bericht an den III Internationalen Sozialistischen Arbeiterkongress in Zürich 1893 über den Stand und Verlauf der sozialdemokratischen Bewegung in Russisch-Polen 1889-1893, erstattet von der Redaktion der Zeitschrift 'Sprawa Robotnicza' ('Arbeitersache'), Organ der Sozialdemokraten des Königreiches Polen* (Report to the Third International Socialist workers' congress in Zürich 1893 regarding the state and development of the Social-Democratic movement in Russian Poland 1889-1893, submitted by the editors of the journal *Sprawa Robotnicza* (Workers' Cause), organ of the Social Democrats of the Kingdom of Poland). [Place unknown] 1893.

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1895

658. Pamphlet.

Maciej Rożga: *Niepodległa Polska a sprawa robotnicza* (Independent Poland and the workers' cause), Paris 1895.

659. Pamphlet.

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1896

660. Pamphlet.

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1898

661. Book.

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1899

662. Book.

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1900

663. Pamphlet.

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1901

664. Pamphlet.

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1903

665. Pamphlet.

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666. Pamphlet.

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1904

667. Pamphlet.

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668. Pamphlet.

Lassalle und die Revolution (Lassalle and the revolution), Berlin, March 1904.

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1905

669. Pamphlet.

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670. Pamphlet.

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671. Pamphlet.

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672. Pamphlet.

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673. Pamphlet.

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674. Pamphlet.

Anon.: *Do inteligencji polskiej*. [*Odezwa Zarządu Głównego Socjaldemokracji Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy*] (To the Polish intelligentsia. [Declaration of the Central Committee of the SDKPiL]), Warsaw, 4 May 1905.

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675. Pamphlet.

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1906

676. Pamphlet.

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677. Pamphlet.

Anon.: *Dni czerwcowe w roku 1848. Kartka z historii walki robotników o chleb i wolność* (The June days of 1848. A page from the history of the workers' struggle for bread and freedom), Warsaw 1906.

678. Pamphlet.

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679. Pamphlet.

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680. Pamphlet.

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681. Pamphlet.

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682. Pamphlet.

Anon.: *Program federacji, czyli PPS w błędnym kole* (The federal programme, or the PPS in a vicious circle), Warsaw 1906.

683. Pamphlet.

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684. Pamphlet.

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685. Pamphlet.

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1908

686. Book.

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1913

687. Book.

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1914

688. Pamphlet.

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See also No. 106.

1916

689. Book.

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691. Pamphlet.

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Illegal *Spartakus* pamphlet.

692. Pamphlet.

Anon.: *Hundepolitik* (A policy for dogs). [Place unknown] 1916.

Illegal *Spartakus* pamphlet.

693. Pamphlet.

Anon.: *Was ist mit Liebknecht* (What about Liebknecht). [Place unknown] 1916.

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Anon.: *Wofür kämpfte Liebknecht und weshalb wurde er zu Zuchthaus verurteilt?* (For what did Liebknecht fight and why was he sentenced to prison?) [Place unknown] 1916.

Illegal *Spartakus* pamphlet.

1918

695. Book.

Chapter 12—"The second and third volume [of Capital]' in F. Mehring: *Karl Marx. Geschichte seines Lebens* (Karl Marx. The history of his life), Leipzig 1918, pp. 378-87.

1920

696. Book.

[Translation and introduction] *W. G. Korolenko: Die Geschichte meines Zeitgenossen. Aus dem russischen übersetzt und mit einer Einleitung versehen von . . . 2 Aufl. Bd. 1-2.* (The history of my Contemporary. Second edition, Volumes 1-2), Berlin 1919-20.

1921

697. Book.

Die Akkumulation des Kapitals oder was die Epigonen aus der Marxschen Theorie gemacht haben. Eine Antikritik (The Accumulation of Capital or what the 'authorities' have done with Marxist theory. An anti-critique), Leipzig 1921.

1922

698. Book.

Die russische Revolution. Eine kritische Würdigung. Aus dem Nachlass herausgegeben und eingeleitet von Paul Levi (The Russian revolution. A

critical appreciation. Edited and introduced by Paul Levi from Rosa Luxemburg's papers), Berlin 1922.

See No. 652 for alternative drafts of certain parts of this manuscript.

1925

699. Book.

Einführung in die Nationalökonomie. Hrsg. von Paul Levi (Introduction to political economy. Edited by Paul Levi), Berlin 1925.

PART E—MAIN COLLECTIONS OF WRITINGS

(i) *Published in German*

700. *R. Luxemburg: Gesammelte Werke*. Published by Clara Zetkin and Adolf Warski (Warszawski), edited by Paul Frölich (referred to in text as *Collected Works*). This complete edition of Rosa Luxemburg's works was to comprise the following volumes:

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|--------|------|--|
| Volume | I | Polen (Poland) |
| „ | II | Die russische Revolution (The Russian revolution) |
| „ | III | Gegen den Reformismus (Against Reformism) |
| „ | IV | Gewerkschaftskampf und Massenstreik (Trade union struggle and mass strike) |
| „ | V | Der Imperialismus (Imperialism) |
| „ | VI | Die Akkumulation des Kapitals (The Accumulation of Capital) |
| „ | VII | Krieg und Revolution (War and Revolution) |
| „ | VIII | Nationalökonomie (Lectures on political economy) |
| „ | IX | Briefe, Gedenkartikel, historische Aufsätze (Letters, memorial articles and historical essays) |

Only the following three volumes appeared:

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|--------|-----|---|
| Volume | VI | <i>Die Akkumulation des Kapitals</i> , Berlin 1923. |
| „ | III | <i>Gegen den Reformismus</i> , Berlin 1925. |
| „ | IV | <i>Gewerkschaftskampf und Massenstreik</i> , Berlin 1928. |

701. *R. Luxemburg: Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften*, Volumes I and II, Berlin 1951 (referred to in text as *Selected Works*). These include her lectures on economics, the mass-strike pamphlet, and the Junius pamphlet, plus other minor articles and works selected at random. Volume I also includes a selection of polemics against Rosa Luxemburg by Lenin and Stalin, though some of the works they polemicize against are not reprinted in the volume (e.g. the question of nationality and autonomy—No. 463).

702. *Rosa Luxemburg im Kampf gegen den deutschen Militarismus*, Berlin (East) 1960. Selection of articles and speeches of 1913/1914 in connection with Rosa Luxemburg's two trials for sedition.

703. *Ich war, ich bin, ich werde sein*, Berlin 1958. Selection of articles from *Rote Fahne* from November 1918 to January 1919.

704. Paul Frölich (ed.): *Redner der Revolution*, Vol. XI: *Rosa Luxemburg*, Berlin 1928. Short selection of speeches.

705. *Die Russische Revolution* (most recent edition), Frankfurt 1963. Introduced and edited by Ossip K. Flechtheim.

(ii) *Published in Polish*

706. *Wybór pism* (two volumes), Warsaw 1959. Edited by Bronisław Krauze. Selection of articles, mainly Polish, some German; partly overlapping with the German Selected Works edition.

(iii) *Published in Russian*

707. *Roza Lyuksemburg o literature*, Moscow 1961. Edited and introduced by M. Korallova. Selection of articles and letters mostly on literary subjects.

(iv) *Published in English*

708. *Leninism or Marxism? The Russian Revolution*, Ann Arbor (Michigan) 1961. Edited by Bertram D. Wolfe. This is a major anti-Leninist work.

The most fertile current source for English translations of Rosa Luxemburg's work is Ceylon, where there is an active Trotskyite party fairly close to the centre of politics.

There have been frequent reprints and translations of individual pamphlets and articles into many other languages.

SECTION II

ROSA LUXEMBURG: BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIAL

Only the major biographical works are included. Short memorial articles or editors' prefaces to collections of writings are referred to in the general bibliography if cited. This list is in alphabetical order.

709. CLIFF, Tony—*Rosa Luxemburg*, London 1959.

A short theoretical assessment, concentrating especially on economic theory.

710. DÖBLIN, Alfred—*Karl und Rosa. Eine Geschichte zwischen Himmel und Hölle*, Munich 1950.

A not insensitive but gaudy dramatization of Rosa Luxemburg's prison years in fictional form. Though it establishes her as a powerful, dramatic figure in German history, the story departs substantially from the truth and grossly over-emphasizes her love-life.

711. FOUCHÈRE, Berthe—*La vie héroïque de Rosa Luxemburg*, Paris 1946. Introduction by Bracke.

A Marxist biography branching out from Frölich's but with a woman's touch. Contains no original material or information.

712. FRÖLICH, Paul—*Rosa Luxemburg Gadenke und Tat*, Paris 1939; second edition Hamburg 1949; first English edition, *Rosa Luxemburg, her life and work*, London 1940.

This is the standard Marxist biography. Frölich himself (born 7 August 1884) was an early member of the left-wing SPD opposition during the First World War and then of the KPD. His early politics (as those of his wife Rosi Wolfstein) were somewhat oppositional to Rosa Luxemburg's leadership; Paul Frölich was then associated with the Bremen Left. As one of the main intellectuals of the German party he was charged with the task of editing Rosa Luxemburg's collected works. His interest in this subject survived his own expulsion from the party in 1928 as a 'right winger' and Paul Frölich then devoted much of his intellectual activity to the study of Rosa Luxemburg's work and life.

His biography is therefore the most comprehensive available, although it deals with problems exclusively in a Leninist (anti-Stalinist) context and attempts to prove the thesis that Rosa Luxemburg's and Lenin's polemics were secondary and unimportant.

Frölich himself survived the war and returned to Germany where he joined the left wing of the SPD. He died on 16 March 1953.

713. FRÖLICH, Paul—Introduction to Volumes III, IV, and VI of *Rosa Luxemburg, Collected Works* (see No. 700).

Useful material written at a time when Frölich was still a member of the KPD. Naturally limited to the problems in hand, it provides a useful guide for Rosa Luxemburg's attitudes to these problems.

714. HOCHDORF, Max—*Rosa Luxemburg*, Berlin [no date]. A popular journalist's biography, but not wholly inaccurate or sensationalist. Hochdorf himself had been a leader-writer on *Vorwärts* 1918–19.

715. KAUTSKY, Luise—*Rosa Luxemburg, Ein Gedenkbuch*, Berlin 1929.

Luise Kautsky was Rosa Luxemburg's personal (rather than political) friend for nearly twenty years. This memorial deals almost entirely with Rosa Luxemburg's personal and private life and was intended as a deliberate 'counter' to the political struggle over her heritage.

716. OELSSNER, Fred—*Rosa Luxemburg, Eine kritische biographische Skizze*, Berlin 1951.

A very limited rehabilitation by a prominent intellectual in East Germany at the height of the post-war Stalin régime. Half the book deals with the biography of Rosa Luxemburg, the other half is the standard analysis of Luxemburgism during the relevant period.

717. ROLAND-HOLST, Henriette—*Rosa Luxemburg: ihr Leben und Wirken*, Zürich 1937 (first published in Dutch, see No. 27).

A biography by the one-time close friend who later worked with Lenin from the Zimmerwald period to the early 1920s and then left the party and Marxism altogether. The biography is acute in personal insights but impressionistic and somewhat romantic in political matters. It contains original material.

SECTION III

GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

This bibliography of works other than by Rosa Luxemburg is highly selective. Only the most important cited works are given. Contemporary articles in the main journals of the time (*Neue Zeit*, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung*, *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, etc.) are not cited again. Neither is unpublished archival material nor correspondence.

Works are cited as in the text, by main title only, and subsidiary titles are not given. The purpose is to provide identification. Where collections are referred to in the text under the name of the editor (e.g. O. B. Szmidt) they are listed under his name, otherwise under the first word of the main subject matter (e.g. *Gruppa Osvobozhdenie Truda*; *Pisma Akselroda i Martova*; *Allgemeiner Kongress der Arbeiter und Soldatenräte . . .*; *Bericht über den Gründungsparteitag der KPD . . .*). Titles of articles are given in English only.

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INDEX TO VOLUMES I AND II

COMPILED BY R. E. THOMPSON

BLANK PAGE

INDEX

- Absolutism, 70, 354, 680
- Abstention and isolation, policy of, 242, 249-50
- Academic Socialists, 230-4
- Accumulation of Capital, The*, 217, 224-5, 392, 473-4, 522, 538, 788, 796; analysis, 530-6, 828-41; anti-critique written in prison, 474, 620, 796, 834; economic criticism, 802, 834; Lenin's criticism, 532-4, 834-5; Marx's economics, and, 37, 215, 473, 530, 828ff; theory of spontaneity, 542, 801-2; time taken to write, 473-4, 532, 828; cited, 143, 527, 640
- Accusations against individuals, 94-95
- 'Acheron on the move', 732-3
- Achilles, 662
- Acquisition of power: *see* Power
- Action, doctrine for, 801
- Adler, Victor, 257, 327, 376, 445-6, 486, 593; 'arrogant Jew', 259; hostile relations with R.L., 61, 93, 97, 102-3, 161, 183-4, 187, 259, 320, 432, 435, 472; relations with Kautsky, 117, 146-7, 193, 432; photographed with R.L., 195; and national question, 260, 846; and war, 602, 611; cited, 93, 153-4, 156, 171, 285, 327, 449, 462, 612, 615, 660
- Africa, campaigns against Africans, 403; emergent nations, 632, 836
- Afro-Asian countries, 36
- Agadir: *see* Morocco crisis
- Agitational tasks, setting of, 420, 426
- Agrarian reform, 125-7, 202, 244, 565-7, 699, 757, 833, 836, 843
- Aiznstat, Isaiah (Judin), 254
- Akimov, V., 85, 252
- Akselrod, Pavel, 65, 67-68, 84, 284, 294, 326-8, 351-2, 356, 555, 581, 587; cited, 67, 320, 326-7, 352, 590
- Albania, 185
- Alexander II, Tsar, 41, 43-45
- Alexander III, Tsar, 43-44, 50
- Alexanderplatz prison, 651-2, 662, 780
- Algemeiner Yiddisher Arbeter Bund*: *see* *Bund*, Jewish
- Algeria, Jogiches in, 165, 263, 571
- Alienation, doctrine of, 225-6, 247, 477, 493, 537-8, 546
- Allemane, J., 95
- Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein*, 122-3
- Alpari, J., cited, 817
- Alps, 412
- Alsace-Lorraine, 478, 525
- America, Conservatives, 40; German revolution, and, 820; imperialism, 820, 836, 838; party conventions, 128; Socialists, 71, 475, 599
- Amnesty for political prisoners, in Russia (1905), 327-9; in Germany, 709, 713
- Amodio, Luciano, cited, 294
- Amsterdam Congress (International, 1904), 194-7, 199, 222, 240-1, 245, 299, 592
- Anarchism, 68, 90, 498, 580, 848, 850; aversion from political action in Europe, 45; disruptive tactics, 72, 74, 130; in France, 242, 441; in Germany, 124, 556, 789; and mass strike, 297, 367, 425, 428, 437, 496-9; Socialists and, 297, 367-8; and war, 398
- Anarchosyndicalism, 367, 425, 497, 817
- Angel, Pierre, cited, 145
- Angst, Sir Henry, 605
- Animal life, R. L.'s love of, 14-15, 63, 666-7
- Ankersmit, Helen, 609
- Annexations, and peace, 690, 694
- Anseele, E., 195
- Anti-Semitism, 33, 86, 140, 187, 245, 586, 672
- Arbeiterpolitik* (Bremen), cited, 627, 658, 660, 689
- Arbeiterstimme* (Zürich), 107
- Arbeiterzeitung* (Vienna), cited, 161
- Arbeitsgemeinschaft*, 639, 643, 647-55, 658-9, 661 (*later: see* USPD)
- Aristov, 812
- Armand, Inessa, 594
- Armed rising, 329-38, 353, 501, 567, 683, 709, 762-3, 814; R.L.'s concept of, 270-1, 332-5, 506, 542, 754-5; Engels and, 754-5

- Armies (*see also under* Germany; and Russia), army of the people, 340-1, 400; militia: *see* that title; R.L. and 'don't shoot', 489, 491; 'proletarians in uniform', 528, 615; revolution, and, 754; supplies, 454
- Arms and armaments (*see also* Militarism), 83, 338, 400, 524, 527
- Art, and politics, 5-6; R.L.'s approach to, 28-31, 201, 387
- Association of Polish Socialists Abroad, 62, 72
- Association of Workers, 49
- Attrition strategy, 516, 518, 527
- Auer, Ignaz, 122, 139, 154, 156, 168, 177, 186, 635; derogatory remarks about Poles, 133-4; death (1907), 376, 558
- Auschwitz (Oświęcim), 179
- Ausnahmegesetz*: *see under* Germany: Socialists
- Australia, 89, 836
- Austria:
- Agent, 609
 - First World War, and, 604
 - Galicia, Austrian, 43, 61-62
 - National question, attitude to, 61, 100, 184, 844, 852
 - Poland, Austrian: *see under* Poland
 - Polish population, 42-43, 61, 576
 - Russia, relations with, 512
 - Russian Socialists in, 48
 - Silesia, Austrian, 179
 - Social Democrats, 61, 71, 76, 80, 94, 183, 320, 376, 401, 433, 642; federated party, 102, 173, 858; leader: *see* Adler, Victor
 - Sphere of influence, 112
 - Trade unions, 599
- Austro-Hungarian empire, 58
- Autonomy, 76, 341, 568, 847, 860
- Avakov, R., cited, 838
- Axelrod, Pavel: *see* Akselrod
- Azev, E. F., 94
- Backward countries, 833, 836-7
- Badaev, A., cited, 592
- Baden, budget policy, 127, 185, 429-32, 436, 438, 441-2, 448
- Baden, Prince Max of, 711
- Bakunin, M., 68, 851
- Balabanoff, Angelica, 596, 602, 794
- Bales, R. F., cited, 269
- 'Balham' group, 811
- Balkans, 112, 403, 490, 604
- Baltic and Baltic States, 386, 694, 696, 700, 729
- Banking, 839
- Barbusse, Henri, cited, 660
- Bardowski, P., 48-49
- Barnimstrasse prison, 618, 620, 643, 651-2
- Barth, Emil, cited, 724
- Barth, Theodor, cited, 119, 231
- Basle, R. L. married in, 110
- Basle Congress (International, 1912), 599
- Basques, 103
- Bassermann, E., 454
- Bauer, Gustav, 377
- Bauer, Otto, 184, 834
- Bavaria, support for Bebel, 448; elections, 219, 236; insurrection (1919), 783; legislature, 127; nationalism, 272; Prime Minister (Eisner), 734; republic, 312, 789
- Beauvoir, Simone de, 751
- Bebel, August, 139, 163, 181-6, 190, 198, 200, 255, 284, 320, 326, 374-6, 415, 475, 487, 676; death (1913), 467-8
- Autobiography, 668
- Bebel cult, 825-6
- Biographical, 120-2, 467-8, 825-6
- Budget voting, and, 127, 415
- Elections, and, 451
- Favourable revaluation, 824-6
- International Bureau and Morocco crisis, and, 442-3, 445-50
- Jena Congress (1905), address, 307-8, 310-11, 358
- Mass strike, and, 307-11, 358, 365-7, 396-7
- Mehring and, 463
- Mensheviks, and, 352
- Militarism, and, 404, 482, 527-8
- 'Not a man nor a farthing for this system', 121, 648
- Open letter to German Socialists abroad, pirated by R. L., 303-4, 327
- Opportunism, on, 235
- Polish question, and, 102-3
- Revisionist controversy, and, 150-1, 153-61, 166, 169-72, 185-6, 191, 206, 219, 221
- Rosa Luxemburg, relations with, 22, 159-61, 168-70, 172, 179-80, 258,

- Bebel, August—*cont.*
 312, 314-15, 366-7, 375, 389, 392, 396, 469, 472; refuses his offer of financial aid, 349, 370-1; relations deteriorate, 371, 431-2, 435-6; personal contact ended, 22, 183, 442, 445-8, 450; tributes to him, 468, 481
 SPD leadership, 117, 120-2, 128, 167, 306, 410, 734, 737, 754
 Stuttgart Congress (1907), at, 396-9, 401-3
 Uncompromising statements, 121
Vorwärts, and, 312-13, 331
 War, and, 604-6
 Works translated into Russian, 67
- Bebel, Julie, 358
- Beer, M., cited, 634
- Beerfelde, Captain, 722
- Beethoven, 29
- Belgium, arms purchase, 338; mass strike, and, 193, 243, 479, 509; revisionists, 235, 240, 243-4, 562; Social-Democrats, 161, 235, 302, 433, 479, alliance with Liberals, 240, 243-4, 416; universal suffrage, 193, 243, 479
- Bell, D., cited, 538
- Bendix, Reinhard, cited, 246
- Berfus, A., 96, 135, 183
- Berger, Maurice, cited, 609, 773
- Berlau, A. J., cited, 123, 126
- Berlin:
 Agitational effort (1913-1914), 485
 Apartments occupied by R.L., Cuxhavenerstrasse, 132, 165; Wielandstrasse, 163; Cranachstrasse, 17, 165, 194, 371, 381-3, 475; Südende, 18, 475
 Commandant, 738
 High School, 52
 January rising (1919), 762-72, 783-4, 788, 791; R.L. and Liebknecht arrested and murdered, 772-81
 Lenin in, 558, 591
 May Day (1916), 648-9
 Newspapers, 721
 Party organization, 312, 647, 650; Federation of Berlin Constituences, 479-80, 485; school: *see* SPD: School
 Poison victims, 477-8
 Police, headquarters stormed, 735; president, 159, 738, 762-3
 R.L. II—32
- Berlin—*cont.*
 Polish Socialists in, 60, 563, 576, 582, 597, 599
 Radek enters illegally, 746-7
 Rosa Luxemburg, life in from 1898 (*see also under* Germany), 111, 131-3, 135, 137, 163-5, 193-4, 199, 263, 325-8, 337; daily routine, 132-3, 163-4; leaves for Warsaw (1905), 316; plans to return, 345-6, 358; returns (1906), 370; speech (1910), 490; trial (1914), 484-6; arrives in after release from prison (1918), 714; last weeks in, 759-61 (*see also* Apartments, above)
 Russian Legation, closed (1918), 713, 718, 740, 746
Spartakus, 485, 709-10, 732, 734, 747
 Strikes and demonstrations (1910), 418-19; (1914), 482-3; (1918), 711
 Troika, 578
 USPD, 741-2, 762-3
 Workers' and Soldiers' Council, 688, 720-2, 725, 737-8, 746-7, 762-3, 776-8
- Berlin Congress (Polish, 1903), 274
- Berliner Lokalanzeiger*, office taken over by *Die Rote Fahne*, 721; restored to owners, 722
- Bern, 627, 663
- Berner Tagwacht*, 685
- Bernstein, Eduard, 95, 109, 117, 164, 249, 300, 368, 371, 375, 377, 417, 562, 622, 672, 826; in England, 146, 151, 154, 214
 Anarchy and, 556
 Auer and, 156, 635
 Biographical, 145-6
 Mass strike, and, 300, 309
 Revisionist controversy, 54, 137-9, 145-56, 165-6, 172, 185-6, 202-21, 224, 227-31, 241-6, 291-2, 303, 440, 494, 823; Parvus's onslaught on, 137-8, 146-9, 218; R.L.'s attitude to, 138-9, 149, 151-5, 206, 212, 229, 234, 259, 823
 Works, cited, 145, 148, 156, 606, 735, 789
- Bernstein, Josef, 774
- Berten, P. (publisher), 618
- Bethmann-Hollweg, Theobald von, 416-18, 457, 623, 682-3, 744
- Bialystok, 257

- Bialystok Congress (1902), 254
 Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, 106, 830
 Bicyclist and mishap to R.L., 394
 Bill of Rights, international Socialists', 629
 Biniszkiwicz, 177
 Bismarck, Prince, 56, 112-13, 115, 123-4, 527, 604
 Bissing, General von, 604
 Bittel, K., cited, 842
 'Black hundreds', 86
 Blackstock, Paul W., cited, 843
 Blanqui, L. A., 286
Blaue Reiter, 28
 Bloch, Joseph, cited, 173
 Block, Hans, 313, 460-1, 465-7
 Blumenberg, Werner, cited, 349, 371, 379, 385, 389, 674
 Bockenheim, 459, 481
 'Bog': *see* Marxism: Centre
 Bogdanov, A., 324, 357, 557, 559
 Bohemia, Czechs, 184
 Böhm-Bawerk, E., 230
 Bolsheviks; Bolshevism, 10-13, 23-4, 35, 79, 81, 244, 293, 361, 614, 755, 792-802, 808-13
 Atrocities, 671
 'Centre' within party, 551-2
 Committee, in Cracow, 569
 Constituent Assembly, and, 700-2
 Democratic tradition, misuse of, 1, 8
 Dictatorship, and, 702-3
 Duma elections, and, 715
 Finances, 579-82
 German Left and, 6, 268, 512, 718, 756, 800, 808-12, 816, 824
 Imperialism, and, 522
 International Socialism, and, 782-4
 Jogiches and, 565, 578-9
 Kautsky and, 430, 433-4, 580-1, 708
 Land policy, 566-8, 699
 Leaders, 84; exile, 549
 Lenin and, 23-24, 267, 486, 507, 569, 577-9
 Liberalism, indictment of, 553
 Loyalty, 495
 Marchlewski and, 598, 635
 National question, and, 699-700, 796-7, 799, 851-2, 859, 862
 Official Russian party, 584
 Parliamentary group, 591-2, 613
 Party and masses, 539-42, 717
 Bolsheviks; Bolshevism—*cont.*
 Personal antagonisms, 266
 Poles, relations with, 264, 267, 274, 344, 352-3, 552-3, 555, 558-9, 577-9; subsidy, 578, 585; join party, 577, 598, 635, 796, 813, 856
 Policy, 699-705
 Propaganda, 322, 528
 Radicals move towards, 628
 Raiding parties, 548
 Referat system, 128
 Revolution, and, 2, 36, 38, 78, 213-14, 330, 338, 355, 512, 683
 Revolutions: *see under* Russia
 Rosa Luxemburg and, 2, 213, 287, 433, 557, 600, 629-31, 684, 690-705, 716, 782, 793-4, 819, 821, 847, 857
 RSDRP, in, 551-2, 560, 577-8, 580
 SDKPiL and, 334, 355
 Spartakus and, 628, 718-19, 731, 739-40, 750-2
 Split with Mensheviks, 90, 240, 279, 284, 293-4, 328, 339, 351-4, 433, 550-1, 579, 591-5, 703, 802, 811-12
 Stalin and, 539-40, 811-12
 Subsidies for allies, 578, 585
 Suffrage policy, 700-2
 Trotsky and, 786
 War, and, 603, 613, 627, 680, 690-4
 Bolshevization, 10, 678, 767, 797-800, 815
 Bömelburg, 311
 Bonnier, C., 303
 Borchardt, Bruno, cited, 452
 Borchardt, Julian, 627-8
 Borgatta, E. F., cited, 269
 Botany, R.L.'s interest in, 63, 190, 664-7
Bourgeoisie, 118, 169, 209, 215, 233, 305, 332, 338-42, 354-5, 370, 567; and bureaucracy, 406; class consciousness, 226-9, 235, 400; economic interests, 838; morals, 124-5; national question, and, 642, 848-9, 858; opportunism, and, 845; role of, 91, 354; Rosa Luxemburg's attack on, 771; Socialist participation in government and parties, 237-43, 248, 268, 416, 538; strength, 554
 Brachmann, Botho, cited, 197-8, 327
 Braithwaite, W. J., cited, 605
 Brandenburg, 194
 Brandler, H., 747, 792, 794, 801, 807, 810, 815-16

- Brandt, Willy, cited, 746
 Braun, Otto, 197, 407, 605, 646, 729
 Braunschweig: *see* Brunswick
 Breitscheid, Rudolf, 740, 742
 Bremen, 391, 422-3, 627-8, 689, 693;
 Emperor's speech in, 489; local
 organization, 416, 419, 432, 441, 460,
 470, 747; Radek in, 460, 465, 470,
 587; Radicals, 617, 658, 708; rising
 (1919), 783, 788
 Bremen Congress (SPD, 1904), 198, 378
Bremer Bürgerzeitung, 463, 627, 655;
 cited, 431, 439, 462
 Breslau, 173, 666, 721; local organization,
 109, 133-4, 136; prison, 677, 686-7,
 697, 713
 Breslau Congress (SPD, 1895), 126-7, 202
 Brest-Litovsk, peace of, 598, 635, 692, 694,
 696-7, 700, 716
 Briand, Aristide, 140
Briefe an Freunde, cited, 30, 305, 348, 350,
 364-5 *passim*
Briefe aus dem Gefängnis, cited, 644
 Britain: *see* England
 Bromberg (Bydgoszcz), 52, 195
 Broński, M., 596
 Broom, L., cited, 249
 Brücke, 28
 Bruhns, J. A. F., 109, 134, 136, 150
 Brunswick, 416, 617, 655, 721, 752
 Brussels, 486, 601-3, 609, 628
 Brussels Congress (RSDRP, 1903), 85,
 275-84, 514, 593-4, 854, 857
 Brutus: *see* Molkenbuhr, Herman
 Brzezinski, Z., cited, 289
 Buchholz, W., 253, 327
 Budelovich, Felicia, alias of R.L., 357
 Buffaloes, R.L. and maltreatment of, 14-
 15, 666-7
 Buffer states, 641
 Bukharin, N., 2, 511, 710, 785, 801-2,
 805-6, 808-9, 834; biographical,
 534-5; cited, 533, 802, 830, 834
 Bukharinism, 3
 Bulgaria, 84, 195, 640, 644
 Bülow, Prince Bernhard von, 373, 405,
 414, 416-17, 493
 Bulygin Duma, 327
Bund, Jewish (*Algemener Yiddisher Arbeter*
Bund), 33, 43, 251-2, 258, 267,
 272-3, 278-9, 318-91, 326, 345,
 594, 597; foundation (1897), 66,
Bund, Jewish—*cont.*
 82-83, 88, 104, 251; and R.L., 105;
Iskra and, 272-3, 276, 854; and
 Russian party, 551, 579, 548
 Bunin, I. A., cited, 671
 Bureaucracy, 35, 405-8
Burgfrieden: *see* Germany: Party-truce
 Burke, Edmund, 509
 Büttner, P., 312
 Byalyi, G. A., cited, 671
 Bydgoszcz (Bromberg), 52, 195
- Calwer, Richard, 313, 374
 Canning, George, 520
 Cape, Grandmother Kautsky's, 664
 Capitalism:
 Accumulation, analysis of, 831-4
 Agrarian relations, 833, 836
 Bernstein and, 217-19, 224
 Collapse, prediction of, 116, 204-5,
 208-9, 221, 531, 533, 535, 640, 830
 Confrontation with, 4-5, 70, 72, 116,
 125-6, 179, 213, 270, 339-40, 354,
 363, 405
 Destruction, entire, 735; through
 revolution, 836
 Economy, 828, 831-9
 Form of class state, 481
 Imperialism, and, 520-2, 524, 526,
 528, 535
 Industrialization, 34
 International, 98
 Nature, 208-9
 Opposition to, 613
 Polish capitalists and Russia, 92
 Rule, 406
 Self-determination under, 99-100
 Tariffs and, 216
 War, and, 399-401
 Workers and, 210-11
 Capri, party school, 559-60
 Carnegie, Andrew, 403-4
 Carr, E. H., cited, 286, 859
 Catholic priest, helps R.L. to escape, 59
 Caucasus, 548, 553, 696
 Cavas-Zaroudny, 357
 Central Party School, Berlin: *see* SPD:
 School
 Central Powers, 597, 603
 Centrism, 313, 853, 855 (*see also* Germany:
 Centre)

- Ceylon, Tamils, 272; Trotskyite party, 323
- Chagin, B. A., cited, 823
- Chancellor, R., cited, 671
- Chateaubriand, F. R., 509
- Chauvinism, 414, 489, 533, 608, 750, 826, 854-6, 861
- Cheka, 584, 697, 731
- Chekhov, Anton, 671
- Chemnitz, 190, 747
- Chemnitz Congress (SPD, 1912), 459, 470, 472
- Chernyshevsky, N. G., 30, 848
- Chicken and the eagle, parable of the, 792-3
- China, 488, 836, 838; Communism, 5, 6, 9, 12, 615; crisis (1900), 447, 522-3; Empire, 41; Marxists, 862; Russo-Chinese dispute, 5, 185, 509
- Chkheidze, N., 682
- Chmura, Józef, pseudonym of R.L., 323
- Christian, R. F., cited, 671
- Christianity, 323
- Cinema, R.L.'s first visit, 475
- Ciolkosz, Adam, cited, 353, 822
- Circus Busch, Berlin, 720
- Ciszewski, J., 599-600
- Civil war, revolutionary, 625, 628, 727
- Class conflict, 453, 503, 515-17, 524, 528, 623, 727, 820
- Class consciousness, 13, 211, 223-9, 235-43, 290-2, 298, 323, 332, 334, 393, 528, 540, 544; bourgeois, 226-9, 235, 400; Socialist, 271, 537-8; working class, 226, 241-2, 290, 338, 400, 490-1, 861-2
- Cliff, Tony, cited, 828, 830
- Collected Works*, 530, 796, 916-17; cited, 214, 480, 496-7 *passim*; introduction cited, 128, 147, 156, 204, 304, 418, 530
- Cologne, Trade Union Congress (1905), 300-2, 309, 366-7
- Colonialism, 397, 402-3, 520-2, 524, 531, 533, 535, 632, 833-9
- Cominform, 709
- Comintern: *see* International, Third
- Communism; Communists (*see also* under country concerned), 39, 145, 185, 213, 219, 249, 353, 563, 607, 803-4, 827-8
- Bureaucracy, and, 406-7
- Communism; Communists—*cont.*
- Class consciousness, and, 226
- European, 789-91, 797-8, 807
- Kautsky and, 247, 409, 422
- Loyalties, 861
- Parliamentary delegates and discipline 457
- Party congresses, role of, 306
- Personal antagonism in parties, 266
- Radicals, and, 340, 628, 791
- Rosa Luxemburg and, 2-6, 8-14, 27-28 33, 334, 542, 684, 788
- Russian control over parties, 785, 855
- Social Democrats, and, 247, 563, 745, 807
- Spontaneity, and, 507, 546
- Textual interpretation, and, 307
- Communist Manifesto (1848), 148, 309, 754-5
- Compound reproduction formulae, solution mathematically, 473, 530, 828, 830-2, 839
- 'Conciliators', 579-80, 590
- Conservatives, 40, 266, 601
- Consumption, 831-3, 838
- Conze, W., cited, 843
- Co-operatives of producers and consumers, 205, 210-11
- Copenhagen, 682
- Copenhagen Congress (International, 1910), 442, 599
- Corsica, 18, 413
- Cottrell, L. S., cited, 249
- Cracow, 331, 379-80, 396; SDKPiL leaders in, 263, 269, 325-9, 345, 350, 549, 576, 582-3, 589; R.L.'s visit (1905), 25, 305, 328-9; Lenin in, 569, 583, 588-9, 607, 663
- Credit, use of, 205, 208
- Crimean War, 42
- Crises, periodic, 205, 208, 831
- Crisis of Social Democracy, The*: *see Juniusbrochüre*
- Critica Sociale*, 94, 104
- Croatia, 107
- Cunow, Heinrich, 312-13, 396, 633
- Customs tariffs, 215-16, 340, 404, 836
- Czartoryski Library, Paris, 106, 830
- Czechoslovakia, 824
- Czechs, 102, 184, 411, 599, 850
- 'Czego chcemy?' (What do we want?), 317, 338-42

- Czerwony Sztandar* (Red Flag), 263, 324-5, 331, 335, 338, 350, 561, 573, 576; established (1902), 269; cited, 88, 257, 283, 318, 333, 345, 353, 585, 597
- Dąbrowa area, 105
- Dahrendorf, Ralf, 861
- Dalski, St. (A. S. Ettinger), 262, 266, 584
- Dan, F. (Gurvich), 95-96, 284, 294, 315, 351, 580
- Daszyński, Ignacy, 173, 180, 259-60, 331, 563; relationships with Austrians, 61, 97, 102, 259-60; and R.L., 72-74, 89, 98, 180; cited, 117, 234, 294
- Däumig, E., 816
- David, Eduard, 375, 403, 612, 614
- Davies, R. W., cited, 584
- Death penalty, *Proletariat* leaders (1886), 49, 57; Kasprzak (1905), 57
- December, men of 1915, 639, 643
- Decembrists, Russian, 639
- de Huszar, G. B., cited, 35
- Deich, Leo: *see* Deutsch, Leo
- Demand, function of, 831-2, 839
- Democracy, 2, 209-10, 363, 407, 477, 553, 702, 751; Marxist, 1, 33, 213; R.L.'s views of, 8, 214, 288, 441, 540-2, 718; suppression of, 718
- Denmark, Parvus in, 633-4
- Denver, Colorado, Socialist from, 475
- Detective, R.L. and, 633, 651-2
- Deutsch (Deich), Leo, 331, 353, 356
- Deutsche Tageszeitung*, 619, 778
- Deutscher, Isaac, cited, 84, 372, 504, 854
- Dickstein, Szymon, 49
- Dictatorship, of the proletariat, 35, 334-5, 338, 354, 685, 717, 725, 730-1, 794, 799, 804, 806; revolutionary democratic, 566-7; military, 604; Bolshevik policy, 702-3
- Diefenbach, Hans, 305, 419, 431, 645, 677; R.L.'s self-portrait presented to, 17; leaves money in trust for R.L., 19, 674; close friendship with R.L., 27-28, 382, 385, 440, 671-4; R.L.'s letters to, 27, 30, 54, 396, 474, 603, 617, 619, 636, 644, 664, 672-4, 677; death (1917), 27, 382, 674-5, 689
- Dietz, J. (publisher), 149, 620
- Disarmament, 641
- Distribution problems, 831
- Dittmann, Wilhelm, 391, 423, 441, 627, 635, 657, 662, 727; papers cited, 391, 395, 432, 456, 459, 463, 468
- Dmowski, Roman, 342, 350, 561
- Dobrudja, 84
- 'Dogs, Policy for', 614
- Dollfuss, E., 15
- Domski, L.: *see* Stein, H.
- Dornemann, Luise, cited, 194, 759
- Dorrenbach, H., 780
- Dortmund, 181, 419, 441, 460
- Dortmunder Arbeiterzeitung*, 422, 424
- Dostoievsky, F. M., 31, 380, 669
- Drahn, E., cited, 613, 617, 642
- Dresden, 146-8, 150, 170, 172, 187, 263; R.L. in, 143, 157-8, 161, 163, 166-7, 465 (*see also* *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung*)
- Dresden Congress (SPD, 1903), 121, 181-2, 189, 191, 198, 241, 245, 299
- Dreyfus affair, 214, 238-40
- Dühring, Eugen, 148
- Duisburg, 655
- Duncker, Hermann, 610, 637; cited, 721, 724, 826
- Duncker, Käthe, 610, 637, 653-4, 719
- Dutch: *see* Netherlands
- Düwell, W., 312
- Dzerzhinskaya, Z., cited, 584
- Dzierżyński, Feliks, 272-3, 280-1, 344-5, 528, 564, 697, 747; biographical, 23, 105; arrested, 104, 328, 583-4; escapes from Siberia, 549; released, 598; in Cracow, 263, 269, 326, 328, 549, 583; joins Bolsheviks, 584, 598, 716; head of Cheka, 584, 731; death, 797, 813; Lenin and, 558, 583-4, 589, 797; and national question, 33, 700, 797, 856, 862; and R.L., 257, 329; on Russian Central Committee, 551, 552; and SDKPiL, 23, 80, 104, 251, 257-8, 262-4, 269, 344-5, 583-4; cited, 272, 275-6, 584
- Dziewanowski, M. K., cited, 47, 74, 76, 105, 254
- East Prussia, 197-8, 329
- Eberlein, Hugo, 637, 639, 719, 782-3, 787; cited, 610
- Ebert, Friedrich, SPD leader, 407, 455, 468-9, 605, 645-6; Chancellor, 468, 711; government, 505, 711-12, 714,

Ebert, Friedrich—*cont.*

722, 737–8, 749, 756–7, 763, 765, 769, 771; *Spartakus* and, 654, 681, 729, 745, 749; and mass strike, 480; and republic, 711–12, 737; cited 605, 611, 638

Eckstein, G., 419, 462, 474; cited, 834

Economic activity and political struggle, 500–1, 515

Economics:

Crises, periodic, 205, 208, 831

Rosa Luxemburg's writings on, 106, 391, 620, 671, 796, 828–34; research on, 494

Teaching, 393

Theory, 217, 830

Vulgar, 64, 840

Economism, 534, 815

Economist, R.L. as, 828–41

'Economist' movement, 85, 254, 288, 290, 500

Eden Hotel, Berlin, 773–5

Education, 340, 388

Edward VII, King, 558

Eggert, Z. K., cited, 823

Eichhorn, Emil, 159, 738, 762–3

Einführung in die Nationalökonomie: see *Introduction to Political Economy*

Einstein, Albert, 830

Eisenacher, 122

Eisler, Gerhard, 810, 816

Eisner, Kurt, 374, 392–4, 449, 471–2, 622, 627, 734; R.L.'s dislike of, 21, 136–7; attached to *Vorwärts*, 169, 312–13, 392; murdered, 777

'Either-or', 643, 647

Elections, German system, 219, 235–6; participation in, 235–7, 242, 248–9, 354, 715, 748, 757–8; secret, 340

Élite, 13, 35, 42, 267–8, 290–1, 363, 388, 392, 394

Émigrés:

Allegiance, 32

Centres, 48

Polish, 48, 58–61, 65, 69, 77–78, 88, 98, 103, 165, 225, 254–5, 257, 548–9, 596–7; tradition, 60; unity of groups, 60–62; congress (1892), 61; dissident movement, 80, 84–86, 101; leadership 101, 107, 597; international interests, 258; return to Russia, 315; amnesty, 327–8; conviction, 359; living on for the fatherland, 689

Émigrés—*cont.*

Russian, 48, 59–60, 65, 77–78, 95, 165 254–5, 596; efforts to unite, 251 amnesty, 327–8

Squabbles, 48, 551, 576, 613

Endecja: see National Democrats

Engel, Eduard, cited, 412

Engelmann, Otto, alias of Jogiches (*q.v.*) 346

Engels, Friedrich, 65, 68, 75, 96, 146, 148, 151, 303, 403, 421

Kautsky, and, 117, 123, 754–5

Liebknecht and, 121, 127–8, 244

Marx, and, 96, 116–18, 121, 192, 204, 421, 753–5; edited version of Engels' introduction to book by, 754–5

National question, and, 842–4, 846–7, 850

Poland, attitude to, 842–4, 849

Posthumous papers, edition of, 107, 188

Social Democracy, and, 116

Works, 59, 67, 411, 477, 511; cited, 209, 672, 842, 844

England, and the English:

'Balham' group, 811

Bernstein in, 146, 151, 154, 204, 214

Bourgeoisie, 554–5

Cabinet tradition, 446

Conditions in, 214, 240, 494

Conservatives, 40, 266

Émigrés in London (see also Poles; and Russians, below), 48, 279

First World War, 640

Independent Labour Party, 612–13, 640

Industrial Revolution, 43, 846

International trade, and, 233

Labour Party, 115, 129, 184, 267

Liberals, 214, 554–5

Morocco crisis, and: see Morocco crisis

Parliamentary life, 114

Poland, and, 843

Poles in, 46, 48, 174; organization, 62, 93, 845

Propaganda from, 123

Public virtues, 20, 32

Revolution (17th century), 541, 693, 728

Rosa Luxemburg and, 168, 214, 240; relatives in, 54, 386; in London, 380, 383, 557, 592

Royal family, 409

Russian revolution (1917), and, 681, 683

Russians in, 48, 279, 328

- England, and the English—*cont.*
 Socialists, 475, 640, 685
 Strike (1893), 89
 Trade unions, 115, 299, 366, 400-1
 Trotsky, and, 811
Entweder-Oder, 643
 Erfurt programme (1891): *see under* SPD
 Ernst, E., 480, 646, 762
 Essen, 419
 Essen Congress (SPD, 1907), 377-8, 389, 404, 482
 Ettinger, A. S.: *see* Dalski, St.
 Europe:
 Communism, 789-91, 797-8, 807
 Communities, 641
 Customs Union, 641
 Germany's position in, 112
 Non-Bolshevik Left, 628
 Post-revolutionary situation, 842
 Russia's position in, 41-42, 511
 Socialism, 71, 640
 Union, 627
 Ewert, A., 810
 Exchange of revolutionaries, proposed, 679
 Expulsion from party, discipline by, 230, 234, 470-3, 577, 587-8, 822
 'Eye to eye, fist to fist, breast to breast', 486, 537
- Fabius Cunctator, 427
Fackel, Die, 14-15
 Faisst, M., 29, 385, 549
 Fascists, 342, 547, 554-5, 817
 Fashoda incident, 401
 Federalism, 341-3, 719
 Feinstein, W.: *see* Leder, Z.
 Feldman, W., cited, 254
 Felice, Renzo de, cited, 547
 Fendrich, A., 169
 Ferri, E., 195
 Feudalism, 828
 Fifth Column, 219, 229, 234
 Finland:
 Bolsheviks in, 352, 549
 German occupation, 694, 696
 Lenin in, 396
 Mass executions, 728-9
 Rosa Luxemburg and leaders in, 351, 356-8, 360, 365, 379, 389, 396, 496, 505, 549, 551
- First World War:
 England, 640
 France, 604-5, 640, 653, 660
 Germany, 512, 601-19, 621-7, 637-40, 660, 823; war credits vote: *see* War credits; offensive (1915), 597; separate peace (1918) with Russians (*see also under* Peace, below), 690-2; Western Front collapse (1918), 706-8; bid for peace, 706, 709; inquiry into causes of defeat, 653
 Inevitability of, 602
 Italy, 613, 640, 691
 Lenin and, 520, 547
 Major incidents as preliminary, 403
 'Mass' opposition to, 644
 Outbreak, 486-7, 528, 596-7, 601
 Peace, German separate peace with Russians, 679-86, 690-2, 694, 696, 752; Brest-Litovsk treaty (1918) (*q.v.*), 692; German bid for, 706, 709
 Poland, 47, 49, 77, 603
 Revolutionary potential, 640
 Rosa Luxemburg, effect on, 26, 609-10; her attitude to, 547, 610-19, 621-4, 631-3, 848, 849; 'study' of (*see Juniusbrochüre*), 619-20; statement of principles, 629-30, 639-43
 Russia, 603, 615, 640; separate peace, 679-86, 690-2, 694, 696, 752; peace of Brest-Litovsk (1918) (*q.v.*), 692
 Social Democrat attitude to, 249, 455, 512, 520, 601ff, 628, 637, 640, 823-4
 Firstenberg, Jakob: *see* Hanecki
 Fischer, Richard, 186-7, 192, 610, 645
 Fischer, Ruth, 268, 751, 798-801, 805-7, 816; cited, 533, 586, 747, 767, 800-1
 Fisher, H. H., cited, 595, 628
 Flaubert, Gustave, 669
 Flechtheim, Ossip K., cited, 622, 790
 Fleiner, Professor, 63
 Flemish problem, 103
Fortschrittliche Volkspartei: *see* Progressive People's Party
Forum, cited, 821
 Fourier, 60, 217
 Frak: *see* PPS: Revolutionary Fraction
 France, and the French:
 Anarchism, 242, 441
Bourgeoisie, 554-6
 Bureaucracy, and, 405

- France, and the French—*cont.*
 Communists, 563, 788
 Conditions in, 214-15, 238ff, 494
 Conservatives, 40
 Émigrés in, 48, 328
 First World War, 604-5, 640, 653, 660
 Flemish population, 103
 Germany, and, 112-13, 238, 398
 Liberalism, 214-15, 554-5
 Mass strike, and, 397-8
 Monarchy revival predicted, 215
 Morocco crisis, and: *see* Morocco crisis
 Physiocrats, 106, 233, 830
 Radicals, 238-41, 243, 414, 605
 Revisionists, 562
 Revolution, 340-1, 512, 541, 621, 693, 728; (1848), 848
 Rosa Luxemburg and, 161, 214-15, 225, 238; her researches in, 105, 830; her writings on, 237-40
 Russia, and, 366-7
 Russian revolution (1917), and, 681, 683
 Socialists, 184, 235, 258, 398, 401, 556, 685, 848; International and, 71, 130, 303; participation in government, 237-41; R.L.'s contacts with, 110-11, 195-6, 441; split, 71, 285, 560, 745; unity pressure, 195-6; and war, 640
 Strikes, 438
 Trade unions, 400-1
 Francis Joseph, Emperor, 603
 Franco-Prussian War, 113-14, 121
 Frank, Dr. Ludwig, 404-5, 449
 Frankfurt, 418-19, 459, 482, 617, 665; R.L.'s trial (1914), 481-3, 485, 617; text of address on her own behalf, 488-92
 Frankfurt Congress (SPD, 1894), 126
Frankfurter Zeitung, cited, 483
 Frassek, Paul, 653-4
 Frederick the Great, 112
 Free expression, 5-6
 'Free Voice': *see* *Wolny Glos*
 Freedom, individual, 13, 340, 494, 701-2
 Freiburg, 483-4, 527, 861
Freie Volkszeitung (Göppingen), 460, 470
Freiheit, Die, 27, 722, 742, 776; cited, 468, 739, 741, 769, 778
Freikorps, 753, 769, 773-4, 784
 Fricke, Dieter, 389-90, 396, 824
 Friction, and class consciousness, 13, 290-1
 Fridman, L. A., cited, 838
 Friedeberg, Dr., 300
 Friedenau, near Berlin, 163, 165
 Friedrich, Carl J., cited, 670
 Friedrich August, King of Saxony, 199
 Friedrichsfelde Cemetery, 781
 Frölich, Paul, 52, 628, 714, 719, 790-1, 810, 816, 819, 859, 867; biographical, 714, 918; and imperialism, 530; and R.L.'s Polish works, 570, 796; biography of R.L., 14, 530, cited, 50-53, 57-59, 106-8, 121 *passim*; introduction to R.L.'s *Collected Works*, 128, 147, 204, 304, 418, 530
 Frölich, Frau Rosi: *see* Wolffstein, Rosi
 Fuchs, Eduard, 651
 Funds for Social-Democratic organizations, 264, 326
Funke, Der, cited, 800
 Futrell, Michael, cited, 596
 Galicia, Austrian (*see also* Poland: Austrian), 43, 58, 61-62, 72, 77, 180, 182, 343
 Galileo, 156, 670, 825
 Gandhi, Mahatma, 334
 Gankin, O. H., cited, 595, 628
 Garosci, Aldo, cited, 795
 Gay, Peter, cited, 145, 205
Gazeta Ludowa, 181, 183, 283
Gazeta Robotnicza (The Workers' Journal), 60, 133, 174-7, 180-1, 589, 596
 Geck, Adolf, 441-2, 760
 Geiss, Imanuel, cited, 605
 Gelfant, A. I.: *see* Parvus
 General strike: *see* Mass strike
 General Union of Jewish Workers: *see* *Bund*, Jewish
 Geneva, 47-48, 206, 376, 380, 383, 410
 Genoa (Genova), 413
 Georgian Bolsheviks, 854
 Gerlach, H., 385
 German Communist Party: *see* KPD
 German Democratic Republic (East Germany), attitude to German revolution of 1918/19, 10-11; historians, 465, 644, 688, 708, 795, 822-6; ideological rigidity, 10, 822; Polish publications in, 600; attitude towards R.L., 10, 11, 600, 795, 825; Socialist Unity Party: *see* SED

- German Federal Republic (West Germany), 10, 11, 773; histories, 820, 822, 824
- German language, 51-52, 56, 84, 108
- German nationality, R.L. acquires, 108-9, 133, 348, 350, 687
- German Social-Democratic Party: *see* SPD
- German Socialist Party, 76, 115-16, 122; later SPD (*q.v.*)
- Germany, and the Germans:
- Agrarian agitation, 125-7, 202, 244
 - Amnesty for political prisoners, 709, 713
 - Anarchism, 124, 556, 789
 - Armaments, expenditure on, 414-15
 - Army, maltreatment of recruits, 481-2, 484-5; Emperor's speech to (1900), 489-90; R.L. and 'don't shoot', 489, 491; propaganda among soldiers, 528, 724; deserters, 725; allegiance to republic, 737; Ebert's negotiations with, 737-8, 769; call for disarming, 762-3; government and, 769
 - Budget, voting, 415-16, 430, 438-9, 441, 622-3, 638, 646-7; scandal (1912), 222; war credits: *see that title Bundesrat*, 114, 709
 - Catholics, 113, 243, 373, 405, 416, 451-2
 - Censorship, 608-9, 617-18, 645, 647
 - Centre, 113, 219, 313, 609, 612, 627-9, 637-9, 643, 646-8, 650, 811, 814, 816, 818, 823
 - Coalitions, 405, 414, 416-17, 452, 454, 458
 - Colonial policy, 115, 373
 - Communism, 9, 10, 297-8, 392, 724-5, 744, 764-9, 781-92, 825, 827; no co-operation with Socialists, 745, 750-1, 818
 - Communist Party: *see* KPD
 - Communist Party Opposition (KPO), 819
 - Conditions in (1898), 112-15
 - Conservatives, 112-14, 119-20, 236, 369, 416, 418, 452, 662
 - Constituent Assembly, 242, 703, 712, 715, 720, 726-8, 734, 741-3, 748, 757, 758
 - Co-operatives, 454
 - Criminal code, SPD government and, 505
 - East: *see* German Democratic Republic
- Germany, and the Germans—*cont.*
- Elections:
 - Constituent Assembly, 242, 720, 741, 743, 748, 757-8
 - Non-participation in, 242, 748, 757-8
 - Provincial, 479
 - Reichstag*, 235-7, 479; (1903), 190-1; (1907), 215, 372-6, 378, 554, 556; (1912), 236-7, 451-4, 456-8, 463, 473, 516; campaigns, 123, 133, 136, 151-2, 175, 177, 197, 390; party's preoccupation with, 414-17, 427-8, 439, 443-4, 447
 - Electoral system, 114, 219, 235-6, 452, 469
 - Europe, position in, 112
 - Expansionist policy, 844
 - First World War: *see under* that title
 - Foreign Office, 634
 - France, relations with, 112-13, 238, 398
 - Government collapse, (1918), 706-8, 711; handed over to SPD, 711; negotiations between Socialist parties, 712; joint government, 712, 714-15
 - Imperialism, 457-8, 468, 472, 615
 - Independent Social-Democratic Party: *see* USPD
 - Industrial unrest (1914), 478
 - International relations, 115
 - January risings (1919), 733, 738, 760-72, 783-4, 791; R.L. and Liebknecht arrested and murdered, 772-81
 - Left, 560, 627, 630, 636-40, 647, 650-1, 739-40, 744, 763, 769, 809-18, 835; question of separate organization, 465; attitude to war, 609, 612, 614-15; leader, 651, and Bolsheviks, 685-6, 692; political loading of evidence against, 774; R.L. as intellectual leader, 825-6
 - Lenin's negotiations with (1917), 584, 682, 692
 - Liberalism, 112-14, 119, 214-15, 219, 243, 301, 416-17, 554, 556, 613, 643, 824; National Liberals, 113-14, 119, 236, 243, 417, 452-4, 483
 - March action (1920), 792
 - Martial law, 608, 610, 708, 712, 728, 773
 - Middle classes, 554, 556, 715, 730
 - Militarism: *see that title*
 - Minorities, 852

Germany, and the Germans—*cont.*

- Morocco crisis: *see that title*
 Nationalism, 113, 123, 373
 Nazis: *see that title*
 Opposition, 415-16
 Parliaments, 712, 719-20
 Party-truce (*Burgfrieden*) (1914), 608, 617, 619, 640
 People's Commissars, Council of, 712, 720, 722, 726-8, 737-8, 742, 773
 People's Naval Division, 738-9, 753, 764, 780
 Poland, and, 842-4
 Poles in, 42, 60-61, 95-96, 103, 109, 133-5, 137, 173, 176-7, 180-4, 474-5, 576, 596, 844, 846, 852
 Political unrest (1914), 478
 Press, party, 721-2
 Prison sentences, categories, 649
 Progressives, 113-14, 119, 236, 414-17, 452-4, 458
 Provincial Prime Ministers' conference (1918), 734
 Provisional government: *see* People's Commissars, above
 Radicals, 378, 406, 414-17, 432, 460, 472, 610, 612, 617, 628-9, 646-7, 658, 706, 735, 739, 812, 816; ultra-radicals, 715
 Reichstag, 113-14, 314, 405, 608-11, 616-17, 619, 622-3, 628, 638-9, 643-4, 647, 649, 662, 707, 711; party control of members, 129, 608-9; forming of blocs, 248, 638-9; suggested candidature of R.L. and Clara Zetkin, 432; importance of members, 457-8; and peace bid, 709; elections: *see under* Elections, above
 Republic, agitation for, 420-3, 426, 429, 432, 625; proclaimed (1918), 711, 714, 719; allegiance to, 737
 Revolution (1918/19), prelude to, 679, 683-4, 688, 693-7, 703, 707-11; outbreak and progress, 711-36, 737-86, 809
 America and, 820
 Communist role, 10
 Directorate, 763
 Executive, 763-4, 766-7
 Freikorps to combat, 753, 769, 773-4, 784
 International aspect, 740

Germany, and the Germans—*cont.*

- Rosa Luxemburg and, 40, 420, 425, 502, 541
 Russia and, 706, 710, 712, 718-19, 746-7, 753, 784, 798
 Spartakus, appeal, 708-9; programme, 712-13; murder of leaders, 773-81
 Revolution (1923), 797
 Revolutionary movement, 505, 512, 660, 800
 Revolutionary Shop Stewards, 688, 707, 710-11, 715, 722-5, 739, 748, 753, 763-9
 Rosa Luxemburg, contribution as revolutionary, 34; moves to (1898), 79, 101, 107-12, 131-3; joined by Jogiches, 164-5, 255; leaves (1905), 314-17; returns (1906), 351, 357-60, 362; impressions of Germans, 131, 139-40, 164, 388; years of disengagement, 376-80, 383; dislike of Germans, 410, 476, 512-13, 860
 Russia, relations with, 511-12, 798; Bebel's appeal to German Socialists in, 303-4, 327; agent in, 609; possible effect of defeat by German arms 634-5; appeal to German Left (1917), 685; Berlin Legation closed (1918), 713, 718, 740, 746; and German Communists, 789; Russian methods imitated, 739-40
 Russian revolutions, effects of, 295-317, 366, 435, 440, 503-6, 510-11, 549, 556, 679-98, 711-2; lessons from, 503-11
 Sailors' Council, 710
 'Sealed train' journey across, 683
 Social-Democratic Party: *see* SPD
 Socialist Workers' Party: *see* SAP
 Socialists (*see also* names of parties and groups), 57, 60, 73, 112-31, 246-7, 405, 850; anti-Socialist laws (*Ausnahmegesetz*), 114-16, 122-4, 146, 231, 415, 844; lifted (1890), 60, 115; 'normal' German traits, 246; Reich conference (1916), 653-5; women's organization, 151, 194; youth movement, 387
 South, 236-9, 243, 249, 405, 429, 432, 436, 438-40, 474
 Spartakusbund: *see that title*

- Germany, and the Germans—*cont.*
 Strikes, 501; (1905), 296, 300, 315, 346, 365; (1910), 418–19, 517; first political strike of war, 649; (1917), 688; (1918), 688, 706, 711, 733, 738; (1919), 778; (1920), 784; political mass strike idea: *see* Mass strike
 Suffrage question, 515 (*see also* under Prussia)
 Superiority, feeling of, 504, 511
 ‘Swabians’, 131, 164
 Taxation, 414–16
 Third Reich, 820
 Trade unions, 299–304, 207–9, 332, 365–9, 377, 424, 441, 538, 556, 612, 746; agreement with SPD (1906), 302, 317, 365–6, 505; Congress (1905), 330–2, 309, 366–7; defined, 115; ‘free’, 115, 372; leaders and R.L., 34, 311, 315–16, 437–8, 480, 539, 645, 784; party and, 185, 366–8, 374, 500–1, 505–7, 514; and party school, 388, 392; Polish, 183; and strikes, 296, 300, 315, 346, 365, 418; and war, 608
 Ultra-Left, 798, 805–7
 Virtues, 31–33
 War credits: *see that title*
 West: *see* German Federal Republic
 Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils, 340, 688, 703, 707, 710–13, 715, 719–22, 725–9, 737–48, 763, 766, 769; National Congress, 742–48, 752
 Working classes, 503–5, 604, 614, 623, 692–4, 709, 743, 749, 754, 825; R.L.’s influence ‘syphilitic’, 571
 Young Workers’ League, 405
 Youth policy, 616
 Geyer, Dietrich, 816; cited, 184, 188, 285
Gleichheit, Die, 151, 403, 460–1, 494; cited, 478–9, 482
Glocke, Die, 313, 461, 626, 633
 Godesberg programme (SPD), 824
 Goethe, 29, 31, 164, 413
 Gogol, 533
 Gogowski, J., 174, 176, 183
 Goldenbakh, D. B.: *see* Ryazanov, N.
 Goldmann, M. I.: *see* Liber, M.I.
Golos sotsial-demokrata, 584
 ‘Good old tactic’ (slogan), 207, 303, 402, 440, 458
 Göppingen, 460, 470, 472
 Gordon, L. A., cited, 838
 Gorin, P., cited, 354
 Gorky, Maxim, viii 356, 559, 603, 669
 Gotha Congress (1875), 116, 122, 656
 Gotha Congress (USPD, 1917), 656–9, 758
 Government, Socialist participation in, 237–43, 248, 268, 416, 538; for post revolutionary state, 544
 Grabieć, J., cited, 42
 Gracchus, pseudonym of R.L., 657
 Gradnauer, Dr. Georg, 158–9, 169–70, 312
 Gramsci, A., 795
 Greece, 489–90
 Grillparzer, Franz, 668
 Groups, leadership emergence, 269
 Grozowski, pseudonym of Leo Jogiches (*q.v.*), 66, 69
 Grün, Karl, 850
 Grünberg, Carl, cited (Archive collection), 401, 461–3, 602, 604
 Grünberg, Karol, cited, 266
 Grünebaum, S., cited, 404
Gruppa ‘osvobozhdenie truda’ (Liberation of Labour Group), 65, 67–69, 75, 251, 570
Gruppe Internationale, 627–31, 633, 638–42, 653, 659, 685, 714; guiding principles evolved by R.L., 629–31, 639–42; adopts name of *Spartakus* (*q.v.*) (1918), 653, 714
Guardian (Manchester), cited, 615
 Guesde, Jules, 110, 238–41, 288, 305, 441, 556
 Gumbel, J., 774
 Gurvich: *see* Dan, F.
 Gusev, S., 324
 Gutman, 84
 Gutt (publisher), 269
 Haase, Ernst, cited, 638, 650
 Haase, Hugo, 125, 581, 621, 627, 635, 648–50, 657, 659, 662, 677, 727, 741–2, 756; co-chairman of party, 455–6; and war, 603–4, 606–7; shot, 777; cited, 410, 638
 Häcker, S., 93, 586
 Haenisch, Konrad, 313, 396, 436, 441, 547, 633; character, 462; supporter of PPS, 181; R.L.’s letters to, 191, 422–4, 460, 462; R.L. and, 412, 419, 422–4, 432, 635; R.L.’s reply to his

- Haenisch, Konrad—*cont.*
 defence of her (1911), 461–2; and Mehring, 462–3; and war, 605; cited, 451, 628
- Hagen, 459, 497
- Hague, The, 628
- Hague Conference (1907), 403–4
- Halle, 816
- Hamburg, 315, 346, 357, 360, 365, 496, 635, 747
- Hamburg Congress (SPD, 1897), 176
- Hamburger Echo*, cited, 316, 605
- 'Hammer, The': see *Mlot*
- Hanecki, Jakub (Firstenberg), biographical, 23, 80, 584; leading member of SDKPiL, 23, 80, 257–8, 326, 345, 564; and Lenin, 23, 279, 558, 582, 584, 598; delegate to Russian party congress, 275–6, 279, 552; helps Jogiches to escape, 360, 549; escapes from Siberia, 549; resignation from party executive, 575, 589; journey round Germany and Austria, 576–7; leads opposition, 582, 584; in Russia, 716, 813; and national question, 856; cited, 262, 274–6, 561
- Hannibal, 427
- Hanover Congress (SPD, 1899), 166, 168–73
- Hapsburgs, 112
- Hare, A. P., cited, 269
- Havemann, Professor, 825
- Hebbel, Friedrich, 668
- Hebrew language, 48, 66
- Hegel, G. W. F., 509
- Heilmann, Ernst, cited, 471
- Heine, Heinrich, cited, 103, 689
- Heine, Wolfgang, 167, 308, 471, 612, 645, 654; and revisionist controversy, 151–2, 165, 169, 187, 234
- Heinrich, 87
- Helphand, Alexander Israel: see Parvus
- Helphand, Mrs., 356
- Henke, Alfred, 191, 392, 432, 441, 462–3, 465, 470–1, 582, 587, 591
- Hertling, Count von, 691
- Hertz-Eichenrode, D., cited, 843
- Hervé, Gustave, 398–9, 736
- Hess, Moses, 834, 850
- Hessen, suffrage, 416
- Hessenwinkel, 194, 197
- Hicks, J. R., cited, 833
- Hildebrand, Gerhard, 471
- Hilfe, Die*, 301
- Hilferding, Rudolf, 389–90, 731, 741–2, 826; cited, 520
- Himmelstrand, Ulf, cited, 249, 306
- Hindenburg, Field-Marshal Paul von, 682–3, 691, 728
- Hirsch, Paul, cited, 452, 762
- Hirsch-Duncker Unions, 115
- Hirschman, A. O., cited, 837
- Historical; History:
 Analysis, 508–10, 748, 768
 Development, 238, 485–6, 489, 491
 Dialectic, 399
 'Historicist' prediction, 204, 220, 222, 234
 Inevitability, 125–6, 748
 Materialism, 435
 National question and, 845, 847–51
 Reappraisal, 3, 10–11, 38–39
 Revolutionary examples, 541, 693, 728, 842–3
 Revolutionary move eastwards, 512
 Rosa Luxemburg and, 508–10, 541, 728, 748, 850
 Social conflict process, 506
- Historiography, Communist, 3, 10, 460, 468, 495, 627, 656, 616, 824, 859; cited, 465, 522, 530, 533, 543, 555, 612, 615, 658, 703, 708
- Historische Shriftn*, cited, 67–69, 83–84, 87–88, 257
- Hitler, Adolf, 487, 616
- Hobbes, Thomas, *Leviathan*, 538
- Hobson, J. A., cited, 520
- Hochdorf, Max, cited, 620
- Hochfeld, Julian, cited, 353, 822
- Hoffmann, Adolf, 169, 171–2, 627–8, 650, 676, 816
- Holland: see Netherlands
- Hörnle, E., cited, 789
- Hoselitz, B. F., cited, 843
- 'Hottentot' elections, 373
- Hryniewiecki, Ignacy, 41
- Huch, Ricarda, 667
- Hué, Otto, 300–1, 645
- Hungary, 6, 102, 107, 411, 599
- Huns, Emperor's reference to, 489
- Hutten, Ulrich von, 29
- Huysmans, Camille, 326, 442–3, 449–50, 603, 629; cited, 592, 595, 602–3, 616
- Hyndman, H. M., 303

- Ideology, 248-9, 256, 289, 306, 440, 477
 Ignatiev: pseudonym of Leo Jogiches
 (*q.v.*), 66
 Ignotus: *see* Martov, Yurii
 Illovo, 329
 Impatience, two kinds of, 434-5
 Imperialism, 4, 215, 399-403, 415,
 478-81, 486, 515-16, 640-2
 Economic features, 527, 530-6, 835-8
 Ethics, 631-2
 Historical, 623, 835
 Image of imperialist state, 529
 International Congress resolution
 (1907), 399-402, 523, 557, 599
 Lenin and, 38, 292, 520-2, 526, 534,
 836, 838
 Majority and, 524
 Rosa Luxemburg's doctrine of, 216,
 248, 392, 473-4, 493, 519-30, 540,
 543, 640-2, 847-8; ignored by critics
 and biographers, 529-30; economic
 aspects in *The Accumulation of*
 Capital, 530-6, 830, 835-8; Marxist-
 Leninist-Stalinist orthodoxy of her
 concept, 539-40
 Socialist propaganda, part in, 373-4
 Strong and weak at same time, 526-8
 'Imperialistic economism', 534
 'In Defence of Polish Nationality'
 (pamphlet), 179, 186
 Incomes, 831, 838
 Independent Labour Party, British,
 612-13, 640
Independent Poland and the Workers'
Cause, 90-93
 Independent Social-Democratic Party of
 Germany: *see* USPD
 India, 632, 836
Industrial Development of Poland, The, 42,
 106, 173, 829, 846
 Innsbruck, 14
 Intellectuals, 53, 102, 136, 165, 185, 361;
 in politics, 22-23, 34-36, 47, 89, 201,
 256, 305; and backward countries,
 36; in *Proletariat* party, 45, 57;
 R.L.'s hatred of, 234; 'young'
 intellectuals, 321-2, 332
 International, First, 116, 130, 842-3
 International, Second, 36, 38-40, 286, 310,
 359, 371, 435, 491, 537, 544, 574-5,
 816
 Academics, lack of, 233
 International, Second—*cont.*
 Block grants, 326
 Collapse, 612-13, 615, 629, 641, 799
 Congresses, 84-85, 130-1, 405; (1893),
 71-75, 81, 84, 130, 178, 260; (1896),
 74, 85, 88, 93, 95-103, 130, 176, 178,
 182, 252, 260, 563; (1900), 176, 182,
 259-61; (1904), 194-7, 199, 222,
 240-1, 245, 299, 592, 594; (1907), 378,
 396-404, 523, 549, 557, 566, 599;
 (1910), 442, 599; (1912), 599; (1914),
 486, 592, 595, venue changed, 602
 Freedom of conscience, 494-5
 Germany and, 405, 480
 History, 130-1
 Kautsky and, 117, 626
 Lenin and: *see under* Lenin
 Mandates, 71, 178, 195, 398
 Middle classes, treatment of, 342
 Militarism, imperialism and wars
 resolution (1907), 399-402, 523, 557,
 599
 Misunderstandings, 496
 Opportunism in, 818, 853
 Permanent staff, 403
 Poles and, 24, 32, 76, 80-81, 88-90, 99,
 265, 574-5, 850
 Primacy of Russian party, 795
 Rosa Luxemburg and, 87, 89, 97, 99-
 100, 109, 131, 161, 198, 257-60, 326,
 378, 396-403, 575, 598-9, 678, 704
 SPD and, 72, 130-1, 310, 326, 396, 403,
 445, 510, 513, 740
 War, and, 602, 606-7, 612-13, 615
 Weakness in face of war, 486-7
 International, new, creation suggested,
 303, 623-4, 627-9, 641-2, 782-3
 International, Third (Comintern), 2, 196,
 219, 342, 542, 717, 784-5, 787, 792-3,
 797, 805-6
 International, Fourth, 8, 801
 International affairs, 478
International Review of Social History,
 cited, 588, 618, 674
 International Socialist Bureau, 285-6,
 397, 582, 585, 599; moves to Holland,
 628-9
 Lenin and, 589, 591-5
 Meeting (1914), 486, 601-3, 609
 Radek case and, 473
 Rosa Luxemburg, as representative,
 195, 263, 281, 286, 326, 347, 443-50,

- International Socialist Bureau—*cont.*
 599, 601, 629; publishes secretary's letter in newspaper, 442-50
 Russian question, 591-5
 War, and, 401, 601-2
- Internationale, Die*, 618-19, 623, 634, 639, 643; cited, 606, 618, 623-4, 626-7, 654-5, 678, 791
- Internationale, Group: see *Gruppe Internationale*
- Internationale Pressekorrespondenz (Inprekorr)*, cited, 755, 772, 817
- Internationalism, R.L.'s, 196, 847, 859, 860-1
- Introduction to Political Economy*, 391, 620, 796, 828-9, 834, 840
- Investment, 830-2, 839
- Isegrim: see Schippel, Max
- Iskra*, 254, 269, 271-8, 282-6, 352, 354, 356, 854; Lenin's article (1903), 276-8, 282
- Italy:
 Communists, 791
 Fascism, 554
 First World War, 613, 640, 691
 Mass strike, 491
 Mercantilism, 233
 Press, 610
 Rosa Luxemburg, holidays in, 18, 411-13
 Russian revolution, and, 681, 683
 Socialists, 94, 401, 560, 745
- Izvestiya*, cited, 710
- Izolska (Irena Szer-Siemkowska), I., 379
- Jacob, Mathilde, 27, 618, 621, 651-2, 657, 667, 686, 697, 747, 760-1, 779; biographical, 677; correspondence, 618, 651, 677-9
- Jacobins, 286, 425
- Jagiello election (1913), 466, 592
- Jagow, T.A. von, 418
- Jankowska-Mendelson, M., 72
- Japan, 195, 318, 343
- Japy, 238
- Jaurès, Jean, 95, 238-41, 243, 303, 305, 398-9, 402, 562; R.L. and, 110, 161, 195-6, 558, 602, 637; assassinated (1914), 602
- Jawlensky, A. von., 28
- Jedrzejewski, B. A., 93
- Jehuda, Ben, 48
- Jena Congresses (SPD) (1905), 301, 306-12, 328, 351, 358, 366-7, 372-3, 399-402, 406, 419, 437, 469, 505, 515; (1911), 442, 445-51, 461-2, 523, 581; (1913), 459, 465, 468-73, 478, 497, 587
- Jerusalem, 44
- Jewish Encyclopaedia*, cited, 50
- Jewish Workers, General Union of: see *Bund, Jewish*
- Jews, 32-33, 43-44, 140, 272, 854; Polish, 43, 50-53; R.L.'s attitude to, 52-53, 140, 859-60; Russian, 43-44, 66, 104; Socialist movement among, 43-44, 66-67, 82
- Jeziarska, Fanny, 27, 636, 652, 761
- Jogiches, Leo (Tyszko, Tyshka), 34, 89, 136, 157, 167-8, 596-9, 685, 692, 731, 760, 784; in Zürich, 64, 78, 141, 164, 255, 263; brief visit to Dresden, 143; joins R.L. in Germany (1900), 164-5; in Algeria, 165, 263, 571; in Berlin, 194, 255, 263; in Warsaw, 316, 329; arrest, trial and imprisonment (1906-7), 345, 359-60, 548; escapes and returns to Germany (1907), 336, 360, 379-80, 548-9; arrested (1918), 688; released, 719; re-arrested and escapes (1919), 779; murdered (1919), 780, 787
- Biographical, 65-69, 569-72
 Bolshevik finances, and, 578-82
 Circular (December 1916), 657
 Communist Party appeal written by, 778
 Constituent Assembly, and, 748
 Dictatorial qualities, 571
 Editor, as, 384, 571-3, 578
 Lenin, relations with, 357, 396, 578-82, 588, 590-1, 595, 779, 857
 Letters, from R.L., 15, 22, 53, 75, 107, 141-4, 420; derogatory shorthand used in, 131, 140; quoted, 54, 75, 82, 87 *passim*
 Memorial, 781
 Money matters, 19-20, 69, 85-86, 88
 Peasantry, on, 565-7
 Permanent revolution, and, 504
 Pseudonyms, 66-67, 69, 346, 559, 651, 655, 657, 679
 Publishing venture, 67-69
 Radek case, and, 472, 586-7, 590; meetings with Radek, 747, 779

Jogiches, Leo—*cont.*

Relationship with Rosa Luxemburg, 18–20, 23–27, 54, 68–70, 75, 82, 86–87, 108–10, 141–4, 164–5, 194, 201, 255–6, 325, 328–9, 335–6; end of intimate relationship (1907), 25–27, 88, 336, 360, 378–83, 411, 672; relationship analysed, 378–84; party subservience, 380–1, 557; threats to kill R.L., 380, 382–3; his use of Berlin flat, 382–3, 475, 572; later relationship, 557, 565, 571–2, 575, 585, 591, 595–9, 618; third and last period of peace, 678–9, 761, 779; her death, 773, 778–80, 788; his work on her papers, 780

Russians, and, 252–3, 274, 277–8, 280, 288–9, 344, 551–3, 578–82, 834

Schmidt inheritance, and, 579–81

SDKPiL, activities in, 24, 79, 81–83, 92, 254–6, 263, 266, 362, 557, 559, 565; leadership, 269, 381–4, 568–72, 575–8, 582–6, 590, 651, 716; and split in (1911), 384, 574–8, 581–5, 716

Spartakus, and, 66, 597, 630, 650–1, 655, 657, 659, 688, 719, 721, 724, 742, 752, 757; leader, 650–1, 655, 780

Speaker, as, 570

Strikes, report on, 688

Trade unions, and, 575

'Une miniature Ausgabe de Nechaieff', 68

Woman friend, 379

Writing, 'totally incapable of', 108, 383–4, 570–1

Joll, James, cited, 74, 311, 401, 404

Jörns, P., (magistrate), 773–4, 777

Journal of Central European Affairs, cited, 645, 651, 667, 677

Journal of Modern History, cited, 145

Journalist, Rosa Luxemburg as (*see also* under names of newspapers), editor of *Sprawa Robotnicza* (1894), 70; editor of *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* (1898), 137–8, 143, 147–8, 154, 157–62, 169–70; joint editor of *Leipziger Volkszeitung* (1901), 162, 187–9; associate editor of *Neue Zeit* (1905); 191; joins board of *Vorwärts* (1905), 312–14, 655; occupies one fifth of *Neue Zeit* space in 1910, 428; under contract to *Leipziger Volkszeitung*

Journalist, Rosa Luxemburg as—*cont.*

(1911), 460–1, 465–7; joint editor of *Sozialdemokratische Korrespondenz* (1913), 313, 467; survey of work *par excellence*, 494; contributes to *Sotsial-Demokrat*, 558; adviser and contributor to *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, 572; prepares *Die Internationale* for publication (1915), 618; editor of *Rote Fahne* (1918), 759–61, 771; last article, 771, 777

Judin: *see* Aiznstat, Isaiah

Junge Garde, 405

Jungen group, 123–5

Junius, pseudonym of R.L., 620, 625, 630

Juniusbrochüre (Die Krise der Sozialdemokratie), 615, 620, 625, 629–32, 634, 658, 682, 848

Junkers, 113, 126, 414, 490, 515, 681, 743

Kaczankowska, J., cited, 847

Kaganovich, L., 814–15

Kalabiński, Stanislaw, cited, 319, 337

Kaliski, J., 312

Kamenev, L. B., 357, 433, 579, 799

Kamieński, H.S.: *see* Stein, H.

Kamo (Ter-Petrosian), 95

Kampf, Der, 655; cited, 657, 662

Kämpfer, Johannes, pseudonym of Julian Marchlewski (*q.v.*), 78

Kandinsky, W., 28

Kant, Immanuel, 136–7, 835

KAPD, 658, 816

Kapp *putsch* (1920), 784, 790

Karski, pseudonym of Julian Marchlewski (*q.v.*), 78

Kaskalah movement, 51

Kasprzak, Marcin, 57–59, 94–95, 174, 176–7, 181, 183, 264, 315

Kathedersozialisten, 230–3

Kaul, F. K., cited, 774

Kautsky, Benedikt (Bendel), 420, 674; cited, 603, 616, 621, 673

Kautsky, Hans, 411–12, 690

Kautsky, John H., cited, 36

Kautsky, Karl, 9, 35, 109, 255, 313, 403, 436, 438, 469, 515, 536, 631, 648, 662–3, 727, 785, 810, 834, 841

Bernstein and revisionism, and, 146–55, 159, 168–9, 185–8, 196–7, 202, 205–6, 212, 221–3, 225, 228, 244, 299, 409, 416

- Kautsky, Karl—*cont.*
 Bolsheviks, and, 430, 433-4, 580-1, 708
 Characteristics, 16
 Class war, and, 556
 Communists, and, 247, 409, 422
 Decline in power, 434
 Engels, and, 117, 123, 754-5
 Haenisch and, 462
 Imperialism, and, 521, 527-8
 Intellectual, as, 117, 234
 International Bureau, representative
 in, 347, 397
 Jogiches-R.L. relationship, on, 378-9
 Left, and the, 522, 811-12, 826
 Lenin, and, 427, 433-4, 539, 559,
 625-6, 708, 811, 818, 840
 Leninist criticism, 818
 Marchlewski, and, 466, 475, 592
 Marxism, and, 7, 37-39, 102, 117, 123,
 221-3, 247-8, 430, 432-4, 626, 840
 Mass strike, on, 300, 443, 509
 Mehring, and, 432, 463-4, 708
 Mensheviks, and, 284, 293, 352, 793,
 836
 National question, and, 844, 847, 849,
 852-3
Neue Zeit, editor, 96-98, 107, 171,
 191-2, 293, 305, 376, 410, 421-4,
 428
 Party writings, 139, 182
 Parvus and, 626, 634-5
 Peace without annexations, and, 690
 Polemics with R.L., 464, 517, 629;
 (1896), 96, 101, 176; (1910), 5, 159,
 234, 250, 377, 412, 421-36, 518-19,
 534-5, 623, 786; (1911), 445-6, 579;
 (1916), 629
 Progressives, agreement with, 453-4
 Relations with his wife Luise, 411-12
 Revolution, and, 220, 241, 298, 305,
 408-9, 431-2, 434-5
Road to Power, The, 408-10, 415,
 428, 434, 452, 516
 Rosa Luxemburg, friendship and
 collaboration with, 22, 133, 143-4,
 163-6, 170-1, 183, 191-4, 305-6,
 349, 357-8, 371-2, 375, 390; decline
 in relationship, 372, 376-7, 410-12,
 472, 476, 627; refusal to publish
 articles, 421-4, 426-7; as Russian
 patriot, 512; agreement with for first
 time for four years, 595; reviews book
- Kautsky, Karl—*cont.*
 by Kautsky, 626-7; analogy with,
 802; letters to, 335; quoted, 53, 55, 97,
 107, 197-8 *passim*; polemics with:
 see Polemics, above
 Russia, attitude towards, 277, 284-5,
 293, 512, 593, 595, 694, 719
Spartakus, and, 675, 769
 SPD executive, and, 456
 Strategy of attrition, 516, 518, 527
 Support abroad, 433-4
 Systems, 545
 Theorist, as, 22, 38, 117, 223, 234, 626,
 811
 Trade unions, and, 367
 Trotsky and, 626
 Trustee activity, 579, 590-3, 626
 'Two impatiences', 434
 USPD, and, 659-60
 War, and, 4, 607, 609, 611-12
 Working holidays with R.L. in Geneva,
 380, 383, 410
 Works, cited, 67, 109-10, 146, 221, 300,
 374, 379, 544, 606, 609, 615-16, 626,
 755
 Kautsky, Luise, friendship with R.L.,
 27, 135, 163-4, 170, 193-4, 201, 305,
 315-16, 345, 349, 357-8, 371-2, 410-
 12, 459, 671-2, 761; totality of
 friendship, 382; information from,
 371, 385, 609, 772; and Jogiches-
 R.L. relationship, 378-80; relations
 with her husband Karl, 411-12;
 R.L.'s influence on, 412; attachment
 to Hans Kautsky, 412; and Clara
 Zetkin, 794; letters from R.L., 335,
 627, 668, 818; quoted, 53, 55, 87,
 107 *passim*; *Ein Gedenkbuch*, cited,
 14, 50, 52-53, 56, 63, 194, 674
 Kautsky, Minna, 54, 164, 675
 Kautsky Archives, 77
 Kautskyism, 815
 Keep, J. H. L., cited, 285, 339
 Keil, Wilhelm, 170, 429, 470, 604; cited,
 622, 723, 725
 Kelles-Krauz, Kazimierz, 100
 Kerensky, A. F., 682
 Kestenberg, L. (publisher), 670
Khassidim, 44, 51
 Khrushchev, N., 4, 36, 128, 508, 615,
 703
 Kiel, 423, 710-11

- Kienthal Conference (1916), 627-9
 Kiepenberger, H., 780-1
 Kievsky: *see* Pyatakov, G. L.
 Kirchmann, O. von, 833
 Kirshnits, 273
 Klausner, Y. A., cited, 51
 Klein, Josephine, cited, 269
 Klimowicz, Waclaw, 182
 Knief, Johann, 470, 587, 627, 658, 747
Kochel-Brief, Der, cited, 821
 Koczan-Morawski, 105
 Koenen, Wilhelm, 390, 392
 Kolarz, Walter, cited, 859
 Kolb, E., cited, 688, 708, 732
 Kolberg, 386
Kommunistische Internationale, cited, 796,
 808, 810, 817-18, 825
 Kon, Feliks, 48-49
 Konderski, Waclaw, 573
 Königsberg trial (1904), 197-8, 298
 Königshütte, 134
 Kopsch, J., 454
 Korallova, M., cited, 823
 Korn, Karl, 387, 405
 Korolenko, Vladimir G., autobiography
 translated by R.L., 29-30, 44, 620,
 668-71
 Korsch, K., 816
 Kostrzewa, Wera (Maria Koszutska),
 cited, 797
 Koszutska, Maria: *see* Kostrzewa, Wera
 Kovno, 746
 Kowalski, Józef, cited, 597
 Kozłowski, Czeslaw, cited, 266
 KPD (German Communist Party)
 (earlier *Spartakus*, *q.v.*), foundation
 (1918), 38-39, 599-600, 610; goes
 underground for nearly a year, 778,
 783, 788-9
 Alliance against military insurgents,
 790
 Appeal (1919), 778
Bericht KPD, cited, 749-50, 753-4,
 756-7; deletions in copy, 756
 Bolshevization, 542-3, 678, 785, 791,
 797-8, 800, 807, 813, 815-20, 823
 Central Committee, 766, 819-20
 Congresses (founding, 1918), 242, 505,
 703, 736, 753-8; (1925), 800
 Fischer, Ruth, attacks by, 751, 800;
 expelled, 805, 807
 Frölich and, 819
- KPD (German Communist Party)—*cont.*
 History, 790, 816
 January rising, and, 762-8
 Kautsky, and, 434
 Leadership, 736, 768, 780-1, 783, 791-
 2, 807, 819; position after murders,
 783, 787-8
 Left-wing deviation (1919), 816
 Lenin and, 791-2
 Nazis, and, 817
 Offices occupied, 770-1
 Policy, differences, 790
 Purge (1936), 781
 Radicalism, 658, 678, 791
 Revolution, and, 732
 Rosa Luxemburg, a founder of KPD,
 1, 24, 599; her warning to, 542-3;
 status and authority, 789, 795;
 rehabilitated, 805, 818-19
 Russian Communists, relations with,
 695, 717, 779, 791, 798
Spartakus, and, 485
 USPD members adhere, 745, 784
Zentrale, 787, 789
 Zetkin, Clara, member, 194, 609, 794
 KPO (Communist Party Opposition), 819
 Kraft, W., pseudonym of Leo Jogiches
 (*q.v.*), 66, 651, 657
 Krajewski, A.: *see* Stein, W.
 Krasny, J., real name, 379; cited, 318,
 360, 379, 570
 Kraus, Karl, 15; quoted, xv
 Krause, Trooper, xiv
 Krause, Helmut, cited, 843
Kreuzzeitung, 187
 Krichevskii, B.N., 55, 67, 84-85, 96, 108,
 252-4
Krise der Sozialdemokratie, Die: *see*
Juniusbroschüre
 Krumbügel, pseudonym of Leo Jogiches
 (*q.v.*), 66, 655
 Krupskaya, Nadezhda, 357, 557-8, 589
 Kruszyńska, R., pseudonym of R.L., 68,
 70, 72
 Krystalowicz, Dr., pseudonym of Leo
 Jogiches (*q.v.*), 66, 679
 Krzhizhanovskii, S., cited, 276, 278
 Kuczynski, Jürgen, cited, 823
 Kunicki, St., 48-49
 Kunina, A. E., cited, 820-1
 Kuokkala, Finland, 355-7, 360, 365,
 396, 557

- Kurnatowski, J., 84
Kwestia polska a ruch socjalistyczny, 71, 271, 277. 21-2
- Labour Leader*, 612
- Labour Party, British, 115, 129, 184, 267
- Labriola, Antonio, 93-94, 233
- Lafargue, Paul, 475
- Land policy, 545, 565-6, 699
- Landauer, G., 789
- Landsberg, O., 614, 649, 737
- Landwehr Canal, 775
- Lane, D. S., cited, 322
- Lange, P., 719
- Langner, P., cited, 708, 808
- Languages, native, 340
- Lansbury, George, 98
- Laslett, P., cited, 803
- Lassalle, Ferdinand, 115, 119, 123, 188, 232, 241, 728
- Lassalleaner*, 122
- Laufenberg, H., 471, 747
- Lavrov, Peter, 46, 95
- Leadership, R.L. and, 480, 502, 507-8, 516-18, 540
- Ledebour, Georg, 397, 459, 466, 511, 627, 648, 650, 654, 731; character, 161; editor of *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung*, 161; support for Poles, 178-9, 181, 475; and R.L., 169, 179, 181, 282, 449, 615; member of Revolutionary Directorate, 763; arrested (1919), 769; trial, 714; and war, 607, 612; cited, 722, 762-4, 774
- Leder, Z. (W. Feinstejn), 80, 92, 549, 558, 560, 575-6, 578, 582, 585, 587, 716; arrested, 345; cited, 796
- Legien, Karl, 366-6, 645, 656, 685, 729
- Leinert, R., 438
- Leipzig, 147, 187-8, 422, 441, 460, 465, 617; R.L. speeches in, 121, 236, 316
- Leipzig Congress (SPD, 1909), 408, 417, 459
- Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 136-8, 147-9, 159, 166, 170, 172, 187-9, 198, 313, 465-6, 633, 650, 655, 708; R.L. as joint editor, 21, 162, 187-9; R.L. gives up all collaboration with paper (1902), 189; R.L.'s contract with (1911), 460-1, 464, 473, 494; R.L.'s articles published in, 138, 166, 170, 206, 395, 444-6, 450, 464; refusal to *Leipziger Volkszeitung*—cont.
 print further articles by R.L., 465-7, 482-3; cited, 178, 214, 216, 219 *passim*
- Leiteisen, G. D.: see Lindov, G.
- Leiteisen family, 357
- Lenin, V. I., 9, 94, 185, 271, 546, 656, 686, 706-8, 738, 803-16 (and mentioned *passim*); emigration (1900), 254-5; in Switzerland, 607, 615, 632 *Accumulation of Capital*, criticism of, 532-4, 834-5
- Bolsheviks, and, 23-24, 267, 486, 507, 569, 577-9
- Capri party school, and, 559-60
- Chauvinism, and, 533, 750, 854-6, 861
- Communist parties, and, 791-2
- Confidential agents, 23, 584, 598
- Demolition method of controversy, 518
- Dzierżyński, and, 558, 583-4, 589, 797
- 'Economism', 534, 815
- Evil motives in political controversy, and, 244-5
- Germany, negotiations with, 584, 682; peace with, 692
- Imperialism, and, 38, 292, 520-2, 526, 534, 836, 838
- International, and, 450, 486-7, 589, 591-5, 624, 627
- Jogiches, and, 357, 396, 578-82, 588, 590-1, 595, 779, 857
- Juniusbroschüre*, comments on, 625
- Kautsky, and, 427, 433-4, 539, 559, 625-6, 708, 811, 818, 840
- Kienthal conference, at (1916), 628
- Land reform, on, 566, 686, 699
- Luxemburg-Kautsky dispute, on, 534-5
- Marxism, and, 7, 37-38, 402, 544, 631, 803-6, 809, 816
- Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, 559
- Mensheviks, and, 94, 205, 242, 284, 352, 577, 809, 812
- Moor, Karl, and, 609
- National question, and, 36, 91, 534, 568, 588-9, 596, 700, 796-7, 849, 852-9; *Iskra* article (1903), 276-8, 282
- Opportunism, and, 104, 624-5, 853, 855
- Organization, and, 80, 264, 276, 323, 545, 555, 704

- Lenin, V. I.—*cont.*
 'Pairing' technique, 801, 815, 821, 853, 857
 Party congress, approach to Polish delegates, 282-3
 Parvus and, 634-5
 Plekhanov, and, 65, 85, 500, 592
 Polemics, and, 483
 Poles, and, 275-9, 475, 552, 558, 797
 Political weakness, and, 22
 Proletariat, and, 425, 431
 Propaganda among enemy soldiers, 528
 Radek, and, 588, 590, 747, 752
 Revisionism, and, 5, 291-2
 Revolution, and, 90, 295, 323-4, 333, 352-4, 359, 361-3, 544, 625, 634, 693-8, 836; permanent, 567, 683, 813; debate with Trotsky, 573
 Rosa Luxemburg, disputes with, 1, 2, 6, 92, 224-8, 258, 267, 285-94, 352, 632, 716, 802, 821, 826-7, 853, 856-7; meetings with, 356-7, 396, 398; personal relations with, 372, 557-60, 568, 581, 590-1, 625-6, 782; political relations with, 532; and errors, 533, 542, 792-3; Lenin-Luxemburg confrontation, 627, 632-3, 788, 826-7; and her death, 779; on her role and importance, 792-5
 SDKPiL split, and, 583, 588-90, 595
 'Sealed train' journey across Germany, 683
 Slogans, use of, 529
 Social-Democrat unity, and, 595-6
 SPD, and, 402-3
 Speaker, as, 128, 570
 Stalin, and, 854
 Testament, 750
 Theories, 38, 803-6
 Trade unions, and, 500
 Trotsky, debate with, 573; pact with, 683; government with, 757
 War, and, 4, 39-40, 547, 603, 615, 628, 640, 660; Luxemburg-Lenin amendment to resolution, 399, 401-2, 557
 What is to be done?, 226, 272, 286, 288, 514
 Works, cited, 660, 693, 706, 791, 793, 796, 803, 854-7
 Zimmerwald Conference, at, 596, 627
 Leninism, 2, 35-36, 266, 268, 362, 428, 465, 534, 693, 766, 792, 799-810, Leninism—*cont.*
 815-18, 821, 825, 852, 858-9; Polish and German, 797
 Leninism or Marxism?, cited, 1, 286-7, 292
 Leninism-Stalinism, 837
 Lensch, Paul, 189, 313, 396, 460-1, 465, 547, 633, 635
 Lenz, J., cited, 801
 Lenzner, N., cited, 808-9
 Leonhard, S., cited, 613, 617, 642
 Lessing, G. E., 29
 Letter-writer, R.L. as, 15, 22, 53, 85, 308, 335, 620-1; derogatory shorthand used, 131, 140; unpublished letters, 551, 565, 867; extracts published in Moscow, 609; repetitive phrases, 636; funny drawings at top, 620; last letter, 759
 Letters from Prison, 171, 378, 620-1, 644, 652, 661-75; cited, 348, 644, 665-7, 713
 Letts, 551, 594, 854, 859
 Levi, Paul, 483, 486, 637, 677, 688, 695, 697-8, 717, 757, 760, 785, 790-6, 816; and *Spartakus*, 719, 747; leader of KPD, 783, 787, 790-6; publishes R.L.'s *Russian Revolution*, 698, 792-3; cited, 391, 620, 698, 757, 791, 828
 Leviné, Eugen, 697, 783, 787, 789
 Liber, M.I. (Goldmann), 272
 Liberalism, 214-15, 219, 282, 341, 363, 553-4, 563, 565, 851
 Liberation of Labour Group: see *Gruppa 'osvobozhdenie truda'*
 Lichtheim, George, cited, 425
 Lichtstrahlen, 627
 Liebknecht, Karl, 198, 236, 376, 415, 437, 471, 614-16, 621, 629, 635, 643-4, 679; imprisonment, 348, 374; evicted from caucus (1916), 639; arrested and sentenced (1916), 648-50, 652-3; in Luckau prison, 615, 667, 670, 688-9, 693, 698; released (1918), 709-10; leader of *Spartakus*, 710, 719; proclaims Socialist Republic, 711, 714; *Spartakus* activities, 714-15, 721-3, 727, 729, 731-2, 734-5, 747-8, 757; refused admission to Councils congress (1918), 745-6; threats on life, 759, 769-70; life during last two months, 759-60, 770-2; member of

- Liebknecht, Karl--*cont.*
 revolutionary directorate, 763; and
 January rising (1919), 738, 764, 766-
 8, 770; arrested, 772-3; murdered
 (1919), 733, 738, 768, 773-81, 787-8,
 818; officially described as 'execution'
 773
 Assessment of, 800, 818-19, 825-6
 Descriptions of, 616, 636
 Hero-worship of, 659-60
 Intellectual parity, 817
 Liebknechtism, 817
 Memorial, 781
 Militarism, and, 374, 404-5, 482, 524-5
 One-man propaganda campaign, 616-
 17, 619
 Party discipline, and, 546, 617
 Radek and, 472, 636, 710, 715, 731, 747,
 760
 Rosa Luxemburg, and, 476, 486, 616,
 619, 630, 636, 643-4; believed to be
 lovers, 770
 Russian revolution, and, 2
 Slogan 'main enemy is at home', 448,
 615, 642
 War, and, 606, 609-11, 613, 616-17,
 622-3, 658
 Writings, 37, 614-15; last article,
 771-2; cited, 374, 595, 604, 606,
 615, 646, 693, 710
 Youth policy, and, 404-5, 616
 Liebknecht, Sonia (Sophie), 14, 413, 644-
 5, 665-7, 773
 Liebknecht, Wilhelm, 117, 128, 150-1,
 155, 169, 221, 244, 257, 284, 755;
 biographical, 121-2; R.L.'s relations
 with, 22, 91, 98, 100-2, 133, 139,
 171-2, 176; Russian translations of
 works, 67; and war, 606; and national
 question, 844, 846-7
 Liège, 616
 Lille, 239
 Limanowski, Boleslaw, 46-47, 61, 850
 Limoges Congress (SFIO, 1906), 398
 Lindau, Rudolf, cited, 639
 Lindov, G.D. (Leiteisen), 580
 Liofka, pseudonym of Leo Jogiches
 (*q.v.*), 67
 Liquidators, 577, 580, 590, 596, 815-16,
 853
 Literary preferences, R.L.'s, 29-31, 53, 56,
 190
 Lithuania, geographical connotation, 105;
 Jewish Socialists, 43, 67; Social
 Democrats, 80, 104-5, 251, 256;
 self-determination, 692, 696
 Litvinov, M., cited, 594
 Lloyd George, David, 448
 Łódź, 43, 98, 257, 345, 582, 590
 London, émigrés in: *see under* England
 London Congress (International, 1896),
 74, 85, 88, 93, 95-103, 130, 176, 178,
 182, 252, 260, 563; resolution on
 right of self-determination, 98-100,
 182, 260
 London Congress (RSDRP, 1907), 379-
 80, 383, 550-7, 565-6
 Longjumeau party school, no Poles in-
 vited to, 560
 Löwenstein, Bernhard (uncle), 63
 Löwenstein, Line: *see* Luxemburg, Line
 (mother)
 Löwenthal, Richard, cited, 746
 Lübeck, Gustav (Rosa's husband), 109-10,
 200, 687
 Lübeck, Karl, 109-10, 123
 Lübeck, Olympia, 109-10, 200
 Lübeck Congress (SPD, 1901), 177-9,
 185-7, 192, 245
 Lublin, 50
 Luckau prison, 615, 649, 693
Lud Polski: *see* Polish People (group)
 Ludendorff, General Erich von, 728,
 744
 Lukács, Georg, 29, 212, 405, 794-5;
 cited, 544, 631
Lumpenbourgeoisie, 215, 756
Lumpenproletariat, 497, 669
 Lunacharskii, A. V., and Kosolenko,
 671
 Luther, Karl Heinz, cited, 764
 Luther, Martin, 662
 Lutz, Ralph H., cited, 645, 651, 667, 677,
 687
 Luxemburg, Anna (sister), 52, 346
 Luxemburg, Elias or Eduard (father),
 51-52, 54-55; death (1900), 54, 200,
 675
 Luxemburg, Jenny (niece), 54, 386
 Luxemburg, Josef (brother), 52; visits
 Berlin 348-9
 Luxemburg, Line (*née* Löwenstein)
 (mother), 53; death (1897), 54, 111
 Luxemburg, Maximilian (brother), 52

- LUXEMBURG, ROSA (*see also* subject headings throughout the index), birth (5 March 1871), 50; prevalence of wrong date of birth, 50; family move to Warsaw (1873), 55; leaves home (1889), 55; in Zürich (1889–1898), 61–111; in Germany (1898–1905), 79, 112, 131–3, 163; moves to Warsaw (1905), 314–17, 329–30; leaves Warsaw (1906), 336, 351; in Finland and St. Petersburg, 355–60; returns to Germany, 351, 357–60, 362; teacher at party school (from 1907), 388–96; murder (1919) (*see also* Murder, below), 733, 775–6; body recovered from canal, 781; funeral, 781, 788
- Academic recognition, rejection, 234
- Animal life, love of, 14–15, 63, 665–7
- Apartments, in Berlin, 17–18, 132, 163, 165, 194, 371, 381, 475, 780; in Zürich, 18, 63, 82
- Appearance, 16–17, 83, 714, 772
- Argumentative style, 505, 515
- Arrests and prison sentences, in Germany (1904), 197–9, 377–8; in Warsaw (1906), 165, 345–51, 479; in Germany (1906–1907), 351, 358, 360, 372–3, 377–8; in Warsaw (1906), *in absentia*, 359–60, 548; Frankfurt trial (1914), 481–3, 485, address on her own behalf, 488–92; Berlin trial (1914), 484–6; in Germany (February 1915), 618–19; (July 1915), high treason indictment not proceeded with, 618; (July 1916), 651–2; imprisonment during the war, 30, 44, 106, 384, 391, 474, 482, 532, 617–21, 630, 633, 637, 643, 646, 686–7, 713–14; effects of prison life, 663–75; in Germany (1919), arrested and shot, 772–5
- Art, attitude to, 28–31, 201, 387, 667–8
- Biographers, 13–16, 378–9, 821, 918–19
- 'Bloody Rosa', 301
- 'Bogey-woman of Polish Socialism', 83
- Botany, interest in, 63, 190, 664–7
- Change of mind during German revolution, discussed, 703, 716–17, 793–5, 808–9
- Character, 20–22, 476, 495, 546, 674–5
- Child, desire for, 144
- LUXEMBURG, ROSA—*cont.*
- 'Cow-like patience', 189–90
- Cultural interests, 201, 667–71
- Daily routine described (in Berlin), 132–3, 163–4
- Dichotomies, 661, 663
- Diet, rice obtained by friends, 678–9
- Doctoral dissertation (*see Industrial Development of Poland*), 20, 105–6, 110, 173, 829, 846
- Education, 56–58, 63–65, 105–6
- Enfant terrible*, 474
- Epigrams, use of: *see* Phrases, below
- 'Errors', 3, 7–9, 684, 717–18, 792–6, 800–6, 810, 819–22, 825–6, 840; Lenin on, 533, 542, 792–3; system of errors, 831, 826
- Family, relations with, 52–55, 60
- Financial affairs, 18–20, 87, 347, 349, 358, 370–1, 391
- France, writings on, 237–40
- Friends (*see also* under their names), 21–22, 25–27, 65, 84, 136–7, 163–4, 173, 193–4, 199, 305, 635–6, 676; political friendships, 164, 440; effect of break with Jogiches (*q.v.*), 360, 379, 384; unbridgeable distance between, 381, 413; men friends, 385–6, 770; influence on wives against husbands, 411–12, 672; circle in 1915, 636–7
- German nationality (acquired in 1897), 108–9, 133, 348, 350, 687, 809
- Germany, attitude to: *see* Germany: Rosa Luxemburg
- Health, hip defect causes limp, 16, 55; deterioration in prison, 349–50; recovery, 358, 376; effect of activities on, 387–8, 441; in hospital (December 1914), 617; delicate stomach, 678–9, 687; constant headaches, 761, 772
- Historical importance, 13–14
- Holidays, 18–19, 372, 412–13
- Household staff, 17, 19
- 'Imitation Joan of Arc', 301
- 'Impatience, noble', 433, 435
- Independence, 142–3, 164
- Influence, discussed, 600, 827
- Journalist, as: *see* Journalist
- Languages, knowledge of, Yiddish, 52; German, 53, 56, 84, 108; Polish, 53, 56; Russian, 54, 56, 286, 620,

LUXEMBURG, ROSA—*cont.*

- 668; translations by, 56, 573, 620, 668; interprets Jaurès' speech at International congress from French to German, 196
- Letter-writer, as: *see* Letter-writer
- Literary tastes, 29–31, 53, 56, 190, 667
- Loneliness, 139–41, 163, 386, 637
- Loyalties, 860–2
- Marriage, to Gustav Lübeck to gain admission to Germany (1897), 109–10; divorce (1903), 110, 200, 687; to Diefenbach contemplated, 674
- Mathematics, and, 63, 532, 828–30, 832
- Memorial, 781
- Murder (1919), xiv, 1, 2, 733, 738, 768, 773–80, 787–8, 818; investigations, 773–8; Pabst's account, 773, 780; officially described as 'execution', 773; body recovered from canal, 775, 781
- Music, and, 29, 201, 385, 667–8
- Nosiness, 472
- Papers, literary remains and private papers, 27, 106, 780, 829, 867
- Patriotism, attitude to, 512–13, 615, 860–2
- Personal ambition as motive, 435
- Personal dislikes, 21–22, 190
- Personal politics, attitude to, 190–1, 194, 476
- Photograph, at International Congress (1904), 195
- Phrases and epigrams, 22, 169–70, 371, 537; repetitive, 636, 752, 758
- Poems by, 56, 167–8
- Polish affairs, expert on, 182, 286–7, 326, 475, 496, 558
- Polish writings: *see that title*
- Political ideas, analysed, 6–13; development, 476, 493–6, 507–8, 543
- Prison sentences: *see* Arrests, above
- Privacy, love of, 18, 21, 25, 190, 201, 256, 461, 476
- Private life, 14–27, 132–3, 200–1, 378–86, 475–6; 557; intimate relationship with Leo Jogiches: *see under* Jogiches; during last two months of her life, 759–61, 770–2
- Pseudonyms, R. Kruszyńska, 68, 70, 72; Maciej Roźga, 90, 845; Anna Matschke, 316, 346; Josef Chmura,

LUXEMBURG, ROSA—*cont.*

- 323; Felicia Budelovich, 357; Junius, 620, 625, 630; Mortimer, 626; Gracchus, 657
- 'Red Prima Donna', 619
- 'Red Rosa', 492
- Revolver, acquisition of, 379, 382
- Russian affairs, expert on, 182, 286–7, 326, 475, 496, 558
- Russian-German dichotomy in R.L.'s life, 31–34, 256–8, 295–6, 358
- 'Russian patriot' accusation, 512–13, 615
- Russian writings, 550
- Secrecy, horror of, 129–30
- Self-portrait in oils, 17
- Shorthand, used in letters to Jogiches, 131, 140; use of Yiddish, 860
- Silence when really moved, 675
- Smuggled abroad to avoid arrest (1889), 59
- SPD, position and influence in: *see under* SPD
- Speaker, as, 37, 373, 441
- Success, Jogiches' attitude to her, 571
- Suicidal tendencies, possible, 379, 609
- Sunshine, love of, 164
- 'Syphilitic' influence, 751, 800, 805–6
- Temperament, 412, 495
- Threats against, 759
- Works (*see also* under their titles), first known publication (1892), 68; first pamphlet appears (1895), 90–93; first major economics work, 106; selections published, 821, 826; published in Russia, 823; collected edition: *see Collected Works*
- Writer, as (*see also* Journalist, R.L. as), 5–7, 29, 36–37, 56, 167–8, 336, 427, 494, 828–9; programmatic writing, 322–3; plans for duration of war, 620; writings in prison, 671
- Years of disengagement, 375–80, 383, 493
- Zoology, interest in, 63, 665–7
- Luxemburg family, 50–55, 60, 66, 337, 348, 359, 386, 548; possible original name Luxenburg, 52
- 'Luxemburgeois', 348
- Luxemburgism, 3–4, 7–9, 11, 14, 533, 543, 546, 631, 675, 751, 838, 852; doctrine of, 217; analysis, 787–827

- Luxenburg, possible original name of
Luxemburg family, 52
- Lyadov, M., 284, 354; cited, 284, 297,
337
- MacIntyre, A., cited, 803
- Magdeburg Congress (SPD, 1910), 424,
431, 435-40, 459, 497, 604
- 'Main enemy is at home', 448, 615, 642
- Mainz Congress (SPD, 1900), 175-6,
447, 522-3
- Majority rule, 268, 541-3, 607, 698-9,
752, 790
- Malecki, A., 552, 575, 584
- Malinovskii, R., 94
- Mammach, K., cited, 707
- Manchester of the East: *see* Łódź
- Mannheim, 369
- Mannheim Congress (SPD, 1906), 357,
360, 365-71, 374, 438
- Mao Tse-tung, 4, 36, 307, 827
- Marchlewski, Julian (Karski), 328, 486,
679, 797; in Germany, 34, 133, 258,
263, 432, 437, 569, 573; expelled
from Saxony, 157, 263; arms mission
to Belgium, 338; returns to Poland
(1905), 263; arrested, but released
(1906), 345, 360, 549; settles in
Germany again, 549; arrested (1916),
635, 639; released and goes to
Russia, 635; joins Bolsheviks (1918),
584, 598, 635; expected return to
Germany, 779; in the Ruhr, 783,
787; death (1925), 781, 813; ashes
returned to Poland, 781
- Agrarian question, on, 566
- Berlin residence, 475
- Berlin Troika, member of, 578
- Biographical, 78-79, 81
- Confidential agent for Lenin, 23
- Doctoral thesis, 105
- International, and, 73-74, 396-4
- Jogiches, and, 570, 574
- Journalist, as, 98, 108, 157, 313, 466-7,
558, 618
- Kautsky, and, 466, 475, 592
- Loyalties, 862
- Memorial, 781
- National question, and, 33, 796-7, 847,
856
- Pseudonyms, 58, 78
- Publishing venture, 263, 356
- Marchlewski, Julian (Karski)—*cont.*
- Radek, and, 586-7
- Rosa Luxemburg, relations with, 51,
58, 79, 84, 98, 108, 137, 157, 266,
268, 347, 362, 635
- RSDRP Congress (1907), delegate to,
551-2
- SDKPiL, and, 23, 79, 81, 279, 344, 564,
583, 716
- Union of Polish Workers, founder, 58
- War, and, 610
- Works, cited, 64, 265, 474, 566, 780, 847
- Marinism, 214
- Markgrawski, Colonel, 176, 846
- Markussohn, Frau, 772
- Marriage of Rosa Luxemburg to Gustav
Lübeck (1897), 109-10; divorce
(1903), 110, 200, 687
- Marstall incident, 738, 742
- Martov, Yurii (Ignotus), 65, 85, 254,
293, 295, 315, 396, 580-1, 588, 593;
support for R.L., 187; and Poles at
Russian party congress (1903), 271,
275-7, 279; and *Iskra* group, 275,
283-4, 352; and national question,
854; cited, 326, 581
- Martynov, A., 814, 818; cited, 810, 817-
18, 826
- Marx, Karl, 13, 41, 112, 130, 148, 211,
477, 494, 511, 672, 756, 785, 851;
exile in London, 742-3
- Alienation, doctrine of, 226, 537-8, 546
- Capital*, quoted, 209
- Capitalist collapse, prediction of, 204-
5, 531
- Class consciousness, and, 223
- Compound reproduction formulae, 37,
473, 530, 828, 830-2
- Engels, and, 96, 116-18, 121, 192, 204,
421, 753-5
- Kautsky and, 96, 421, 430
- National question, and, 277, 842-4,
846-7, 849-50
- Poland, attitude to, 842-3, 849
- Posthumous papers, edition of, 107, 188
- Re-establishment of pre-eminence,
38-39
- Rosa Luxemburg's attitude to, vii, 7,
37-38, 59, 212, 215, 411, 827
- Sociology of, 225, 546
- Works, in Russian, 67
- Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute, 755

- Marxism and Marxists, 494, 518, 564-5, 625, 631, 669, 727, 799, 817, 824-5
- Alienation, 538
 - Anarchism and, 498
 - Bureaucracy, and, 406
 - 'Centre', 434, 612, 657
 - Class analysis, 511
 - Collapse of capitalism, and, 531
 - Democratic, 1, 33, 213
 - East Germany and, 10
 - Economics, 217, 828-34, 838-41
 - Élites in, 290-1
 - 'Evangelization' of, 44
 - Historical analysis, 508-9
 - Historical materialism, 453
 - Intellectuals and, 36
 - Kautsky and, 7, 37-39, 102, 117, 123, 221-3, 247-8, 430, 432-4, 626, 840
 - Lenin and, 7, 37-38, 402, 544, 631, 803-6, 809, 816
 - Literature, translated into Russian, 67; distributed, 67-69
 - Loyalties, 861-2
 - Mass strike, and, 498
 - Mehring and, 39, 171, 247
 - National question, and, 847-9, 853-5, 857
 - October Revolution and, 11-12
 - Orthodoxy, departure from, 494-5
 - Polish independence and, 47, 92, 171
 - PPS programme, 70
 - Reformation, 755
 - Revisionist controversy: *see that title*
 - Revolutionary, 2-3, 7-12, 14, 65, 218, 222, 402, 550, 715, 787, 806, 819, 827
 - Rosa Luxemburg and, vii, 1-2, 7-14, 37-38, 59, 74-65, 92, 98, 138, 183, 207, 249-50, 288, 390-2, 399, 507, 544, 786
 - Russian, 65, 67
 - Social-Democracy and, 39
 - Social science, as, 840
 - Society and party, 536-40
 - Sombart and, 233
 - Spartakus* and, 725
 - SPD and, 116-18, 123-4, 247-9, 367, 824
 - Theory and practice, 543-4
 - Trotsky and, 37
 - War, attitude to, 4, 5
 - Zetkin (Clara) and, 193
- Marxism-Leninism, 4, 615, 816, 837
- Maskilim*, 44, 51
- Maslow, Arkadi, 798, 800, 807, 816
- Mass action, 513-14, 518-19, 536, 540, 542, 544, 555, 659, 723-5, 732-3, 755
- Mass demonstrations, 482, 491, 732-3, 735, 738, 743, 767
- Mass movements, new policy, 424-5
- Mass strike idea, political, 307-12, 366-9, 397-403, 419-28, 458, 513-16, 518, 536, 755, 814
- Anarchist conception of, 297, 367, 425, 428, 437, 496-9
 - Bebel and, 307-11, 358, 365-7, 396-7
 - Berlin resolution (1914), 480, 485
 - Development of concept, 509
 - Doctrine, 496-503, 513, 518-19, 529
 - Germany, lessons of Russian experience, 503-10
 - Leadership and, 502, 516-19
 - Masses and, 424, 427, 438, 480, 513-14
 - Nazi government, and, 817
 - Revolution, and, 499-501
 - Rosa Luxemburg and, 248, 304, 312, 374, 387, 399, 409, 436-8, 478-81, 485, 491-2, 518-19, 808; refusals to publish her articles on, 420-4, 426-7; her pamphlet on (1906), 224, 298, 319, 357, 365, 367, 410, 425, 556; analysed, 496-611
 - Russian experience, 318-19, 330-3, 498-503, 510
 - Social Democracy's role, 502, 509
 - SPD and, 307-9, 366-9, 399, 401-2, 406, 436-8, 443, 468-9, 496, 514-15; gag on discussion, 420-1
 - Trade unions and, 299-302, 304, 307-9, 311, 315-17, 332, 366-9, 497, 500, 506, 518, 575-6
- Masses, the, 427, 440, 507-8, 513-14, 540-3, 610, 614, 642, 771-2; appeal to, 470; and mass strike, 424, 427, 438, 480, 513-14; and party, 407, 415-16, 424, 507-8, 609; revolutionary, 368-70, 541, 729, 756, 765; R.L.'s views of, 387, 394, 407, 431, 465, 540-3, 646, 656, 663, 726, 756, 803; *Spartakus* and, 729, 741-3, 750-2
- Matern, Hermann, 821
- Mathematics, R.L. and, 63, 532, 828-30, 832

- Matschke, Anna, name and papers used by R.L., 316, 346
- Matthias, Erich, cited, 117, 154, 221-2, 409-10
- Maurenbrecher, M., 392
- May Day, 58, 68, 89, 301, 324, 642, 648-9
- Mazowiecki, M., cited, 45
- Mecklenburg, 416
- Mehring, Franz, 11, 78, 184, 186, 201, 305, 326, 437, 486, 616, 677, 817, 819, 826; 70th birthday, 676, 688; arrested (1916), 639, 676; accident (1918), 678; old and ill, 719; death (1919), 779, 787
- Academically qualified, 233-4
- Appeal to Russia, 685
- Haenisch and, 462-3
- Journalist, as, 166, 463-7, 618, 694
- Kautsky, and, 432, 463-4, 708
- 'Long wind of history', and, 541, 693-5
- Marxism, and, 39, 171, 247
- Memorial, 781
- Morality, and, 471
- Murders, and, 779
- New Left, and, 454, 464-5
- Open letter to Bolsheviks, 694-5
- Party school, and, 389, 391, 395-6
- Revolution, and, 541
- Rosa Luxemburg, her letters to, 15, 182, 375, 678; his use of her notes on Poland, 106-7, 188; relations with, 21, 163-4, 168, 170-1, 187-9, 194, 198, 315, 349, 396, 432, 454-5, 461-5, 477, 579, 636
- Russian revolution, proposed analysis of, 697, 717
- Schiller, and, 29, 53
- Spartakus*, and, 630, 686, 693-5
- Trustee of Schmidt inheritance, 579
- War, and, 609-11, 613
- Writings, 37, 139; cited, 107, 158, 188, 429, 606
- Meiner, Felix, cited, 64, 146, 204
- Mendelson, Stanislaw, 49, 61
- Mensheviks; Menshevism, 3, 9, 284-6, 327, 351-6, 362, 385, 565, 593-4, 685
- Bolsheviks and, 90, 240, 279, 284, 293-4, 328, 339, 351-4, 433, 550-1, 579, 591-5, 793, 802, 811-2
- Duma representation, 591-2
- Mensheviks; Menshevism—*cont.*
- Lenin and, 94, 205, 242, 284, 352, 577, 809, 812
- Liberals, and, 352-3, 553-4
- National question, and, 851
- Revolutionary strategy, 354
- Rosa Luxemburg and, 216-17, 284, 290, 293-4, 351-6, 433, 581, 793, 814-15, 821, 836
- SDKPiL and, 351, 552, 588
- Merker, P., 442
- Merton, R. K., cited, 35, 249, 306
- Meyer, Alfred G., cited, 854
- Meyer, Ernst, 610, 628, 639, 650-1, 688, 695, 697, 719, 787, 810, 816; cited, 466, 610, 630, 633
- Meyer, Konrad Ferdinand, 29-30
- Michels, Robert, cited, 403, 408, 495, 511
- Mickiewicz, Adam, 30, 53-54, 271
- Middle classes (*see also* Bourgeoisie), 90-91, 106, 116, 318-19, 369-70, 414, 417, 431, 438-9, 452, 487, 553, 567; lower, 342, 398, 554, 556, 756
- Miedzyński, Florian, cited, 177
- Militarism, 214, 374, 397, 399-405, 448, 482-6, 489-91, 527, 604, 640
- Benefits of, 216, 404
- Economic necessity, 835
- International Congress resolution (1907), 399-402, 523, 557, 599
- Pre-military training in schools, 454
- Propaganda among troops, 528, 724
- Prussian, 404-5, 482, 485, 524-5
- Rosa Luxemburg and, 482-5, 489-91, 524-5, 634; writings on, 11
- SPD and, 397, 454, 482, 524-5
- Military service, 66, 359, 404-5
- Militia, people's, 341, 400, 482, 491
- Mill, John, 68-69, 82-83, 86-88, 96, 105, 108, 123, 252-3
- Millerand, A., 215, 237-8, 240, 303
- Milowski (sailor), 764
- Mimi (cat), 165, 382, 591, 678
- Minei, J. G.: *see* Yaroslavskii, E.
- Minorities, 43, 341, 842, 846, 852
- Minsk Congress (RSDRP, 1898), 110, 254
- Mirskii, G., cited, 838
- Mlot* (The Hammer), 245, 573; cited, 586
- Moabit prison, 774
- Molkenbuhr, Herman (Brutus), 406, 443, 446-8, 834
- Mommsen, Theodor, 428

- Moor, Karl, 609, 629, 683
 Morality, 124-5, 220, 462, 471, 547
 Morawski, F., 137
 Morgan, Roger, cited, 116
 Mörike, E., 29
 Morocco crisis (1905), 523; (1911), 401, 437, 441-51, 455, 523
 Mortimer, pseudonym of R.L., 626
 Moscow, Frölich in, 570, 796; risings (1905), 314, 329, 331-2, 351, 353, 501, 506, 542, 555; (1917), 579; Soviet, 353
 Moscow Congress (International, 1919), 782, 787
 Moscow Congress (Russian Communist Party, 1919), 796, 856
 Motor-cars, 385
 Mozart, W. A., 29, 668
 Müller, H., 447, 449; cited, 758, 774
 Müller, Richard, 722; cited, 723-4, 762, 764
Münchener Post, cited, 474
 Munich, Eisner in, 734, 777; Poles in, 157, 164, 220, 258, 263, 271, 356; rising, 783, 787-8; *Spartakus* in, 778
 Munich Congress (SPD, 1902), 179-80, 190
 Münzenberg, Willi, 816
 Music, R.L.'s tastes in, 28-29, 201, 385, 667-8
 Mussolini, Benito, 547
 Myrdal, Gunnar, cited, 837
Myśl Niepodległa, 586
- Napoleon III, 113
Naprzód (Forward), cited, 96, 331
Narodnaya Volya: see People's Will
 Narodniks, 843, 854
 Nasser, G., 36
Nasza Trybuna, cited, 563, 597
 'Nation', concept of, 849, 861
 National Assembly, Polish, 341
 National Democrats: see under Poland
 'National' parties, 642
 National question:
 Bolsheviks and, 699-700, 796-7, 799, 851-2, 859, 862
 Bund and, 272
 Colonialism and, 836-7
 Emergent nations, 247
 Émigrés, among, 61, 69
- National question—*cont.*
 History (appendix 2), 842-62
 Intellectuals and, 36
 Jews and, 32-33
 Kautsky and, 844, 847, 849, 852-3
 Lenin and, 36, 91, 534, 568, 588-9, 596, 700, 796-7, 849, 852-9; *Iskra* article (1903), 276-8, 282
 Pilsudski and, 560, 562, 564
 Polish independence: see under Poland
 PPS and, 33, 69, 89-94, 105, 175-6, 260-1, 276, 282, 341, 700, 846, 853
 Rosa Luxemburg, anti-nationalism, 33, 86, 91-94, 99, 105-6, 175-6, 179, 182-4, 260-1, 270, 324, 568, 845-62; articles on, 386
 Russian attitude (see also Bolsheviks, above), 276-8, 282, 699-700, 857
 SDKPiL and, 33, 92, 104, 257, 261, 568, 845
 Self-determination: see that title
 Socialists and, 642, 842-51, 853, 858
 Stalin and, 700, 858-9
 Stalinist solution, 363
 National Socialists: see Nazis
 Nationalities, 340-1, 719, 858-9
 Nature-lover, R.L. as, 63, 664-7
 Naumann, Friedrich, 301
 Nazis (National Socialists), 161, 342, 554, 744-5, 774, 781, 785, 817
 Nechacv, S. G., 68, 286
 Nehru, J., 36, 836
 Netherlands, royal family, 409; SDAP, 656; strike of railwaymen, 501; women's conference (1915), 618
 Nettel, J. P., cited, 120, 145, 247, 306, 407, 437, 588, 608
Neue Deutsche Rundschau, cited, 844
Neue Rheinische Zeitung, 411, 842
Neue Zeit, 149, 156, 173, 270, 405, 432, 440, 448, 544, 559, 572-3, 592, 625, 755; Kautsky as editor, 96-98, 146, 171, 192-3, 509, 638, 663; R.L.'s contributions to, 29, 94, 96-97, 101, 104-5, 107, 189, 192, 206, 231, 233, 238-9, 243, 286, 431; Bernstein's articles, 145-8, 205-6; R.L. as associate editor, 191, 305, 372, 376, 410; debate on mass strike, 297, 299, 311, 509; refusal to publish articles by R.L., 421-4; R.L. occupies one fifth of space in 1910, 428; Lenin and,

- Neue Zeit*—cont.
 293; Marchlewski and, 98, 466;
 Mehring and, 463-5; Radek and,
 472; cited, 93, 185, 187, 218 *passim*
- Neues Deutschland*, cited, 639, 780
- Neukölin, 771
- Neumann, Heinz, 817
- Newcastle, Duke of, 411
- Nicholas I, Tsar, 112
- Nicholas II, Tsar, 314-15, 327-8, 330,
 360, 409, 501, 549, 603, 682
- Niederbarnim, 485, 617, 619
- Niedersächsische Arbeiterzeitung*, cited, 609
- Niemojewski, Andrzej, 86, 586
- Niepodległa Polska i sprawa robotnicza*,
 90-93
- Nieuwenhuis, Domela, 398, 428, 438
- Nikolaevskii, B. I., cited, 284-6, 290,
 320, 326-7
- Nkrumah, K., 36
- Nogin, V. P., 580
- North Africa, Jogiches in: *see* Algeria
- Norway, 401
- Noske, Gustav, 377, 404, 482, 604, 768-9,
 773-4, 781, 788-9
- Nowe Drogi*, cited, 823
- Nürnberg Congress (SPD, 1908), 392-4,
 415-16
- Ochak, I. D., cited, 613
- October Revolution: *see* Russia: Revolution (1917)
- Odessa, pogroms, 356
- Oehme, Walter, cited, 738
- Oelssner, Fred, cited, 50-52, 217, 533,
 821-2, 837, 840
- Offenburg, 441
- Okhrana, 94-95, 548, 580, 585, 645
- Olekhnovich, 812, 816
- Olszewski, Wladyslaw (Wladek), 87, 265
- Open Letter*, 180, 181
- Opportunism, 3, 240, 244, 284, 287, 375,
 402, 564, 801, 811-12, 822; definition,
 202; French and, 556; German Left
 and, 812, 816, 818, 825-6; imperi-
 alism and, 521-2; Lenin and,
 103, 624-5, 853, 855; R.L. and,
 199-200, 206-7, 219, 229, 235-7,
 242, 291, 308, 320, 458, 543, 596,
 802, 845, 852-3
- Opposition der Jungen*: *see* Jungen group
- Ordzhonikidze, G. K., 534, 700, 796
- Orel, 679
- Organization, and action, 504, 513; Bebel
 and, 824; R.L. and, 6, 226-7, 294,
 495, 539
- 'Orient', 385
- Ossowski, M., 48-49
- Oświęcim: *see* Auschwitz
- Otzovism, 558
- Pabst, Captain, 773-4, 780
- Pacifists, 622
- 'Pairing' opponents, 801, 808, 815, 821,
 848, 853, 857
- Palestine, 43
- Palmerston, Lord, 442
- Pankratova, A. M., cited, 322
- Pannekoek, A., 389-90, 432, 437, 470, 486,
 587
- Panther* (cruiser), 442, 448
- Paris, émigrés in, 48, 82, 258, 263, 559,
 569, 578, 581; first issue of *Sprawa*
Robotnicza (*q.v.*), 70; Lenin in, 475,
 588; R.L. visits, 82, 88, 95-96, 106,
 110-11, 830
- Paris Commune, 60, 685, 691
- Paris Conference (of revolutionary organ-
 izations, 1904), 318, 320
- Paris Congress (International, 1900), 259-
 61; (1914), 602
- Parkinson's Law, 406
- Parliaments and parliamentarianism,
 Socialist participation in, 236-7,
 241-2, 268, 287, 375, 400-1, 439;
 parliamentary delegates and party,
 457-8, 463-4; R.L.'s attitude to,
 468, 518; formation of blocs, 595;
Spartakus and, 659, 712, 719-20;
 and revolution, 728
- Parsons, Talcott, cited, 535
- Party and society, relations between, 536-
 42, 546-7, 704, 717, 852-3, 855
- Party congresses, role of, 306; secret
 police as bailiffs, 100
- Party Historical Institute, Warsaw, 324
- Parvus (Alexander Israel Helphand), 96,
 284-5, 297, 315, 415, 462, 681-2,
 692, 813; editor of *Sächsische Arbeiter-*
zeitung, 108, 137, 147, 157, 159-
 60; expelled from Saxony (1898),
 157; imprisonment in Russia (1906),
 350, 356; effects of prison, 663;
 escapes, 360; returns as millionaire

- Parvus (Alexander Israel Helphand)—*cont.*
 (1915), 633-4; publisher of *Die Glocke*, 313, 461, 633; offer to go to Russia (1918), 634
 Biographical, 108, 356, 633-4
 Citizenship, 635
 Coterie round, 313, 461, 633
 Germany, activities in, 34, 220, 263, 547, 633
 Gorky royalties, and, 356
 Kautsky, and, 626, 634-5
 Lenin and, 634-5
 Mass strike, and, 509
 Party congress, and, 150, 169, 187
 Pseudonym, use of, 58, 107
 Publishing venture, 263, 356
 Revisionist controversy, and, 137-8, 140, 146-53, 155, 160, 165, 185-7, 206, 212, 218-20, 222-3, 228-9, 245
 Revolution, and, 435, 567; conception of, 633-5
 Rosa Luxemburg, relations with, 20, 108-9, 137-8, 220, 384-5, 634-5
 Russia, activities in (1905/6), 328, 330, 339, 350, 353-4, 356, 360
 South German dispute, and, 237, 243
Parvusiade, Die, 634, 637
 Pasternak, B. L., 670
 Patriotism, 33, 46, 377, 528, 554, 564, 625, 850, 860-2; R.L. accused of Russian patriotism, 512, 615
 Pavilion X (Warsaw prison), 345, 348
 Pawiak prison, 348
 Peasantry, 47, 125-6, 401, 699, 756, 797, 808, 836, 851, 859; revolutionary potential, 361, 363, 521-2, 565-7, 686
 Peer group, 23, 33, 267-8, 564, 569-70, 583, 675-6, 678, 688
 Pendzichowski, Adam, 347
 Penthesilea, 662
 People's Democracies, free expression in, 5-6
 People's Will (*Narodnaya Volya*), 45-49, 57; alliance with *Proletariat*, 47-48, 76
 Peretz, Yitskhak Leyb, 51-52
 Perl, Feliks (Res), 72; cited, 48, 173, 829
 Personality cult, 47, 406
 Peter Paul Fortress, 663
 Petersohn, 84
Petite bourgeoisie, 92, 208, 215, 297, 342, 374, 439, 727, 756
 Petrograd (*earlier* St. Petersburg, *q.v.*), revolution (1917), 679-80, 682, 691-2; Soviet, 682, 685, 788
Peuple, Le (Brussels), cited, 595
 Peus, H., 169, 346
 Pfeiffer, H. (publisher), 618
 Pflugk-Hartung, Captain von, 775
 Physiocrats, 106, 233, 830
 'Physiognomy' (word), use of, 529
 Pieck, Wilhelm, 391, 610, 637, 772, 774; R.L. and, 394, 459-60; arrested, 639, 780; escapes, 780; charges against, 780-1; and *Spartakus*, 710, 719; and KPD, 753, 764, 766, 787; and Kippenberg's death, 781; cited, 392, 722-4, 735, 764, 767, 771-2, 775, 779
 Pietrusiński, J., 48-49
 Pikart, Eberhard, cited, 458
 Pilsudski, Józef, 33, 97, 318-20, 324, 334, 342-3; and armed rising, 261, 270, 318-20; loses political control of party, 320, 324, 331, 342-3; forms own organization, 343, 560-2, 564; armed squads, 548, 555; backs Central Powers, 597
 Pinner, Dr., 687
 Pipes, Richard, cited, 859
 Plekhanov, Georgii, 7, 35, 90, 257, 328, 354, 450, 500, 555, 631, 834, 841; biographical, 65; relations with R.L., 22, 65, 68-69, 73, 75, 82, 95-96, 161, 253, 351; works distributed, 67; hatred of Jogiches, 67-70, 73, 75, 82, 253; support for PPS, 73, 93, 95-96; at International Bureau, 326, 589, 592, 595; and Marxism, 39, 45, 65, 102, 247; and national question, 847, 852; and Radek, 587; and revisionist controversy, 151, 155, 202-3, 206, 239, 244, 247; and Russian unity, 84-85, 251-5, 271, 284, 793
 Plevna, 360
 Plochocki: *see* Wasilewski
Po Prostu, cited, 353, 822
 Poems, written or translated by R.L., 56, 167-8
 Poison victims, R.L. on, 477-8
 'Poland' (name), abolished, 42
 Poland:
 Art, 6
 Austrian (*see also* Galicia), 42-43, 45, 50, 59, 183, 845

Poland—*cont.*

- Autonomy, 76, 341, 568, 847, 860
- Border crossings, 59
- Communist Party (formed 1918 from SDKPiL (*q.v.*) and PPS-Left (*q.v.*)), 14, 23, 49, 78-79, 81, 269, 279, 324, 379, 563, 570, 597-9, 796-7; break in research continuity, 13-14; purge (1937), 14, 23, 79, 570, 820
- Economic and industrial development, 42-44, 106, 829-30, 846
- Economic integration into Russian empire, 829, 846
- Émigrés from: *see under* Émigrés
- First World War, 47, 49, 77, 603
- German Socialists in, appeal to, 303-4
- History, 41-44; R.L.'s work on general history, 106-7, 188, 412; position of historians, 824
- Independence (*see also* Self-determination, below), 53, 96, 171, 277, 321-2, 363, 829, 842-5; *Bund* and, 272; industrial development and, 42; International and, 260; PPS and, 560, 562, 564; R.L.'s stand against, 76, 87, 89, 92, 98, 175, 342, 792; Russian attitude, 282; Socialists and, 46-47, 70-72, 76-77, 89-93, 98-99, 103-6, 175; SPD attitude, 133, 181, 844
- Jews, 43-44, 50-53
- Labour movement, 596-7
- Language, official (Russian), 42
- Liberals, 565
- Literature, printing and distribution of, 67, 264
- May Day, 648
- National Democrats, 174, 325, 342, 344-5, 553, 561
- Nationalism: *see* National question
- Partition, first, 50
- Peasantry, 565-7
- Polish Socialist Party: *see* PPS
- Political frustration, 44-48
- Press, 572-3
- Prussian (*see also* Poznań; *and* Silesia), 57, 60, 845
- Revolt of 1863/4, 41-42, 50, 348
- Revolution (1905/6), 183, 170, 295, 314, 715; effects of, 317-64, 548-9, 551, 555; traditional date of outbreak, 318;

Poland—*cont.*

- prisoners released for cash payment, 548-9
- Revolutionary movements, 45, 47-50, 57-58, 304, 846; Poles' tradition, 60
- Rosa Luxemburg, memory honoured, 600, 820; her writings on: *see* Polish writings
- Russification, 41-42, 50
- Self-determination (*see also* that title), 32-33, 92, 101, 174-82, 260, 276-8, 632, 692, 716, 751, 796-7, 829, 836, 842-60
- Socialist movement (*see also* under names of parties), first groups and parties, 45-50; development, 57-62, 65, 69-70, 843-5, 850; PPS (*q.v.*) founded (1892), 61, 69, 845; paper started (1893), 70-75; independent groups, 71-75; SDKP (*q.v.*) formed (1893), 22, 75-77; call for united party with Russians, 76; relations between parties, 77-81, 87-94, 98-104; R.L. as 'bogey-woman of Polish Socialism', 83-84; reduced to token forces in Poland (1896), 88; accession of Lithuanian Social Democrats, 251: SDKPiL as adviser to German party, 134-5, 137; renewed activity, 251, 256-60, 283; R.L. and unity, 283, 320-1; middle position, 560; war-time relations between groups, 561, 600
- Strikes, 48, 58, 597
- Trade unions, legal, 500, 575-6
- Trotsky, and, 811
- Wages, 42-43
- Polemical methodology, R.L. and, 853
- Polendebatten*, 103
- Poetaev, N. G., 581, 591
- Polish Committee in London, 93
- Polish Communist Party: *see under* Poland
- Polish language, 51, 56, 68, 90; restrictions on use, 175-6, 179
- Polish People (*Lud Polski*) (group), 45-47, 49, 61
- Polish People's Party, 182
- 'Polish question and the Socialist movement', 71, 271, 277, 321-2
- 'Polish Social Democracy in Germany', 180
- Polish Socialist Party: *see* PPS

- Polish writings by R.L., 53, 256, 259, 317, 321-5, 332, 334, 355, 361, 363, 383, 555, 570, 574, 751, 796, 822-3
- Political controversy, imputation of evil motives ascribed to Russians, 244; demolition method, 518
- Political economy, 828, 840; treatise on: see *Introduction to Political Economy*
- Political philosophy, 322, 476
- Political prisoners, amnesty, 327-9
- Politische Briefe*, 633
- Polonica, the: see *Kwestia polska a ruch socjalistyczny*
- Pomerania, 60, 258, 604
- Popov, N., 814-15
- 'Popular Front', 745
- Populists, 45-46, 65, 78, 534
- Portugal, 836
- Posen: see Poznań
- Post*, 346
- Potresov, A. N., 284, 286, 290, 352; cited 284-6, 290, 320, 326-7
- Power, seizure of, 209-10, 213, 216, 224, 541-2
- Poznań (Posen), 57, 60, 109, 137, 174-5, 177-84, 190, 195, 283, 652
- PPS (Polish Socialist Party), foundation (1892), 61, 69, 844-5
- Armed uprising, and, 333-4
- Bund*, and, 272
- Central Committee, 320
- Congresses (1905), 320; (1906), 343
- Co-ordination body in London, 62, 845
- First World War, and, 603
- Germany, organization in, 96, 109, 133-5, 173-83, 235, 265, 270, 586
- International congresses, activities at, 71-74, 87-88, 93-103, 259-60, 326
- Kautsky, support for, 433
- Leadership, 89, 92-94, 102, 850
- Left: see PPS-Left
- Lenin and, 277-8
- National question, and, 33, 69, 89-94, 100, 105, 175-6, 260-1, 276, 282, 341, 700, 846, 853
- Poland, organization, 61, 69, 88, 844-5
- Programme, 69-70, 342-3
- Prussian PPS: see under Prussia
- Revolutionary Fraction (*Frak*), 343, 555, 560-4
- PPS (Polish Socialist Party)—*cont.*
- Rosa Luxemburg's attitude to, 83-84, 87, 92, 95, 98, 100, 259, 282-3, 289, 324, 341, 554, 846-7, 852-3
- RSDRP and, 355, 552, 589
- Russia, attitude to, 62, 70, 105, 251, 265, 282, 320
- SDKPiL struggle against, 33, 101-4, 109, 137, 178, 237, 255-61, 266, 269-70, 280-3, 304, 318-27, 341-3, 361, 550, 552, 560-4, 613; desire for *rapprochement*, 576-7
- Splits (breakaway group, 1893), 22-23, 74-77, 81, 256, 745 (see SDKP); (1905/6), 261, 320, 331, 342-3, 560-3, (see PPS-Left)
- PPS-Left, 33, 342-3, 355, 560-5, 576-7, 583, 594, 823, 853; united with SDKPiL to form Polish Communist Party (1918), 49, 78, 597-9 (see Poland: Communist Party)
- Prager, Eugen, cited, 605, 622, 638
- Prague Conference (1912), 584
- Prague Congress (SDKPiL, 1908), 361, 565-8, 573, 575, 590
- Pravda*, 811; cited, 580, 693, 708, 782, 793
- Preobrazhenskii, E. A., 534; cited, 809
- Press, party (see also under names of newspapers), 147-8, 157-61, 170-7, 181, 183, 187-8, 191, 269-70, 312-14, 324-5, 572-3, 578, 655, 721-2; R.L.'s phrase for, 170; freedom, 701; and war, 608-9, 617; action against newspapers, 609, 621-2; *Die Internationale* (one issue only), 618, 623; newspaper offices occupied, 753, 763-5
- Printers' Union, 372
- Prison, effects on revolutionaries, 663
- Production, 831-2, 838-9
- Profits, 831-3, 838
- Progressive Nationalists, 325
- Progressive People's Party, 414
- Proletariat:
- Acquisition of power, and, 209-10, 213
- Class consciousness, 224-6, 228, 235, 400, 425
- Contrast between Russian and German, 503-4
- Dictatorship, 35, 334-5, 338, 354
- Ethics, 631-2, 634
- Imperialism, and, 526
- Impoverishment, 221

- Proletariat—*cont.*
 International, 235, 398, 401, 564, 640-1, 844
 Lenin's concept, 425, 431
 Peasantry, and, 565-7
 Purpose, 218, 260, 370, 567
 Revolution, and, 12, 33, 323, 333, 338, 354-5, 363, 521, 553-4, 756, 851
 Social Democracy and, 286
 War, and, 615, 623-4
Proletariat party; First, 45-50, 57, 61, 64, 72, 348; alliance with People's Will, 47-48, 76; Second, 49, 57-58, 60-61, 75; Third, 77, 182, 257
Proletarii, 558, 578, 857
Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya, cited, 274-6, 420, 543, 811-13
 Propaganda, illegal, 123; Bolshevik, 322, 528; R.L.'s writings as, 322-4; among soldiers, 528, 724; mass, 540
Propagandist, Der, cited, 497
 Prosecutions, of journalists, 492
 Protectionism, 524
 Provisional government, workers', 339
 Prussia:
 Amnesty, 709
 Diet, 616
 Electoral system, 414
 Expansionist policy, 844
 History, 112-13
Landtag, 619
 Militarism, 404-5, 482, 485, 524-5
 Ministry of the Interior, 762
 Non-German Minorities, 842
 Parvus and, 635
 Poles, 41-42, 57, 60, 270
 PPS, 61-62, 150, 173-83, 256, 259, 261
 Prussian Poland (*see also* Poznań; and Silesia), 57, 60
 Rosa Luxemburg, on Prussians, 110, 131; charges arising out of her pamphlet, 179, 186; hatred of, 200; activities, 314
 Silesia: *see* Silesia
 Socialists, foreign, 389
 SPD, 416-17, 421, 438
 Suffrage reform, 296, 300, 390, 399, 414-21, 425-6, 430-1, 435-9, 469, 479-80, 490, 493, 514-16; R.L.'s pamphlet on, 419
Przedświt, cited, 282
Przegląd Robotniczy, 317, 324
Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny (Social-Democratic Review), 66, 269-70, 324, 386, 572-3, 857; R.L. and, 269, 386, 572-3; cited, 100, 188, 273-6 *passim*
 Pseudonyms, use of, viii, 58, 69, 337; of R.L.: *see under* Luxemburg, Rosa
 Pskov Conference (1902), 254
 Purges, 14, 23, 79, 406, 570, 781, 803, 811, 820
Putsches, 270, 361, 729-30, 767, 784, 790-1
 Pyatakov, G. L. (Kievsky), cited, 534
 Pyatnitskii, O., cited, 284, 297, 581
 Quelch, H., 404
 'Quousque tandem', 270
 Rabinovics, cited, 67
Rabochee Delo, 85
 Rackow, Felix, 746
 Radek, Karl (Sobelson), 2, 34, 92, 191, 214, 528, 627, 634, 689, 770, 797; move to Göppingen, 460, 469, 472; in Russia, 716; enters Germany illegally (December 1918), 598, 703, 740, 746-7, 760
 Case against (1910-1913), 460, 465, 469-73, 574-7, 585-91
 Dictatorship and terror, on, 334, 725, 731
 German revolution, on, 808-10, 823
 Henke and, 191, 463, 470-1
 Jogiches, meetings with, 747, 779
 KPD, and, 753, 765-7
 Lenin and, 588, 590, 747, 752
 Liebknecht, and, 472, 636, 710, 715, 731, 747, 760
Massenstreik, on, 298
 National question, and, 596, 862
 Polish situation, 469, 470-3
 Pseudonym, used exclusively, viii, 58; broken, 586-7; Struthahn, 731
 Rosa Luxemburg, her dislike of Radek, 21-22, 471-2, 586; meeting with, 703, 747; Radek on her articles, 752-3, 758
 Russian experience, 362, 760
 SDKPiL, and, 268, 469-74, 584-6; expulsion from, 471, 586; and split (1911), 80, 574-7, 585-91, 716, 747
 SPD, status in, 470-3, 586-8, 593; expulsion from (1913), 587

- Radek, Karl (Sobelson)—*cont.*
 Theft charges (1910), 586–7
 Trial (1937), 534
 ‘Whore category’, 471, 747
 Works, cited, 298, 636, 658, 710, 731,
 746–8, 752–3, 758, 760, 780, 808–9
- Radicals, orthodox, 199, 203
- Rafes, M., cited, 272
- Rakovskii, Christian, 84
- Rapallo, treaty of, 798
- Ratyński, K., 87–88, 257
- Red Flag (journals): *see Czerwony Sztandar*; and *Rote Fahne*
- Referat*, 128
- Reformism, 12, 36, 202, 218, 245–6, 291–2,
 303, 429, 853
- Reiff (printer), 82
- Relativity, 830
- Religion, R.L.’s dissertation on, 323
- Remarque, Erich Maria, cited, 660
- Rembrandt, 29
- Remscheid, 459
- Renaudel, P., 241
- Renner, Karl, 184
- Res: *see* Perl, Feliks
- Reuter, Ernst, 746
- Reval, 558
- ‘Revision’, first use of word, 202
- Revisionist controversy, 39, 57, 102–4,
 126, 189–91, 200–50, 259, 299–303,
 368, 377, 416, 430, 786
- Alienation and, 537–8
- Analysis, 145–72
- Baden policy, 436, 439–40
- Definition of revisionism, 202
- ‘Good old tactic’ slogan, 207, 303, 402,
 440, 458
- Lenin and, 5, 291–2
- Practice of revisionism, 235–50
- Rosa Luxemburg and, 5, 103–4, 138–9,
 149–54, 158–61, 166–71, 184, 195–6,
 252, 301, 321, 454, 795, 823
- SPD and, 126, 184–7, 299, 312–13, 392,
 403, 414, 417, 434, 439–40, 451, 455,
 467–8, 523, 608
- ‘Statesman’s impatience’, 434
- Students and, 395
- Theory of revisionism, 203–35
- Revolution:
 Armed uprising: *see that title*
 Comforts of, 150
 Commitment to, 292, 311
- Revolution—*cont.*
 Conservatives and, 601
 Final aim, 212, 217, 220, 224, 405
 Historically necessary, 305, 512
 International, 782, 784
 Kautsky and, 220, 241, 298, 305, 408–9,
 431–2, 434–5
 Lenin and: *see under* Lenin
 Lessons from Russian experience,
 503–6, 510–11
 Majority and, 542
 ‘Managerial’, 406
 Marxism and: *see under* Marxism
 Mass strike, and, 499–501
 Masses and, 368–70, 541, 729, 756, 765
 National question and, 854–5
 Parvus’s and Trotsky’s idea: *see* Per-
 manent, below
 Peasantry and, 361, 363, 521–2, 565–7,
 686
 Permanent, 339, 361, 435, 504, 567, 683,
 812–13
 Postulating revolution and being
 revolutionary, 5, 117, 204, 210, 248,
 322
 ‘Pregnant with revolution’, 120
 Proletariat in: *see under* Proletariat
 Revisionism and, 205, 209, 218–20,
 222–4, 229
 Rosa Luxemburg and, 90, 212–14, 217,
 220, 338–42, 361, 364, 366, 386, 435,
 536–8, 541–2, 547, 704–5, 756, 763;
 pamphlet on: *see Russian Revolution*
Spartakus programme, 712–13
 SPD and, 116, 119–21, 123–4, 373, 407,
 429, 743–4, 754
 Strikes, and, 500
 Theoretical necessity, 117, 440
 Vocabulary, absence of, 744
- Revolutionary Fraction: *see under* PPS
- Revolutionary movements, 60, 199, 301
- Revolutionary Party Proletariat, 57
- Revolutionary Workers of Greater Berlin,
 763
- Rhine, 430
- Ricardo, David, 412, 832
- Riesman, David, cited, 23
- Riga, 679
- Rights of man, 340; ‘right to work’, 848
- Ripper, Alexander, 347
- Ritter, Gerhard, cited, 457
- Rjasanoff, N.: *see* Ryazanov

- Robinson, Joan, cited, 828, 832, 838-9
 Rodbertus, K. J., 143
 Roland-Holst, Henriette, 14, 20, 199, 303, 308, 349, 794; cited, 50, 56, 63, 188, 194, 196, 199, 250, 378-9, 499, 656, 735, 772
 Roman history, argument about, 427-8
 Roscher, W. G. F., 230, 830
 Rosenbaum, Marta, 27, 610, 621, 637, 671, 685-6, 760, 785
 Rosenberg, Arthur, cited, 628, 738, 748, 806, 819
 Rosenfeld, Kurt, 385, 483, 486, 761, 817
Roslamowcy ('Splitters') organization, 582, 584-9, 592-3, 595-7
Rote Aufbau, Der, 816
Rote Fahne, Die, 712, 734, 742, 745, 751-2, 759-62, 766-7, 770-1, 787-8, 815; title adopted, 721-2; R.L. and, 726, 749, 759-60, 771; offices occupied by troops, 738; goes underground, 771, 775-6; reappearance, 771, 783; disclosures regarding murders, 776-7, 783, 788; cited, 695, 697, 714, 721 *passim*
Rote Hilfe, 816
 Roth, Günter, cited, 306
 Rotstadt, Józef: *see* Krasny, J.
 Rousseau, J. J., 541
 Roźga, Maciej, pseudonym of R.L., 90, 845
 RSDRP (Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party), foundation (1898), 88, 104-5, 155, 251-4
 All-Russian Conference (1917), 856
 Bolsheviks in, 551-2, 560, 577-8, 580
 Central Committee, 275, 286-7, 511, 579; Poles represented on, 355, 550-2
 Congresses, 254, 552; R.L. as German delegate to, 336; (1898), 110, 254; (1903), 85, 275-84, 514, 593-4, 854, 857; (1905), 279, 294; (1906, Unity), 85, 336, 351, 355, 396, 550-2, 854; (1907), 379-80, 383, 550-7, 565-6; (1919), 856
 Duma, and, 345
 Factional manoeuvring, 352, 359, 559, 577-81, 583-4, 590, 592, 834
 German peace terms, and, 752
 International, and, 396
 Leadership, 254; leaders forced to live abroad, 457
 R.L. II—34
- RSDRP—*cont.*
 Lenin-Jogiches battle (1911), 396, 579-83, 588, 590
 Money and power, 579-81
 National question, and, 642, 854, 856-7
 Organizational questions, R.L.'s article on, 286-94
 Organizing Committee, 271, 273-5, 579-80
 Parliamentary group, 591-2
 Poles and, 79, 81, 340; possible unity with, 92, 105, 195, 252-5, 265-6, 351, 362; 1903 negotiations, 92, 258, 263, 266, 271-84; unity congress (1906), 85, 293, 344, 351, 355, 396, 550-2, 854; position in party, 362, 552-3, 559-60, 569, 572, 577-8, 582, 589, 852, 856
 PPS and, 355, 552, 589
 Predominance of foreign organizations, 262
 Press, 550-2, 578, 580-1
 Revolution, effect of, 550-2
 Rosa Luxemburg and, 378, 558, 580-1, 600
 Russo-Japanese War, effect of, 283, 318
 Schmidt inheritance, 579-81, 626
 Schools, party, 559-60
 SDKPiL as autonomous group within: *see* Poles, above
 Society and party, 539-40
 SPD and, 197-8, 496, 510, 553, 556
 Split (1903) (Bolsheviks-Mensheviks), 279, 284-94, 352-5, 550-1; German offer to arbitrate, 284-6, 294; unity efforts, 355, 486, 510, 551-2, 591-5, 601, 603
 Technical Commission, 578-81, 590
 Title, use of word, 'Russkii', 286
 Trotsky's position, 585
 Rubanovich, I.A., 326
 Ruben, Regina, 643
 Rühle, Otto, 623, 658
 Ruhr, 300, 419, 432, 459, 783, 787
 Rumania, 107, 666-7, 696
 Runciman, W. G., cited, 803
 Runge, O. (soldier), xiv, 773-7, 781
 Russia, and the Russians:
 Absolutism, 70, 354, 680
 Agricultural policy, 699, 701, 851
 Amnesty for political prisoners (1905), 327-9

Russia, and the Russians—cont.

- Anti-Russian policy of containment, 842-4, 847
- Army, appeals to, 344; propaganda among troops, 528
- Autocracy, 41, 45-46, 90, 96, 112, 261, 317, 338, 341, 511, 846, 854
- Bolsheviks: *see that title*
- Cadets, 553
- China, dispute with, 5, 185, 509
- Collectivization, 807, 810-11
- Communist Party, 4, 6, 798, 800; Central Committee, 4, 814; congress (1919), 796; congress (1925), 799, 805; history, 811-5
- Constituent Assembly, 339-41, 700-1, 717-18, 757
- Constitutional system, 76-77, 327, 339, 341, 679
- Dictatorship, 702-3
- Duma, 327, 345, 549, 591, 613, 757; Social-Democratic deputies arrested, 549; elections: *see Elections*, below
- Economic and industrial development, 42-44, 807, 809, 830
- Elections, laws, 717; Social Democrats and participation, 242, 354; Bolsheviks and, 715
- Émigrés: *see under* Émigrés
- Europe, position in, 41-42, 511
- Evil motives in political controversy, ascribed to Russians, 244
- First World War: *see under* that title
- Franchise, restricted, 549, 700-1
- Free expression in, 5-6
- German revolution (1918), and, 706, 710, 712, 718-19, 746-7, 753, 784, 798
- Germany, relations with, 511-12, 798; Bebel's appeal to German Socialists in (1905), 303-4, 327; German agent in, 609; possible effect of defeat by German arms, 634-5; appeal to German Left (1917), 685; Berlin Legation closed (1918), 713, 718, 740, 746; and German Communists, 789; Russian methods imitated, 739-40; peace with: *see under* First World War
- History, 41-42
- Industrial unrest (1914), 478
- Jews, 43-44, 66, 104
- Labour movement, 596
- Land policy, 699, 701, 851

Russia, and the Russians—cont.

- Liberals, 42-44, 76-77, 344-5, 352-3, 553-4, 556, 565
- Literature, 30-31, 41, 125, 233, 668-71
- Mensheviks: *see that title*
- Minorities in, 43, 341
- National question, and, 276-8, 282, 699-700, 857
- New Economic Policy, 807, 809
- Peasants, 699, 701, 851
- Poland: *see* Poland
- Police, 548-50, 580; security (Cheka) 584, 697, 731
- Purges, 14, 23, 79, 406, 570, 781, 803, 811, 820
- Republic, All-Russian, 339-40
- Revolution (1905-1906), 90, 201, 214, 225, 258, 295, 314, 318, 327-36, 343, 535, 540, 548-52, 565, 851; analysis 553-5; Rosa Luxemburg and, 31, 227-8, 250, 360-4, 369-72, 380, 425, 496-503, 510, 512-13, 540-2; effects in Germany, 295-317, 366, 435, 440, 503-6, 510-11, 556; effects in Poland, 283, 317-64; ebb, 343-5, 359; R.L.'s pamphlet on: *see Russian Revolution*
- Revolution (February 1917), 679-86; *Spartakus* letters, 680-6
- Revolution (October 1917), 3, 11-12, 78, 213-14, 228, 268, 287, 292, 335, 361, 544, 679, 684, 686, 689-94, 705-7, 786, 809; R.L. and, 542, 544-5, 689, 695, 716-19, 732
- Revolutionary literature, distribution, 197-8, 293
- Revolutionary movement, 43-48, 251-2, 317-18, 574, 603, 633-4, 843, 845-7, 851, conferences, 318, 320
- Rosa Luxemburg, attitude to Russians, 20, 253, 386-7, 433-4, 510; accused of Russian patriotism, 512-13, 615; Russian attitude to, 600, 788, 822-3; suggested Russian citizenship, 679
- Social change, pressure for, 43-44
- Social-Democratic Workers' Party: *see* RSDRP
- Socialist movement, 47-48, 85, 104, 251, 376, 510-12; émigrés: *see under* Émigrés; Poles' co-operation, 62, 76, 95; Socialists released from prison (1917), 679; unity, 76, 203, 283, 320-1, 344; party created: *see* RSDRP

- Russia, and the Russians—*cont.*
 Socialist Revolutionaries: *see that title*
 Soviet Union: *see that title*
 Soviets, 353-4, 682, 684-5; leaders arrested, 329-30
 Strikes, 327, 329-32, 343, 498-501, 503, 506
 Suffrage, 549, 700-1
 Trade unions, 344
 Troika, anti-Trotsky, 799, 805
 Tsarism: *see that title*
 Working classes, 70, 503-5
 Russian citizenship, R.L. and, 679
 Russian Communist Party: *see under* Russia
 Russian language, 42, 54, 56, 67, 286, 387, 668
 Russian Poland: *see* Poland
Russian Revolution, The (by R.L.), 224, 357, 496, 631, 783, 792-3, 795, 802, 818, 895; publication, 792; analysis, 696-705; cited, 541, 698, 735
 Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party: *see* RSDRP
 Russian writings by R.L., 550, 696-705
 Russo-Japanese War, 283, 317-18
 Ryazanov (or Rjasanoff), N. (D. B. Goldenbakh), 183, 387, 475, 755, 834, 843
 Rykov, A. I., 579-80, 805
Rzecz o konstytuancie, cited, 339, 341-2
- Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung*, 108, 147-8, 150, 157-61, 188; R.L.'s contributions to, 29, 101, 107, 137, 154; R.L. as editor, 138, 143, 154, 157-61, 169-70; cited, 148, 216, 238, 242, 296, 302, 319, 352
 St. Gilgen, Austria, 197, 305
 St. Petersburg, 48-49, 350-1; revolution (1905), 295, 314-15, 318, 329-31, 335, 345, 353-4; R.L. visits (1906), 356-9; revolution (1917): *see* Petrograd
 Saint-Simon, H., 60
 Sakasoff, Janko, 644
 Santillana, George de, cited, 670
 SAP (Socialist Workers' Party), 817, 819
 Sarajevo, 486
 Sauerland, Kurt, 816-19; cited, 530, 816-17
- Saxony, party organization, 159, 190; Parvus and Marchlewski expelled, 157, 635; R.L. and, 101, 190, 199, 451
 Scandinavia, 306, 596
 Schapiro, Leonard, cited, 68, 339, 551, 555, 559, 579, 583, 590
 Scharlau, Winfried, cited, 148, 219, 634
 Scheidemann, Philipp, 605, 609, 656, 685, 691-2, 719, 729, 741-2, 770-1; SPD leader, 407, 455, 468-9, 645-6; vice-president of *Reichstag*, 454; and Parvus, 634, 681, 692; and mass strike, 497; negotiations for possible peace with Russians, 681-3, 692; proclaims republic, 711-12; member of government, 714, 737, 749, 756-7, 763, 765, 771; cited, 451, 609, 622, 682, 692, 712, 746
 Schiller, J. C. F. von, 29, 53
 Schippel, Max (Isegrim), 154, 165, 190, 216, 234, 377, 404, 454
 Schleifstein, Josef, cited, 53, 171, 234, 463, 465, 779
 Schlesinger, Rudolf, cited, 595
 Schlüsselburg Fortress, St. Petersburg, 49
 Schmidt, Karl, cited, 805
 Schmidt, Konrad, 230
 Schmidt inheritance, 579-81, 626
 Schmoller, Professor, 155, 230, 830
 Schneller, Ernst, cited, 800
 Scholze, P., 763
 Schönaich-Carolath, H., Prinz zu, 454
 Schönlank, Bruno, 109, 136-7, 147, 149-50, 159-60, 162, 166, 170-1, 187-8, 202
 Schönlank, Bruno (junior), 472
 Schools, Party, 388-96, 419-20, 433, 441, 459-60, 559-60
 Schorske, Carl E., cited, 116, 307, 373, 404, 406, 416, 418, 437, 452, 455, 496, 605
 Schreiner, A., 723
 Schrick, V., 618
 Schröder, W., 312
 Schüddekopf, Otto-Ernst, cited, 731
 Schulz, Heinrich, 389-91, 395-6
 Schumpeter, Josef, cited, 34
 Schurer, H., cited, 298-9
Schwabische Tagwacht, 621-2
 Science, function of, 840
 Scotland, 846
 SDAP: *see under* Netherlands

- SDKP (Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland), 75-101, 104-5, 137, 139; adherence of Lithuanian group (1899), 80, 104-5, 251, 256-7; name changed to SDKPiL (*q.v.*), 81, 104-5
- Congresses (1894), 77-78, 257, 261; (1900), 80
- Foundation (1893), 75, 583
- Leadership, 77-81, 86; personal accusations against refuted, 93-95
- Newspaper: see *Sprawa Robotnicza*
- Programme, 75-77
- Rosa Luxemburg's position in, 79, 81-82, 86, 89, 256
- SDKPiL (Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania), name changed from SDKP (*q.v.*) (1899), 81, 104-5; united with PPS-Left to form Polish Communist Party (1918): see Poland: Communist Party
- Analysis, 380, 552-7
- Anti-Semitic attack on, 586
- Armed uprising, attitude to, 334-5, 337-8, 353
- Bebel's proclamation reprinted, 303-4, 327
- Bolshevik/Menshevik alignment, 279, 351, 553, 558-9, 577-9
- Central Committee, 195, 262, 278, 281, 303, 318, 326, 336, 345, 379, 470, 565, 570, 574-8, 582-91, 594-7, 857
- Conferences (1902), 265; (1905), 327-8
- Congresses (1901), 262; (1906), 326, 343-4, 351; (1908), 361, 565-8, 573, 575, 590
- Expulsion of members, 471, 586
- Finance, 264-5, 326, 358, 578, 585-6
- Foreign Committee, 262-3, 271, 273-5, 280-1, 320
- Germans, help from, 586
- Historical role, 823
- History, 22-24, 251
- International Bureau, representative in, 195, 263, 281, 286, 326, 347, 397, 443, 446, 601
- International Socialism, commitment to, 259-61
- Jogiches and: see under Jogiches, Leo
- Leaders and leadership, 23, 80-81, 251, 254, 256-8, 261-3, 266-9, 280, 569-71, 575, 583-5, 630; emigration, 165, SDKPiL—*cont.*
- 257-8; in Cracow, 326-7; move to Warsaw, 329
- Lenin and, 372, 583, 588-90, 595, 797
- Mass support, 567-9
- Materialy i dokumenty*, cited, 70, 72, 76, 78 *passim*
- National question, and, 33, 92, 104, 257, 261, 568, 845
- Opposition, 577, 582, 584, 589, 596
- National Committee, 582-3
- Organization, 261-3, 567-9
- Peasant question, and, 361, 565-7, 851
- Poland, organization in, 105, 165, 255, 257
- Policy, 35, 559-60, 570, 574-6, 578
- Political purpose, 269
- PPS, struggle against: see under PPS
- PPS-Left, relationship with, 33, 355, 560-4, 576, 583, 823; united, 597-600
- Press, 269-70, 572-3
- Programme of minimum demand: ('Czego chcemy?'), 317, 338-42
- Propaganda, 322-3
- Radek case, and: see under Radek, Karl
- Revolution (1905), and, 90, 183, 315, 318 *et seq.*, 337-45, 351-3, 548-50, 560, 565, 568, 721, 813
- Revolution (1917), and, 716
- Rosa Luxemburg's role in, 24, 106, 140, 195, 255-9, 265, 269, 283-4, 305, 349, 387, 557, 571-6, 585, 590, 598-9
- Russian party, autonomous member of (1906): see RSDRP: Poles
- SPD, relations with, 134, 183, 474
- Split (1911), 80-81, 270, 384, 396, 560, 565, 570-1, 573-90, 592, 747
- Strength, 104-5, 165, 275-8, 337
- Subsidized by Bolsheviks, 578, 585
- War, effect of, 596-7
- Seas, freedom of the, 641
- Second International: see International
Second
- Second *Proletariat*: see *Proletariat*
- Second World War, 6
- Secret documents, 181
- Secret police, as party congress bailiffs
100
- SED (Socialist Unity Party), 10, 612, 745, 820, 825
- Segal, Clancy, cited, 2

- Seidel, Robert and Mathilde, 84, 95, 107-10, 191; biography of Robert, 107; letters cited, 52, 68, 95, 107, 163, 189, 200, 675
- Self-determination for subject people (*see also* National question), 32-33, 174-82, 265, 270, 276, 534, 596, 696, 699-700, 796-7, 842-60; London Congress (1896) resolution, 98-100, 182, 260; Polish: *see under* Poland
- Serbia, 613, 640
- Severing, C., 817
- SFIO: *see* France: Socialists
- Shakespeare, 668
- Shatzky, J., cited, 52
- Shaumyan, S. G., cited, 855
- Shaw, G. B., cited, 124
- Shils, Edward, cited, 36
- Shlyapnikov, A., 625
- Shorthand, used by R. L., 131, 140; Yiddish, 860
- Shukman, H., cited, 104, 252
- Shulgovskii, A., cited, 834
- Siberia, 133; exiles, 58, 88, 105, 257, 328, 356, 360, 549
- 'Sie': *see* Diefenbach, Hans
- Silesia:
- Austrian, 179
 - Polish Socialists, 60-61, 97, 109, 133-7, 139, 173-6, 179-81, 258
 - Polish workers, 42-43, 60, 133, 174
 - Rosa Luxemburg's work in, 133-7, 139, 150, 172-6, 184, 283
 - SPD, 97, 133-7, 173-6, 179-81
 - Trade unions, 174, 176
- Singer, Paul, 139, 198, 415, 417, 455
- Sismondi, J. de, 832
- 'Sisyphus, labours of', 169, 211, 223, 227, 300
- Slater, P. E., cited, 269
- Slavonic and East European Review*, cited, 671
- Slavs, 43, 411
- Slogans, 121, 529, 604
- Slovenes, 102
- Slutskii, 811
- Smallholdings, 125-6
- Smolensk, 254
- Smutny: *see* Wesolowski, Bronislaw
- Sobczak, Jan, cited, 353, 552, 559, 578
- Sobelson, Karl: *see* Radek, Karl
- Social Democracy:
- Defence against revisionists, 222, 229-32
 - International, 98
 - Interpretation of R.L.'s work, 7-8, 222-3
 - Marxism, and, 38-39, 494
 - Mass strike, role in: *see under* Mass strike
 - Parvus and, 218-19, 222
 - Political collapse, 39
 - Relationship with society, 536-40, 546-7
 - Taint of pre-war, 799-800
 - Use of term, 38, 507
 - Weber on, 406
- Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania: *see* SDKPiL
- Social Democratic Review*: *see* *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*
- Social groups, cohesion among, 247
- Social matters, R.L.'s articles on, 477-8
- Social patriotism, 625, 853
- Social reform, struggle for, 209, 212
- Social Reform or Revolution*, 7, 138, 206-17, 220, 223-9, 234, 250, 291-2, 535, 794-5, 826
- Social science, 232, 840
- Socialism:
- Brands of, 494
 - Confrontation between capitalism and, 4-5, 116, 125-6, 213, 270
 - European, 71, 640
 - History course, 389, 391, 393, 395
 - 'Inevitability' of, 373
 - International, 89-90, 93, 130, 195-7, 247, 256, 261, 395, 614
 - Patriotism, and, 33, 46
 - Revisionist controversy: *see that title*
 - Rosa Luxemburg, first acquaintance with writings on, 59
 - Scientific, 94, 848, 851
 - 'Socialism in one country', 512, 797, 799, 804, 813
 - Study of, 59-60
 - War, effect of, 640
 - Western, 70
- Socialist Revolutionaries, 251, 318, 326, 851, 854
- Socialist Unity Party (East Germany): *see* SED
- Socialist Workers' Party: *see* SAP
- Society, party and: *see* Party and society

- 'Society', Polish élite's use of word, 265
Sozialdemokracja Królestwa Polskiego: see SDKP
- Sokolnikov, G., 512, 534
- Soldiers' Councils, 340, 703; *see also* Germany: Workers' and Soldiers' Councils
- 'Solidarność' group, 577
- Solingen, 423, 441
- Sombart, Professor Werner, 173, 230-3, 830
- Sonderbund*, the, 459
- Sorel, Georges, 35, 232, 498
- Sorki, M., cited, 818
- Sotsial-Demokrat*, 550-2, 558, 578, 580-1, 583, 590
- Sotsialdemokraticeskaya Biblioteka*, 67, 69
- South Africa, torture of negroes, 533
- South America, 836
- Souvarine, Boris, 658
- Soviet Socialist Academy of Social Sciences, 234
- Soviet Studies*, cited, 584
- Soviet Union, 3, 11, 39, 289, 406, 680, 718, 746, 778, 797-8, 811, 823
 Constitution, 701, 854
 Economics, 831-3
 Germany, relations with, 746, 753
 Imperialism, and, 837-8
 Organization, 6
 Propaganda among enemy soldiers, 528
Referat system, 128
 Self-determination, 854-6, 859
- Soviets, 329-30, 340, 353-4, 702-3 (*see also* under Russia)
- Sozialdemokrat, Der*, 624, 694
- Sozialdemokratische Korrespondenz* (founded 1913), 313, 455, 465-7, 475, 609, 617, 724; cited, 478-80, 525
- Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*: *see* SPD
- Sozialist, Der*, cited, 595, 740
- Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 107, 146, 164, 301; cited, 57, 156, 173, 366, 374, 417, 429, 454, 471
- Sozialistische Partei Deutschlands* (later SPD, *q.v.*), 122
- Sozialreform oder Revolution*: *see* *Social Reform or Revolution*
- Spain, 93, 103, 195, 473, 811, 836
- Spartakus* (*Spartakusbund* (earlier *Gruppe Internationale, q.v.*), 10, 268, 305, 340, 370, 455, 545-6, 618, 637, 642-61, 680-96, 706-15, 718-53, 758-62, 767-81; joins USPD (*q.v.*) (1917), 659; prepares to found separate party, 742, 745, 752-3; founding congress of KPD (*q.v.*) (1918), 753-8
- Appeals, 708-9, 733
- Arbeitsgemeinschaft*, relations with, 643, 647-50, 653-5, 658-9
- Berlin headquarters, 485
- Bremen radicals and, 658, 708
- Conferences (1918), 709, 753
- Internationalism, 642, 685, 799
- Jogiches and: *see* under Jogiches, Leo
- Jubilee (10-year), 610
- Leaders, 630, 650, 655, 688, 710, 719, 780; prison sentences, 649, 706; threatened with death, 753, 759; murdered (1919), 773-81
- Letters, 385, 485, 614, 617, 628, 630, 651-2, 655, 661, 680-6, 688, 690-2, 695, 707, 709, 731, 972
- Liebnecht and, 660, 710, 714, 719
- Literature, 614, 634, 650-1, 655, 688, 722, 724
- Mass propaganda, 540, 732-3
- Name, adopted officially (1918), 653, 714; synonym for all insurgents, 769
- Newspaper, 721-2, 724
- 'Policy for Dogs, A', 614
- Programme, 712-13, 715, 719, 748-52, 759, 790
- Rosa Luxemburg and, 643-4, 650, 661, 675, 715, 851; influence declines, 687-9; programme written by, 748-52, 759
- SPD and, 546; hatred of executive, 645, 653; break with (1917), 656; relations with, 715
- USPD, joins (1917), 659; relations with, 564, 657-9, 661, 710, 712, 714-15, 723-5, 739-42; separation from, 742, 752-3, 758
- Views of, 800, 805, 808, 823
- Vorwärts* poem, 770
- War, attitude to, 680-6, 690-2, 707
- Spartakusbriefe*, cited, 616, 628, 633-4, 639, 642, 646-8, 651-2, 657-8, 680-5, 691, 695

- SPD (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*) (see also under subject headings throughout the index):
- Agrarian policy, 125-7
 - Alliance with Progressives, 414, 416-17, 438, 452-4, 458
 - Analysis of, 117-31
 - Arbeitsgemeinschaft*: see that title
 - Berlin police, and, 762
 - Budget policy, 127
 - Bureaucracy, 407, 546
 - Centrists, 622-3, 627, 653, 655, 657, 659 (see also *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*)
 - Co-chairmen, 455
 - Congresses, annual, 116, 120, 124, 127-30, 573; organization and status, 128-30; changing role, 249, 306; R.L. and mandates, 378, 459 (1891), 76, 116-17, 122, 124, 148, 221, 262, 307, 755 (1894), 126 (1895), 126-7, 202 (1897), 176 (1898), 148, 150-8, 168-9, 193, 202, 222 (1899), 166, 168-73 (1900), 175-6, 447, 522-3 (1901), 177-9, 185-7, 192, 245 (1902), 179-80, 190 (1903), 121, 181-2, 189, 191, 198, 241, 245, 299 (1904), 198, 378 (1905), 301, 306-12, 328, 351, 358, 366-7, 372-3, 399, 401-2, 406, 419, 437, 469, 505, 515 (1906), 357, 360, 365-71, 374, 438 (1907), 377-8, 389, 404, 482 (1908), 392-4, 415-16 (1909), 408, 417, 459 (1910), 424, 431, 435-40, 459, 497, 604 (1911), 442, 445-51, 461-2, 523, 581 (1912), 459, 470, 472 (1913), 459, 465, 468-73, 478, 497, 587 (1914), postponed, 608
 - Constituent Assembly, and, 340
 - Control Commission, 193, 455-6, 622
 - Convicted members, treated to mass demonstrations, 482
 - Cultural Committee, 460
 - Discipline, inability to maintain, 543
- SPD—cont.
- Educational Commission, 389
 - Elections, participation in, 235-7; party's preoccupation with, 414-17, 427, 439, 443-4, 447, 518; campaigns and alliances, 451-4, 456, 463; (1903), 190-1; (1907, defeat), 373-6, 378, 404, 414; (1912), 236, 451-2, 457-8
 - Engels and, 754-5
 - Erfurt programme (1891), 76, 116-17, 122, 124, 148, 221, 262, 307, 409, 755
 - 'Establishment', R.L.'s characterization of, 140, 167, 431; opposition to, 362
 - Executive (*Vorstand*), function, 128; and revisionists, 439; proposed enlargement, 455; Kautsky and, 456; and parliamentary group, 458
 - Expulsion of member, 470-3, 587-8
 - Financial embargo threatened, 646, 648, 650
 - Foundation and legal re-establishment, 115-16, 122
 - Gag on discussion (1910), 420-2
 - Godesberg programme, 824
 - Government, participation in, proposed 706-7, 711; advent to power, 711-12; joint government with USPD, 712, 714-15, 723
 - Impatiences, two, 434-5
 - Imperialism, and, 525-6, 528
 - Inheritance, sense of, 744-5
 - Internal affairs, disorder, 166-7, 266, 373-7, 387-8, 429-35, 437-40; 451; truce among factions, 373-4; history (1911-1914), 455-9, 467, 476-7, 486
 - International, and, 72, 130-1, 310, 326, 396, 403, 445, 510, 513, 740
 - International role, 93, 130-1, 445, 510
 - January rising, and, 764, 770
 - Leadership, 93, 120-2, 153, 177, 406-8, 734, 737; new role for leaders, 425; R.L. on, 22, 431-2, 464; R.L. advocates mass pressure on (1914), 480; R.L.'s battle with, 502, 508, 516-19, 540, 757, 826
 - Left, new, 454, 464-5, 597
 - Lenin and, 402-3
 - Literati, 29
 - Local organization, 128, 441, 459
 - Marx, and, 116
 - Mass movements, new policy, 424-5

SPD—*cont.*

- Mass strike, and: *see under* Mass strike
- Morocco crisis, and, 443-51, 455
- Murders of *Spartakus* leaders, and, 776, 778, 788-90
- Official policy, interpretation of, 304
- Opposition, 459, 627-31, 633, 638-9, 645-50, 654-6; Reich conference, 655-6; new party formed (*see* USPD), 638, 656-8
- Organization and structure, 80, 120, 128-30, 139, 161, 174, 177-85; internal reorganization, 405-9, 456, 476
- Parliamentary activity, group, 457-8, 463-4; control of delegates, 128-9; party's preoccupation with, 366, 518, 523, 539
- Parvus and, 34
- Polish affairs, adviser on, 466, 474, 573-4, 585
- Polish Socialists in Germany, and, 60-61, 76, 81, 95, 102-4, 173-83, 259, 283; R.L.'s integration policy, 102-4, 134, 174, 183-4, 277; help for, 586
- Post-war (1950-1953), 819
- PPS, relations with, 844; Prussian, 173-83
- Press and journalism, 94, 96, 109, 147-8, 157-61, 171-2, 187-8, 191, 622, 655
- Progressive elements: *see* Socialist Unity Party
- Public speaking, 441
- Radek and, 470-3, 586-8, 593; expulsion of (1913), 587
- Radicals, 315, 374, 432, 435-40, 451, 454, 456, 459-60, 463 (*see also* Germany: Radicals)
- Reich conference (1916), 653-6
- Reichstag* (*see also* Elections; and Parliamentary activity, above), strength in, 190, 235-7, 373, 451-2, 457-8, 467
- Revisionist controversy: *see under that title*
- Revolution, and, 116, 119-21, 123-4, 373, 407, 429, 743-4, 754
- Revolutionary government, and, 720, 723

SPD—*cont.*

- Rosa Luxemburg and, 7-8, 33, 35, 60, 138-40, 151-3, 255-6, 258, 293, 403, 513, 585; allegiance to, 32; first contacts with, 57, 111, 121, 123, 131, 133-4; position in party, 134-5, 161-2, 184, 191, 327, 362, 394, 474; executive's offer of money, 349, 370-1; years of disengagement, 375-80, 383, 493; and mandates for congresses, 378, 459; 'spectator' on the scene, 408; influence waning, 441, 448-9; executive's personal campaign against (1911), 445-50; tributes to, 789; party renounces claim to her, 818
- RSDRP, and, 197-8, 496, 510, 553, 556
- Russian Communist attitude to, 824
- Russian questions, attitude to, 284, 320, 327, 352, 511
- Russian revolution, effects of, 296-317, 357, 359, 435
- School, Central Party (Berlin), 388-96, 419-20, 433, 441, 459-60
- Secret organizational activity, 540
- Self-determination, and, 100
- Slogans, and, 604
- Sonderbund*, 459
- Spartakus* and, 546, 645, 653, 715; break with (1917), 656
- State within a state, 246-7, 249, 388, 538-9
- Stockholm mission (1917), 692
- 'Suffrage promenade', 418
- System, 545
- Tactic, new (1912), 458, 476
- Title, 115, 122
- Trade unions and (*see also* Germany: Trade unions), 115, 365-9, 374, 377, 505, 507, 514; agreement with (1906), 302, 317, 505
- Voting method, 551
- War, attitude to, 455, 601, 603-9, 621-4, 645, 649, 653-4, 657, 823; and war credits vote, 601, 604-7, 622-3, 637-40, 646, 647, 653; R.L.'s opposition, 610-19, 623-5
- West German, 820
- Workers' songs and poems, 28
- Spheres of influence, 524
- Spiegel, Der*, cited, 773
- Spiessbürgertum*, 398

- 'Splitters': *see* *Roslamowcy* organization
- Spontaneity theory, 9, 13, 333, 495, 504, 506-9, 533, 536, 542-3, 546, 636, 670, 675, 802, 816-17, 826
- Sprawa Robotnicza* (The Workers' Cause), 70-75, 81-82, 85, 87-90, 95, 108
- Stadthagen, Arthur, 163, 198, 201, 305, 312-13, 348, 365, 486, 635, 662
- Stalin, J. V., 3-6, 36, 100, 128, 196, 512, 615, 697, 781-2, 803-7, 827
- 'Denunciation' of pre-war Radicals, 530, 600, 628, 810-16
- History 'improvement', 409, 543, 628, 811-16, 818-19, 823-4
- International policy, 806
- Khrushchev and, 703
- Leninism, adaptations of, 796-7, 799-800, 804-5, 818, 854
- Letter to *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya*, 543, 811
- Luxemburgism, and, 3-4, 543, 810-16
- Marxism, and, 544
- National question, and, 700, 858-9
- Purge of Polish Communist Party, 23, 79, 570
- Rosa Luxemburg and, 553, 731, 785, 811, 821
- Society and party, and, 539-40, 704, 853
- Texts and interpretation, 307
- Translating words into action, 244, 469
- Trotsky and, 11-12, 799, 801, 810-16
- Stalinism, 2, 7, 9-12, 334, 363, 540, 555, 600, 785, 815, 822, 824, 827
- Stampfer, Friedrich, 170, 442
- Stein, H. (H. S. Kamiński, L. Domski), 561, 584, 596
- Stein, W. (A. Krajewski), 353, 584, 596
- Stendhal, 26, 381, 669
- Stern, Leo, cited, 644, 686
- Sternberg, Fritz, cited, 830, 834
- Stettin, 173
- Stöcker, Walter, 759
- Stockholm, German peace moves in, 692; Bolsheviks in, 584, 598, 634, 692, 707
- Stockholm Conference (1917), 685
- Stockholm Congress (RSDRP, 1906), 85, 336, 351, 355, 396, 550-2, 854
- Stolypin, P. A., 566
- Strafford, Earl of, 619
- Street demonstrations, 424, 427, 491, 517, 519
- Strike, Political mass: *see* Mass strike
- Strikes, 89, 331-2, 352, 500, 555
- Ströbel, Heinrich, 172, 312-14, 419, 739
- Struthahn, pseudonym of Karl Radek (*q.v.*), 731
- Stuttgart, Clara Zetkin living in, 193-4, 378, 611, 677, 719, 779; Council, 721, 745; Radical centre, 617; *Spartakists* in, 721, 723, 725
- Stuttgart Congress (SPD, 1898), 148, 150-8, 168-9, 193, 202, 222
- Stuttgart Congress (International, 1907), 378, 396-404, 523, 557, 599
- Sudan, 272
- Südekum, Dr. A. O. W., 610, 612, 645, 685
- Südende, 18, 475, 759, 780
- Suffrage reform; *see under* Prussia
- Sverdlov University, 804
- 'Swabians', R.L.'s name for Germans, 131, 164
- Sweden, 401, 610
- Sweezy, Paul, cited, 834
- Święto Pierwszego Maja* (First of May Celebration), 68
- Switzerland:
- Bebel in, 121, 468
- Bernstein in, 146
- Émigrés in, 225, 597, 609-10, 627, 636
- Jogiches in, 570
- Lenin in, 520, 607, 615, 632
- Revolutionary activities in, 45, 48, 58, 65, 67, 78, 123, 155, 301, 328
- Rosa Luxemburg in, 18, 19, 59-60, 63 *et seq.*, 95, 110-11, 132 (*see also under* Zürich)
- Sonderbund*, 459
- War, attitude to, 613
- Working-class movement, 107
- Syndicalists, 297, 397, 425, 438, 497, 817
- 'Syphilitic', R.L.'s influence diagnosed as, 751, 800, 805-6
- Systems, R.L. and, 545-7, 799
- Szer-Siemkowska, Irena: *see* Izolska
- Szmidt, O. B., cited, 58, 76, 81, 101, 265, 318, 597, 796
- Szumowski, Zbigniew, cited, 174
- Tagebuch, Das*, cited, 774
- Tagliche Rundschau*, 777
- Talmon, J. L., cited, 33
- Tamils, 272
- Tammerfors, Finland, 352

- Tamschick, Sgt.-Major, 780
 Tariffs: *see* Customs tariffs
 Tarnow, F. 390-2
 'Tartar-Mongolian savagery', 577
 Taxation, 340-1
 Telephones, 406
Temps, Le, cited, 311
 Teplov, P. F., 84-85, 252, 254
 Ter-Petrosian, S.A. (Kamo), 95
 Terror, 334-5, 343, 702, 716-18, 725, 794; R.L.'s conception, 729-32
 Textual interpretation, note, 307
 Thalheimer, August, 628, 637, 719, 791, 807, 815-16; R.L. and, 460, 472, 788; unsuccessful uprisings, 792, 801; expelled, 807, 810
 Thalheimer, Bertha, 628, 637
 Thälmann, Ernst, 268, 780-1, 807, 819-21
 Theory and practice, relationship between, 543-4
 Thornton, T. P., cited, 838
 Thuringia, 358, 373
 Tiergarten, Berlin, 132, 142, 775
 Titian, 29
 Tito, Marshal, 185
 Togliatti, P., 185
 Toller, Ernst, 789
 Tolstoy, Leo, 31, 387, 668-9
 Tomskey, M. P., 805
 Tormin, Walter, cited, 707
 Trade unions:
 Development, 89, 115, 344
 'Economist' movement, and, 85, 290
 Germany: *see under* Germany
 History course at school, 395
 Mass strike, and, 299-302, 304, 307-9, 311, 315-17, 332, 366-9, 497, 500, 506, 518, 575-6
 Parity with party, 500-1, 505-7, 514
 Role of, 205, 210-11, 224-6, 231, 248
 Rosa Luxemburg, and, 152, 169, 211, 233, 304, 308, 311, 315, 332, 344, 368-9
 Socialist, 497
 War, and, 400-1
 Tradition, 38-39, 220-1, 224, 236, 315
 Traill, V., cited, 671
 Treichler, Professor, 63
 Trier, 430
 Trieste, 401
 Triple Alliance, 634
 Tripoli, 491
 Troika, Berlin, 578; Russian, 799, 805
 Trotsky, L. D., 7, 34, 68, 201, 362, 423, 554, 580, 703, 747, 785-6, 809; in Russia (1905), 328; arrested, 330, 350, 354; escapes, 360; position in party, 585; effects of prison, 663; expulsion from Soviet Union, 811-12
 Cited, 788
 Constituent Assembly, and, 701
 Kautsky, and, 626
 Lenin, debate with, 573; pact with, 573; government with, 757
 Marxism, and, 37
 Opposition to, 799-801, 803, 806, 811-13, 815; anti-Trotsky Troika, 799, 805
 Political support lacking, 3, 23
 Rakovskii, and, 84
 Revolution, and, 691; theory of permanent revolution, 339, 361, 435, 504, 567, 683, 812-13; debate with Lenin, 573
 Rosa Luxemburg, relationship with, 8, 21, 84, 372, 433-4; similarity of character, 372
 SPD, and, 581
 Stalin, and, 11-12, 799, 801, 810-16
 Trotskyism and Trotskyites, 3, 4, 7, 9, 11-12, 555, 795, 799-801, 803, 806, 811-12, 815-16, 821, 827
 Trusiewicz, Stanislaw (Zalewski), 80, 101, 105, 251, 259, 266, 564, 577
Trybuna, 331
 Tsarism, 511-12, 561, 605, 615, 633, 680-1, 854; dissatisfaction with system, 44-45, 282-3; and revolution (1905), 295, 317-18, 333, 338, 341-2, 344, 348; struggle against, 70, 91, 96, 270-1, 287, 317-18, 338, 341-2, 550
 Tsyavlovskii, M. A., cited, 580, 594
 Tucker, Robert C., cited, 4, 538
 Turati, F., 94
 Turgenev, I. S., 669
 Turkey, 34, 41, 100, 633, 846-7, 850
 Tuscany, 413
 Twining, Miss, 475
 Tych, Feliks, cited, 319, 337, 346, 353, 561, 564, 628
 Typewriters, 406
 Tyszko or Tyshka, Jan, pseudonyms of Leo Jogiches (*q.v.*), 66, 559

- Ukraine, 694, 696, 700, 729
 Ulbricht, 781, 825
 Ultimatism, 558
 Under-developed countries, 36, 833, 836-7
 Unemployment, R.L. on, 478
 Unfried, E., 745
 Union of Polish Workers, 49, 58, 60, 79
 Union of Social Democrats Abroad, 84-85, 253-5
 United States of America: *see* America
 Unszlicht, J., 23, 80, 584-5, 716; biographical, 584
 Untermann, Ernest, cited, 209
 Upper Silesia: *see* Silesia
 Urbahns, H., 816
 USPD (Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany) (earlier *Arbeitsgemeinschaft, q.v.*), foundation (1917), 560, 638, 656-9, 758
 Congresses (1917), 656-9, 758; demand for (1918), 724, 741-2; held at Halle, 816
 Government, participation in, 712, 714, 720, 742, 746; leaves, 738, 753
 Intermediate position, 742, 745
 January rising, and, 762-4, 767-9, 778
 KPD, adhesion of members to, 745, 784
 Lenin and, 626
 Liebknecht (Karl) and, 710, 715, 723, 748, 757
 Mentioned, 159, 313, 637, 726, 733
 Newspapers, 721-2, 724
 Rosa Luxemburg and, 741-2, 757, 789
 Russia, attitude to, 690, 694
Spartakus, joins, 659; relations with, 564, 657-9, 661, 710, 712, 714-15, 723-5, 739-42; separation to form new party (*see* KPD), 742, 752-3, 758
 War, and, 706-7
- Vaillant, Edouard, 95, 110, 195, 238-9, 305, 398-9, 402, 441
 Vaks, G., 420
 Valentinov, N., cited, 294
 Vandervelde, Emil, 72-73, 244, 594, 793
 Vasin, V. G., cited, 824
 Venezuela, petroleum industry, 833
Verband der Deutschen Arbeitervereine, 122
 Verdi, G., 239
Vérité, La, cited, 658
- Vienna, 52, 160, 171, 187, 585, 604
 Viktorov, I., cited, 824
 Vilna, 43-44, 66-68, 82-83, 251, 383
Visnshaftlikher Iohrbikher, cited, 273
 Vistula, 42, 348
 Vogel, Lieutenant, 773, 775-7
 Vogt, Professor, 63
Volksfreund (Brunswick), 655
Volksstimme (Frankfurt), cited, 481
Volkswacht (Breslau), 713; cited, 97, 181, 426
Volkswacht (Freiburg), cited, 483-4, 486, 861
 Vollmar, Georg von, 152, 154, 186, 249, 308, 375, 399, 401-3; agrarian proposals, 126, 244; and budget voting, 127-8; and R.L., 169, 219
 Vorovskii, V. V., 707-8
Vorwärts, 147, 197, 305, 307, 329, 331, 462, 633, 737, 745, 762, 834; purge (1905), 312-13; publication suspended (1914), 609; seized by party executive (1916), 645, 655; offices occupied by *Spartakus* members (1918), 753; occupied by demonstrators, 763-4, 768, 774; taken by government troops, 769
 Cited, 94, 96-97, 100, 175-8 *passim*
 Engels's introduction reprinted, 755
 Kautsky and, 445
 Murder of R.L. and Liebknecht, on, 776, 788, 818
 Poem accusing *Spartakus*, 770
 Policy regulation, 647
 Radek case, and, 588
 Rosa Luxemburg, her attacks on, 158-9, 169-70; contributions, 182, 313-16; refuses editorial place (1899), 171-2, 312; member (for a few weeks) of editorial board (1905), 312-16, 460, 655; article on mass strike returned (1910), 420-1; barred as contributor, 483
 Russia, attitude to, 297
 War, and, 604, 609, 622
Vossische Zeitung, 187
Vpered, 294, 323, 580
- Wages, of Polish workers, 42-43, 58; wage slavery, 209; level, 210-11; real, 832, 839
 Wagner, Richard, 30

- Walcher, Jacob, 392
 Waldeck-Rousseau, René, 237
 Waldman, Eric, cited, 764, 766
 Walecki, H., cited, 562
 Wales, 846
 Walewska, Countess, 346
 War (see also First World War):
 Agitation against, 448-9, 489-91
 General strike in case of, 398-9
 Hague Conference (1907), 403-4
 International Congress resolution (1907), 399-402, 523, 557, 599; Luxemburg-Lenin amendment, 399, 401-2, 557
 International Socialist Bureau meeting (1914), 601-2
 Lenin and, 4, 39-40, 603, 615, 628, 640, 660
 Marxist attitudes to, 4, 5
 National wars, 632, 640, 847
 'Plutôt l'insurrection que la guerre', 367, 398
 Proletariat and, 615, 623-4
 Reinterpretation of, 4
 Rosa Luxemburg's attitude to, 366, 448-9, 481, 489-91, 615, 631-2
 Socialists and, 39, 374, 397-404, 640
 Working class and, 400, 615
 War credits, 121, 601, 604-7, 610, 617, 622, 628, 637-40, 646-7, 653, 658
 Warsaw, 78, 95, 98, 356, 592, 716
 Citadel, 49, 348, 557
 Gendarmerie Commandant, 176, 846
 German Emperor's visit (1884), 56
 High School, 56, 59
 Jewish population, 50
 Luxemburg family in, 55, 337, 341
 May Day, 68
 Polish University, 42
 Revolution, 325-6, 328-9, 345, 354, 356
 Rosa Luxemburg, early life in, 50, 55-59; illegal stay in (1906), 25, 54, 302, 314-17, 329-30, 353, 505; arrested and imprisoned, 165, 345-50, 379; released, 350-1; allowed to leave, 183, 336, 351, 359, 496
 SDKPiL in, 88, 105, 251, 257, 281, 582, 590, 597, 721
 Strike (1883), 48
 Students' agitation, 57-58
 Warsaw Committee, 589
 Warsaw Congress (SDKP), 77-78
 Warski, Adolf, pseudonym of Adolf Warszawski (*q.v.*), 58, 79
 Warszawski, Adolf (Warski), 92, 466, 558, 592, 796; in Paris, 82, 263, 559, 578; accusations against refuted, 93-95; in Munich, 258, 263; member of Russian Central Committee, 551, 552, 578; on board of *Sotsial-Demokrat*, 552, 578
 Biographical, 23, 79
 Communist Party of Poland, and, 597, 599
 Doctoral thesis, 106, 830
 Jogiches and, 570
 Lenin and, 558, 578
 Polish participation in Russian party congress, and, 271, 273-8, 281, 594
 Pseudonym, 58, 79
 Rosa Luxemburg, relations with, 15, 55, 58, 73, 328-9, 349, 795; and her change of mind, 703, 16-17, 793, 795
 SDKPiL, and, 79, 81, 87, 563-4, 578, 583, 585, 597
 Union of Polish Workers, and, 58
 Works, cited, 3, 106, 135, 174-5, 717, 793, 830
 Warszawski, Jadwiga, 87
 Warszawski family, 475
 Waryński, Ludwik, 45-50
 'Was Weiter?' ('What Next?'), 420-4; cited, 514-16
 Wasilewski, L. (Plochocki), 259, 843
 Wavre, 616
 Weber, Max, 36, 225, 246, 406, 535, 546
 Wehler, Hans-Ulrich, cited, 173, 177, 181, 842-3
 Weimar, R.L.'s trial at (1906), 372-3, 377
 Weimar Republic, 11, 774, 790, 819
 Wels, Otto, 456, 738
 Wenzel, Hans, cited, 752
 Wenzel, Otto, cited, 806
 Werfel, Roman, cited, 353, 822
 Wesolowski, Bronislaw (Smutny), 58, 78, 328
 Westarp, Graf, 562, 662
 Westmeyer, F., 639
 Wetzker, Heinrich, 159, 312
 'What do we want?': see *Czego chcemy?*
 White, Winston, cited, 23
 Wiemer, O., 454
 William I, German Emperor, 56

- William II. German Emperor, 119, 404, 442, 486, 489-90, 605; abdication, 709, 711, 743-4; 'behave like Huns' speech, 489; policy, 115, 124; R.L. charged with insulting, 197-9; rumours of scandals, 409
- Wilmersdorf, 771
- Winnig, A., 392
- Winter, Dr. August, 134, 137, 173, 176, 181
- Wissell, R., 646
- Witte, Count, 348
- Wittwer, Walter, cited, 823
- Wladek: *see* Olszewski
- Wojnarowska, Cezaryna, 80, 95-96, 257-9, 262-6, 272, 279-81, 286, 326
- Wolf, Felix, 746
- Wolf, Hugo, 29, 385
- Wolf, Professor Julius, 63-64, 232
- Wolfe, Bertram D., cited, 1, 66, 239, 286, 294, 566, 603, 698, 735
- Wolffstein, Rosi (Frau Frölich), 391, 646, 678-9, 767
- Wollenberg, Erich, cited, 781
- Wolny Glos* (Free Voice), 573
- Women, emancipation, 340; International Conference (Holland, 1915), 618; R.L. and privileges, 59, 672; Socialist women's movement, 125, 136, 151, 194
- Woolf, Virginia, 670
- Workers' and Soldiers' Councils (*see also under* Germany; *and* Soviets), 340, 703
- Workers' Cause, The: *see* *Sprawa Robotnicza*
- Workers' Journal: *see* *Gazeta Robotnicza*
- Working classes:
- Class consciousness, 226, 241-2, 290, 338, 400, 490-1, 861-2
 - Development in organization, 496
 - Imperialism and, 641
 - International character of movements, 70, 76
 - Moral aspect, 125
 - National question, and, 91, 858
 - Representation, 341
 - Revolution, and, 369-70
 - Rosa Luxemburg and, 231, 369-70, 488-92, 503-5, 656, 861
 - Society, and, 231, 338-9
 - War, and, 400, 615
- World citizenship, 860-1
- Wronke fortress, 633, 652, 657, 661, 664, 672, 674, 677, 686-7, 856
- Wurm, Emmanuel, 305, 350, 397, 433, 457, 620, 635, 661; cited, 638
- Wurm, Mathilde, 305, 652, 661-3, 672, 689, 860
- Würmchen: *see* Wurm, Emmanuel
- Württemberg, 404, 483, 605, 783; press, 460, 470, 621-2; Provincial Assembly, 127, 609; SPD, 127, 723
- Wurzburg, 608
- Wybór Pism*, cited, 848-51
- Yaroslavskii, E. (I. G. Minei), 814
- Yezhovshchina*, 14
- Yiddish language, 52, 66; shorthand used by R.L., 860
- Yiddishe Arbeter, Der*, 105, 254
- Youth, organization of, 123, 323, 404-5; young intellectuals, 332
- Z doby rewolucyjnej: co dalej?*, cited, 333-4
- Z Pola Walki* (From the Field of Battle), 324-5, 813; title revived, 324; cited, 49, 52, 54, 67, 68 *passim*
- Zabern, 525
- Zakopane, 257
- Zakopane Congress (SDKPiL, 1906), 326, 343-4, 351
- Zalewski, pseudonym of Stanislaw Trusiewicz (*q.v.*), 105
- Zamość, Rosa's birthplace, 50-52, 55
- Zamoyskis, 50
- Zasulich, Vera, 65, 67, 277, 356
- Zeman, Z. A. B., cited, 634
- Zetkin, Clara, 11, 153, 166, 168-9, 381, 616, 630, 686, 693, 708, 742, 787; in Stuttgart, 193-4, 378, 396, 677, 719, 783; meetings with Lenin, 557, 626; arrested (1915), 636, 639, 676; released (1916), 636; poor health, 676-7; in Moscow (1920), 626
- Bebel, on, 151
- Biographical, 193-4, 676-7
- Communism, and, 613
- Editor of *Gleichheit*, 151, 403, 460
- Intellectual weaknesses, 461
- Internationale, Die*, indictment, 618
- Juniusbrochüre*, introduction to, 631
- Mass strike, and, 436-7

- Zetkin, Clara—*cont.*
 Party Control Commission, and, 193, 455-6, 622
 Party school, and, 389-91
 Radek case, and, 471
Reichstag candidature, proposed, 432
 Rosa Luxemburg, friendship with, 21, 172, 193-4, 198-9, 304, 337, 349, 360, 362, 371-2, 382, 459, 461, 676-7, 706; letters from, 187, 375, 635, 647, 677, 758-9; and R.L.-Jogiches relationship, 378-9; last meetings with, 636; and her change of mind, 717, 793-5; last letter to, 759; and R.L.'s death, 779-80; criticism of, 793-5; on campaign against, 805
 Trustee of Schmidt inheritance, 579, 581
 USPD, and, 752
 War, and, 609-11, 613
 Women's movement, 125, 136, 151, 194
 Women's rights, and, 672
 Works, cited, 158, 482, 609, 612, 626, 672, 689, 697, 717, 752, 759, 779-80, 793
 Zetkin, Konstantin, relationship with R.L., 19, 22, 381-2, 413, 419, 460, 674; R.L.'s letters to, 22, 380, 382, 387, 472, 530, 572, 611, 616
 Zetkin family, 15, 471, 549
 Zévaes, A., cited, 602
 Zhitomirskii, 94
 Zickler, Arthur, 770
 Ziekursch, Johannes, cited, 409
 Zimmerwald conferences (1915), 596, 624, 627-9, 639; R.L.'s statement of principles evolved for, 629-30, 639-43; second conference (Kienthal, 1916), 627-9; third conference (Stockholm, 1917), 685
 Zimmerwald Left, 627-8, 719
 Zinoviev, G., 357, 552, 557, 579, 747, 784, 799, 805, 808; cited, 357, 783, 788
 Zionism, 43-44, 48
 Zlottko, Gertrud, 17, 19, 419, 620, 665
 Zoology, R.L.'s interest in, 63, 665-7
 Zürich, 138, 141-3, 269, 324, 605; Lenin in, 663; R.L. in (1889-1898), 60, 63ff, 82, 88, 107-8, 111, 123, 253-5, 667; (1899), 164; Russian and Polish Socialists in, 48, 54, 106-7, 141-3, 168, 263, 415, 443; Technical High School, 63; University, 18, 50, 63-64, 105-6, 829
 Zürich Conference, of revolutionary organizations (1905), 320
 Zürich Congress (International, 1893), 71-75, 81, 84, 130, 260
 Zwickau prison, 198