

ROSA LUXEMBURG -- 11 Years After

The echo of the Bolshevik revolution in Germany in 1918 was drowned out by the thunderous torrent of blood drawn from the working class by the bayonets of the social democracy. Noske and Scheidemann were the hands of the German junkers and bourgeoisie that drew a deep and ineradicable line which forever divides the revolutionary movement from the social democracy. But the cruelest blow the social democracy could have struck the young Spartacus was the murder of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. Not years and not decades can wipe out the memory of the horrible crime, for it has become an accusing finger that always points to the role of the social democracy in the present epoch of history.

To recall Rosa Luxemburg on the eleventh anniversary of her assassination is to unfold again the two decades of struggle between the revolutionary and the reformist wing in the pre-war social democracy. The manner in which Rosa's position in this struggle applies to the difficulties and travail that the movement is traversing today, is evidence that the memorials to her are not formal, solemn obligations to be fulfilled one day and forgotten the next, but rather the occasion for a recapitulation of her work and its relation to the struggle today.

Rosa Luxemburg was uncompromisingly loyal to revolutionary principle. Her very first appearance as an active and leading force in the proletarian movement showed her definite capacities for swimming against the stream. To the nationalist spirit that pervaded the petty bourgeois and revolutionary movement towards the end of the last century, she opposed the Marxist spirit of the proletarian revolution. Against the Polish Socialist Party formed in 1892 by intellectuals who set the national independence of Poland from Russian czarism as the next goal of the labor movement, Rosa Luxemburg together with Adolf Warski, Julian Karski, Ratinsky, Wesselowski and others, founded the Russian-Polish Social Democracy, based upon the most advanced workers in the country, and thus laid the foundation for the Marxian labor movement of Poland. It was her inexhaustible theoretical arsenal that furnished the weapons for the Marxist movement of that period. Her work on "The Industrial Development of Poland" played much the same role in the Polish movement as Lenin's work on the development of capitalism in Russia played in his country. Sharp were the struggles that developed between the Marxists and the Nationalists; in them the term "social-patriotism" was coined which was to become a tragic reality in the betrayal of the Second International little more than a decade later.

From the period of her first work in Poland to the day that the Communist Party in Germany was founded by her and Karl Liebknecht, her record can be searched in vain for any compromise in principle. The vulgar opportunism of the German party leaders was entirely alien to her. And if, in the rigidity of her position, she erred in her conceptions—as she sometimes did—it was always on the side of the revolutionary struggle and not on the side of that corroding "adaptability" that finally fitted social democracy for its role as handmaiden to the Kaiser and the bourgeoisie who succeeded the monarchy.

Her contempt for compromise—we speak here, of course, not of temporary compromises in the strategic or tactical course, but of compromise in principles—earned her the harshest blows and antagonism of the German party leadership, even if she gave better than she got. She repulsed those who tried to storm the Marxian fortress and evaded the others who, like Bebel and later Kautsky sought to damn her with faint praise and dull her steel with a paternal tolerance for "youthful hotheadedness".

Her profound regard for principle and Marxian theory still stands as a reproach to those cheap "practical people" who, in the Communist movement today, hide their contempt and fear of theory behind the empty clamor of the "mass work" they are supposed to be doing. It is true that she was always preoccupied with the study and development of Marxian thought, but she had nothing in common with the dull pedantry of the closet professor. Even when she still was a close friend of Kautsky she

would make fun of his dry, lifeless learning. Like Lenin, she showed the vital connection between living Marxist theory and the living movements of the masses. While the "practical" leaders of the German social democracy were engaged in the "slow but productive" work of increasing the socialist vote in the Reichstag and the Landtags, Rosa not only engaged them in theoretical battle, but showed her capacity of stirring the masses into action. It was Luxemburg, not Kautsky not Bertstein not Legien, who went up and down the country arousing the workers to action against discriminatory electoral provisions in Prussia. It was Rosa Luxemburg who published the first appeals to the German proletariat, to the German masses, to rise against the imperialist war and the socialist bellwethers who led them to the slaughter.

She was the embodiment of Marxist theory enriched by the living struggle for power. With what scorn would she lash the bureaucrats of the Communist movement today who seek to smother all fundamental discussion with hypocritical appeals for "practical mass work" which gains no masses, introduces no clarity of purpose, and does not advance the basic aims of the revolution! In this period of the movement when contempt for investigation and discussion of questions of principle is at a premium, the monumental work of Rosa Luxemburg stands out like an unflickering, comforting flame.

Rosa Luxemburg knew how to stand and fight as a minority, even a minority of one. Especially now should this characteristic of hers be recalled, when it is as necessary and difficult to swim against the current as it was in her time. It would have been easier to yield to the national-socialist movement in Poland than to lay the small but firm foundations of a Marxist movement. She chose the latter alternative. With her brilliant attributes she could easily have become the most esteemed and highly placed figure in the German

social democracy, instead of the unyielding opposition. She remained with the opposition and life gave victory to her views. She could have swam with the current of blood in 1914 instead of being the persecuted, hounded, despised and calumniated leader of the handful of men and women that raised the banner of insurrection. But it was precisely because she was with the proletarian masses that she stood alone. She stood with the minority for so many occasions for the simple and conclusive reason that the minority was right and the majority, the men of the apparatus, the men of influence and weight, was wrong.

The proudest, most respected, most influential names in the German social democracy were subjected to her remorseless blows. I recall an apt cartoon in an old German socialist journal which depicts Rosa Luxemburg swinging her pen like a sabre and putting to rout the most prominent and authoritative statesmen of the party: Rebel, Kautsky, David, Fischer, Bernstein and a half dozen others. With her pitiless whip she sometimes compelled a whole party congress to acquiesce in her views, and many of the Leftward swings of the German social democracy were accomplished not only under the distant influence of the Russian revolution of 1905 but under the more immediate impulsion of Rosa Luxemburg. And if she was not deceived or convinced by the "innocent" revisionism of Eduard Bernstein, she was just as little inspired with confidence by the Centrist vacillations of Kautsky and Company. It must be remembered that the pseudo-radicalism of Kautsky was quite fashionable in the socialist movement before the war; it had a certain glamor and genuineness about it in the struggle against Bernsteinism, not to speak of the enormous authority, among Marxists attached to Kautsky's name. But for every blow she dealt the open revisionists, Rosa dealt another to the school of Kautsky which revealed its opportunist cowardice in every crucial struggle. Her relentless scalpel laid bare

Kautskyan Centrism at every turn. With the whole party leadership, and the enormous machinery at its disposal, ranged against her, she was nevertheless untiring in her efforts to arouse the party in the discussion on the war danger and the tasks of the social democracy that opened after the international congress at Copenhagen where, together with Karl Radek, Lenin and Trotsky, the viewpoint of the Left wing on militarism had been fought out, with Kautsky on the side of the social pacifists.

Her activity during the war is so well known that it requires no setting down here. With Liebknecht, Franz Mehring, Klara Zetkin, Karl Radek and a few others—a handful against the brutally oppressive machinery of the state, against party and public opinion—she carried on the painstaking, painful work of forming the nucleus of a new revolutionary movement, of mobilizing the forces of the proletarian insurrection. She was with a hundred against a million because she knew that it is often necessary to be only a hundred—the minority—was no fetish with her; her "fetish" was the proletarian revolution. In its interests, she knew how to stand with the mocked and jeered minority and fight implacably for principle. The difference between Rosa Luxemburg and the present-day pretenders to leadership of her party and her cause, the weather-cocks of the momentarily prevalent administration, the lost souls who have neither the courage to maintain a conviction nor the ideas to form one with—is the difference between the lion and the lapdog.

Despite their conflicting viewpoints on many questions, said Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg was an eagle. The modern Communist movement is as inseparable from the name and work of Rosa Luxemburg as it is from the name of Lenin. For both of them the International was the fatherland. To attempt to identify either of them with one particular nation is as meaningless as to say, for instance, that Marx was a German revolutionist. Both of them were single-mindedly consecrated to the triumph of the international proletariat. Both of them were teachers and soldiers in an epoch that makes them greater than those who illuminated the pages of history in the past. Both of them were devoted to the cause that is superior to all others because its victory opens an entirely new epoch for humanity. For that they are deathless.

To consider now those important issues that divided Rosa and Lenin—the mass strike, the driving forces of imperialism, the role of the proletarian party, and others—would require more than the space of this insufficient memorial. Rather let the solidarity and oneness of the two great revolutionists of our time be emphasized here, all the more so because it has become the fashion to distort, misrepresent and exaggerate the differences between Luxemburg and Lenin. Every little official functionary, particularly those turned out by the gross in the numerous "Lenin" schools throughout the world, can deliver a long dissertation to prove what a hopelessly incompetent thinker Rosa was and what enormous blunders she made. In the German Communist Party especially has this loathsome belittling of Rosa's immortal contributions reached the most revolting depths. The less the neo-Bolshevik knows about Luxemburg or has read of her works, the freer he feels to dismiss her with a contemptuous gesture. Let that sort of appreciation of Rosa remain the task of those cut out for it. For us, Rosa Luxemburg remains the eagle.

The eagle was foully killed as she was reaching the height of her power. With her death, the German proletariat, on the threshold of the revolution, suffered an irreplaceable loss. History does not produce many Marxes, or Lenins or Luxemburgs. Her place can only be taken by numbers, growing in strength, clarity and resoluteness, confident of victory. Men and women can be martyred by the enemy, but a whole movement cannot be assassinated. It can be set back for a time or cruelly defeated more than once. But each time it is crushed, like Hercules in his struggle with Arctus, it will gain from the earth that covers Rosa's grave a renewed power and determination to triumph.

—M. S.

The Communist Fight against Imperialist War

Talk! talk! talk! Peace! Naval reduction! Disarmament! Abolition of War! Geneva Conferences! London Conferences! League of Nations! Kellogg Pact—and while all this hypocritical cant is filling the air to the confusion of many workers, arsenals are being filled, gasses compounded, troops drilled, battleships built, industries organized, all for the next August 1, 1937?

Young workers and farmers, you who do the fighting and dying for the greater glory (and profit) of your capitalist masters, engrave this deeply into your consciousness: Twelve years after "the last war, the war to end wars", the world is bristling with armaments even more so than the week before Earejevo in July, 1914. The black clouds have gathered—a tiny spark and the storm of death will have broken.

The Role of the Socialists

Loudest in their vehemence, most touching in their oratory, holding the attention of millions of workers are the bellwethers for capitalism, the leadership of the international social democracy and the pacifists, trying to convince the workers of the possibility of disarmament, of the abolition of war under capitalism, meanwhile, with might and main aiding their imperialist in arming, such as MacDonald, Mueller and Paul Boncour.

The Communists are blunt: under capitalism war is inevitable. If you, fellow-worker, desire to abolish war, we say: Abolish capitalism with all its misery and replace it with the proletarian dictatorship—with a system of production for use and not for profit—all over the world.

Some "scientists" say, in the spirit of Bismarck, that war is nature's way of removing the unfit, the way "the law of the survival of the fittest" operates nowadays. Nonsense! It is precisely those who are sickly and weak and crippled and old who stay at home to survive and deteriorate the race, while the strong, the healthy and the young, without scar or blemish, who lay down their lives as blood sacrifices to Mammon on the altar of war.

So, as the chief sufferers, those most endangered, the young workers traditionally lead the fight against capitalist war. But how? Whose method shall be used?

War calls for a radical cure, for a revolutionary surgeon's knife to exterminate

class society, and not a reformist salve to heal the ulcer and retain the body of capitalism. So those who would apply the salve, the leadership of the Socialist Parties and Socialist Youth Leagues are excluded as capable of fighting war.

From Bosses' War to Class War

Essentially the problem is how to turn the imperialist war into a war of the working class against the master class. The reformists do not desire whatsoever to turn the war against capitalism. The task remains for the Communists.

But the days when Leninist policy dominated the Communist movement are long past. Today, within the Communist movement we have three currents, the Right, the Center and the Left.

Based theoretically on the monstrosity of "socialism in one country", which it shares with the Centrists, the Rights have taken the next step down the hill to reform the next step following "socialism in one country". They have declared their "right" to "national" Communist Parties" (a contradiction in terms as ridiculous as a square circle), negating the very principles of internationalism which is fundamental in our movement and especially in the fight against war. The Right wing "Communist" is checked off as incapable. The Centrists waver between the Right and Left, and anyone who hesitates in the class struggle is lost. A bold, determined policy is needed. They lag behind the masses or overtake and jump far ahead of them into adventurism and lag behind again.

The Left wing under the leadership of Trotsky and Rakovsky and many other fighters against the last war stands foursquare on an international Leninist platform. It is the embodiment of internationalism, of the fight against war and capitalism.

With the old battle-cries, first used by Lenin, Liebknecht and Trotsky, with which the masses overthrew the czar and Russian imperialism, and shook many a haughty empire, we shall also turn the next imperialist war into a victorious class war of the proletariat. The young workers must be in the front ranks.

—CHARLES CURTISS