

tual creativity and no longer produced great works of the mind. Contemporary art and literature were alien to the proletariat, which turned to the great classics for the sound of warfare, the passion and fighting spirit by which it was itself animated. The art which would express specifically proletarian ideals and aspirations was still in an embryo state. Mehring did not believe, however, that sympathy for the workers' cause sufficed to produce literature of high quality: he did not identify artistic value with a correct political tendency, but more than once deprecated any such 'reduction'. Good intentions were not a substitute for artistic ability. Thus, although Mehring emphasized the value of art that expresses the proletarian point of view (Freiligrath's poems, Hauptmann's *Die Weber*), he was mistrustful of proletarian literature produced for direct political or propaganda ends and detached from the classical literary tradition.

It is not clear, however, how there can be a 'scientific aesthetic' such as Mehring desiderates, since he declares on the one hand that art cannot be evaluated by its social genesis and intentions, and, on the other, that there can be no purely aesthetic, non-historical criteria. Mehring was a well-read and perceptive critic and quite aware of the difference between great and mediocre art. He defined the greatness of a work of art by the success with which it reflected the conflicts of its time, but he also questioned the possibility of other criteria than those based on the genesis of the work. On this basic point it is hard to clear him of inconsistency. For if all works of literature are born of class conflict, their genesis cannot permit us to distinguish good works from bad. The fact that a work expresses the tendencies of the 'progressive' class is also not enough. There is still a need for criteria independent of the genetic explanation; but according to Mehring there cannot be any such criteria, for in that case we should have to acknowledge that there were non-historical standards of beauty, which would mean falling into Kantianism or worse.

Here again, however, Mehring should not be too severely blamed for inadequacies that he shared with all contemporary Marxist writers on this subject. The value of his work does not consist in theoretical generalizations but in particular analyses in which he explained, skilfully and convincingly, the social background of creative literature. The genetic approach remains legitimate even when it is not clear exactly how it relates to artistic evaluation.

Kautsky, Mehring, and Heinrich Cunow were the most eminent theoreticians of orthodox Marxism as it was understood in their day. During and after the war, however, their political paths diverged. Kautsky maintained his 'centrist' position, Mehring declared for Spartacus, and Cunow for the right wing of the party. There was no direct correlation between theoretical orthodoxy on the one hand and politics on the other.

III

Rosa Luxemburg and the Revolutionary Left

ROSA LUXEMBURG occupies an ambiguous place in the tradition of socialist thought. She was the principal theoretician of the small revolutionary group which combated both revisionists and orthodox centrists, but she differed from the Leninist wing on certain important points. The group in question, the left wing of German social democracy, had no real prolongation in the later history of the socialist movement, in the time of polarization after 1918. Rosa Luxemburg's uncompromising revolutionism, and her violent criticism of the treachery of most of the socialist leaders in 1914, separated her completely from reformist social democracy. At the same time her sharp attacks on Lenin's programme and tactics meant that, in spite of dying a martyr's death, she was never quite admitted to the Communist pantheon. Verbal tribute was paid to her as a revolutionary and critic of revisionism, but from a practical point of view she was disregarded.

None of her writings is expressly philosophical: she was a theoretician of socialist strategy and tactics and of political economy. One may, however, regard 'Luxemburgism' as a particular variant of Marxism which, though not possessing an articulate philosophical basis, occupies a place of its own in the history of socialist doctrine, including its theoretical foundations.

1. Biographical information

ROSA LUXEMBURG, a Polish Jewess, was born at Zamość in 1870. Although she spent very little of her adult life in Poland she maintained close links with the Polish revolutionary movement, as a pillar of the Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania and, indirectly, as one of the founders of the Polish Communist party. Her links with socialism began in her early youth. After leaving high school in Warsaw in 1887 she joined a clandestine socialist youth group and, to escape arrest, fled to Switzerland in 1889. She studied at Zurich University and lived there till 1898, when she moved to Berlin and became one of the most active theorists and leaders of German

social democracy. In Zurich she met the Polish socialists Warski, Marchlewski, and Tyszkiewicz, and wrote for the Paris paper *Sprawa Robotnicza* (*The Workers' Cause*), which became the organ of SDKPiL when the latter was founded in 1894. From 1893 onwards she took part in all the congresses of the Second International except the final one at Basle, and afterwards in all those of the German social democratic party. From the outset she devoted much time to combating the Polish Socialist party and its programme for the independence of Poland. In 1897 she wrote a doctoral thesis at Zurich on Polish industrial development (published as *Die industrielle Entwicklung Polens*, 1898); this formed the historical background to her future tactics, which were unalterably opposed to any attempt at reconstituting an independent Polish state. Her argument was that the development of capitalism in Russian Poland was mainly the result of the conqueror's policy, which had linked the fate of the Polish bourgeoisie with the Tsarist empire and its economic expansion to the east; plans for an independent Poland, as she maintained in subsequent writings, were contrary to the 'objective economic trend' which had irrevocably drawn Polish capitalism into the Russian orbit. Rosa Luxemburg's opposition to the movement for Polish independence supplied the main ideological theme of SDKPiL in contrast to that of the PPS.

From the time she settled in Berlin Rosa Luxemburg's career was linked with the German socialist movement, but she remained active in the leadership of SDKPiL, carried on political propaganda in Prussian Poland, which she visited several times, and wrote for Polish socialist papers; *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny* (*Social Democratic Review*), published legally at Cracow, and the illegal Warsaw journal *Czerwony Sztandar* (*Red Flag*). From 1895 she wrote for *Die Neue Zeit*, the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, and other German socialist organs. From 1898, when the world of German social democracy was dominated by the controversy over Bernstein's views, Rosa Luxemburg's writings and speeches were largely devoted to combating revisionism as advocated by Bernstein and other reformists. Her most important theoretical work of this period was the pamphlet *Sozialreform oder Revolution?* (*Social Reform or Revolution?*) published in 1900 (second edition 1908), containing the fullest expression of her disbelief in the possibility of reforming capitalism and her conviction that any struggle for economic reform must be of purely political significance.

Up to 1906 revisionism was attacked by all orthodox German socialists, but the first Russian revolution caused, or rather brought to light, a divergence of view resulting in the formation of a left-wing group with Rosa Luxemburg as its chief theorist; other members were Karl Liebknecht, Clara Zetkin, and Franz Mehring. It was not until 1910, however, that the differences between the radicals and the centre took on an acute form and led to a new balance of polit-

ical forces within the party, with the centre group (Bebel and Kautsky) in general closer to the Right than to the revolutionaries.

The events in Russia prompted Rosa Luxemburg to work out a new idea of revolution in the light of the spontaneous uprising of the workers of the Tsarist empire. At the end of 1905 she went illegally to Warsaw to take part in the revolutionary movement. Arrested after two months, she was released on bail in July 1906 and returned to Berlin via Finland. In a pamphlet *Massenstreik, Partei und Gewerkschaften* (1906) she attempted to draw conclusions from the events of the past year. Apart from this, both before and after the 1905 Revolution she expressed her views on matters related to the state of socialism in Russia. In articles published in *Die Neue Zeit* in 1903-4 she criticized the 'opportunism' of Lenin's ultra-centralist policy and his distrust of the workers' movement. At the same time she defended the Bolsheviks against the charge of Blanquism that was brought by Plekhanov and the Mensheviks. Like Lenin she opposed the doctrine that, in view of the bourgeois character of the coming Russian revolution, the socialists should not attack the liberals but should allow them to gain power without hindrance; this issue was debated, for example, at the London Conference of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party (RSDWP) in May 1907. Rosa Luxemburg believed that the defeat of the Russian revolution was only temporary, that the revolutionary process would continue and that Russia was a pattern for the German working class as well—which Bebel and Kautsky both denied. The centrists and the radicals, however, were agreed in their attitude towards militarism and the threat of war, until it actually materialized. At the Stuttgart Congress of the Second International in 1907 Rosa Luxemburg caused the anti-war resolution to be amended in the sense that if war did break out despite the efforts of the working class, it should be transformed into an anti-capitalist revolution.

In 1912 she wrote her principal theoretical work *Die Akkumulation des Kapitals* (published in 1913; English translation, *The Accumulation of Capital*, 1951), which analysed the process of reproduction and demonstrated the economic inevitability of the collapse of capitalism. In 1913, with Marchlewski and Mehring, she founded the *Sozialdemokratische Korrespondenz*, a revolutionary organ of the German Left. She was sentenced to a year's imprisonment in 1914 for anti-war speeches, but was not actually imprisoned until later. The outbreak of war, the action of the social democrats in voting for war credits, and the dissolution of the International had placed the internationalist Left in the position of a helpless minority; but Rosa Luxemburg continued the struggle, convinced that the revolutionary potential of the world proletariat would eventually turn the war into a social upheaval. Sentenced to another year's imprisonment in February 1915, she wrote in her cell a pamphlet analysing the causes of the war and condemning the social democratic leaders for destroying the

socialist movement by accepting the *Burgfriede* ('civic truce') and supporting the imperialist war. She went on to define the basis on which the workers' movement should be revived: wars, imperialism and militarism could not be abolished as long as capitalism lasted, but could only be overcome by a socialist revolution; the most urgent task was to free the proletariat from the state of spiritual dependence on the bourgeoisie in which it had been placed by its time-serving leaders. This work, published under the title *Die Krise der Sozialdemokratie* but generally known as the 'Junius pamphlet', was the ideological foundation of the Spartacus League, which was formed early in 1916 and was the nucleus of the future German Communist party (KPD). In 1917 the League, while remaining a separate body, joined the left wing of the social democrats who had formed the USPD: after the war the USPD dissolved, its members joining either the KPD or the reconstituted SPD.

Rosa Luxemburg was released from prison in February 1916 but was arrested again less than four months later for taking part in anti-war demonstrations; she remained in gaol until the last days of the war (8 November 1918). While there she wrote a reply (the *Antikritik*) to criticisms of her *Accumulation of Capital*, and an unfinished analysis of the October Revolution in Russia. The latter work was first published in 1922, after Rosa Luxemburg's death, by her friend Paul Levi, a former member of the Spartacus League and a leader of the KPD, who, however, was afterwards expelled from the latter and returned to the SPD. The pamphlet, entitled *Die russische Revolution*, hailed the events in Russia as a sign that world revolution was close at hand, but attacked the Bolsheviks for their policy towards the peasants and the national question, and above all for their despotic rule and suppression of democratic freedoms. It was chiefly on account of this work that Rosa Luxemburg became a *bête noire* of the Stalinists (who never quoted it, however). In general the pamphlet was little known before the Second World War, and was only translated into other languages after 1945 (English version 1959).

Rosa Luxemburg was set free by the German revolution, but did not enjoy her liberty for long. She imagined that the revolution would at once develop into a socialist phase, but the attempted rising by the Spartacus League, which was weak in itself and had scarcely any roots in the working class, was a fiasco. During the rising the League transformed itself into the KPD, while the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils formed the basis of the social democratic government of Germany. On the night of 15-16 January 1919 the two chief Communist leaders, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, were murdered by *Freikorps* troops, and two months later Leo Tyszka-Jogiches met a similar death at the hands of the police. The lectures on economics which Rosa Luxemburg had delivered at the party school and written up while in prison were published posthumously in 1925 (*Einführung in die Nationalökonomie*).

2. *The theory of accumulation and the inevitable collapse of capitalism*

ALTHOUGH Rosa Luxemburg's chief theoretical work was not published until 1913, its main ideas can be found in many earlier texts, including *Social Reform or Revolution?*, and most of her theoretical and political opinions derive logically from her views on accumulation, which we shall therefore begin by examining.

The theory expounded in *The Accumulation of Capital* is commonly referred to as that of the 'automatic collapse of capitalism'. This term, however, was coined by Rosa Luxemburg's opponents, chiefly Leninists and Stalinists: it does not occur in her own work, and it is misleading in so far as it suggests that capitalism will collapse by virtue of its own contradictions and irrespective of the political struggle of the proletariat. Far from taking this view, Rosa Luxemburg believed that the revolution would overthrow capitalism long before the latter's economic possibilities were exhausted. She held, however, that the capitalist system could only work as long as it had at its disposal a non-capitalist market, whether internal or external, and, as it was in the nature of the system to destroy its non-capitalistic environment, it was inevitably preparing its own economic ruin. There could be no such thing as 'pure capitalism' on a world scale: if the capitalist economy developed to that extent it would cease to exist.

Marx had maintained that capitalism was bound to destroy itself by its own contradictions, especially those connected with the concentration of capital and the impoverishment of the working class, but he never defined the exact conditions under which capitalism would become an economic impossibility. Rosa Luxemburg set out to do this, partly by supplementing Marx's views and partly by modifying them.

The starting-point of her theory of accumulation consists in the schemata of reproduction set out in Volume II of *Capital*. This is the most arduous and the least-read portion of Marx's work, but from Rosa Luxemburg's point of view it was fundamental to the crucial question of scientific socialism, viz. 'Why is capitalism doomed to destruction on economic grounds?'—or, to put it the other way round, 'Can the process of compound reproduction (*erweiterte Reproduktion*) as it exists in capitalism develop, theoretically, to infinity?' Rosa Luxemburg's argument is as follows.

According to Marx the value of any commodity consists of three components, expressed in the formula $C + V + S$. C (constant capital) stands for the value of the means of production, i.e. tools and raw materials, that have gone into making the product; V (variable capital) represents wages, and S (surplus value) is the increase of value due to the unremunerated portion of wage-labour. In contrast to previous systems in which reproduction was governed by social needs, capitalism is concerned only with the maximum increase of sur-

plus value, and therefore tends constantly to increase production irrespective of need. Accumulation, or the conversion of surplus value into fresh, active capital, belongs to the nature of capitalist production. It is a condition of compound reproduction, however, that the goods produced should be converted into money: for this purpose further quantities of goods must be marketed, a process over which the individual capitalist has little influence. Let us assume that the annual production is expressed in the proportion:

$$40C + 10V + 10S = 60$$

In this formula the amount of constant capital is four times that of variable capital, and the rate of surplus value, or rate of exploitation, is 100 per cent. The value of the commodities produced is 60 units. If the capitalist now devotes 5S, or half the surplus value, to increasing production, i.e. adds it to his constant capital, then, the organic composition of capital remaining the same, the next phase of production will be expressed by the formula

$$44C + 11V + 11S = 66$$

This process can go on as long as the capitalist can get hold of sufficient means of production and labour force and secure an outlet for his goods. Hence, if in conditions of simple reproduction money plays only the part of an intermediary in the exchange of commodities, under capitalism it is an element in the circulation of capital: for accumulation to be possible, surplus value must assume a monetary form. In addition capitalism tends naturally to drive wages down to subsistence level, so that S tends to increase in relation to V.

If, following Marx, we divide the whole of social production into two 'departments'—I production of means of production, and II production of consumption goods—then we see that the two are interdependent, i.e. they must remain in a specific proportion so that the process of production may continue harmoniously. Department I produces means of production for both departments I and II, while department II produces consumption goods for the workers and capitalists of both departments. The necessary proportion is illustrated by the following pattern:

$$\text{Department I: } 4,000C + 1,000V + 1,000S = 6,000$$

$$\text{Department II: } 2,000C + 500V + 500S = 3,000$$

For simple reproduction the value of the products in department I, i.e. 6,000, must equal the value of the constant capital of both departments (4,000 + 2,000), while the value of the products of department II, i.e. 3,000, must equal the combined income of workers and capitalists in both departments, i.e. 1,000 + 1,000 + 500 + 500. This is so in the above example, but it is not so in capital-

ist reality, which is based on 'compound reproduction', i.e. the capitalization of a part of S in both departments. If we have

$$\text{Department I: } 4,000C + 1,000V + 1,000S = 6,000$$

$$\text{Department II: } 1,500C + 750V + 750S = 3,000$$

it will be seen that the value of the production of means of production (6,000) exceeds by 500 the value of the means of production used in the given productive cycle (i.e. 4,000 + 1,500), while the value of consumption goods (3,000) is 500 less than the total incomes of capitalists and workers in both departments (1,000 + 1,000 + 750 + 750). The application of this unconsumed portion of S to the new productive cycle, the proportion between the two departments remaining the same, causes a corresponding increase in all elements of the value of the totality of commodities. For this, however, the commodities must first be transformed into money. Accumulation depends on an increasing demand for the goods produced, and the question is, how does this demand arise? Industry cannot go on creating its own market *ad infinitum*; what is produced must in the end be consumed. An increase of population does not solve the problem of demand, for the numerical increase of the capitalist class is included in the absolute magnitude of the consumable portion of surplus value, while working-class consumption is limited by the wage-level; non-producing sections of the population, such as landowners, civil servants, soldiers, professional men, and artists, are maintained either from surplus value or from wages. Nor does foreign trade provide the solution, for the analysis of compound reproduction applies to world capitalism, for which all countries are an internal market. In other words, for the surplus value of both departments of production to realize itself in money-form, there must be a market external to both departments and capable of absorbing goods at a rate increasing with the rate of accumulation.

Marx, according to Rosa Luxemburg, did not come to grips with this problem. He believed that capitalists collectively provide a market by buying one another's means of production; but they cannot increase surplus value indefinitely except by increasing the rate of consumption, and the workers cannot help towards this end, since all they have is their wages, which figure in the equation already. Marx, it is true, never stated that accumulation can go on to an unlimited extent: his schemata are only designed to illustrate the proportion between accumulation in the two departments and their dependence on each other. But, as he never answered the basic question, For whom does compound reproduction occur?, the schemata may be falsely interpreted as indicating that production is capable of absorbing the whole increase of surplus value: the industry of department I expands to increase production in department II,

and the latter is increased so as to maintain the growing army of workers in both departments. Thus the Russian Marxists—Struve, Bulgakov, and Tugan-Baranovsky—use the Marxian schemata to infer that capitalist accumulation can go on increasing indefinitely. But to admit this is to give up the whole idea of scientific socialism. For if there is no limit to accumulation within capitalist forms of production, it follows that capitalism is economically invincible, that it is an inexhaustible source of economic and technical progress; socialism is not a historical necessity, and there is no economic reason for the collapse of capitalism. (The idea that capitalism would collapse because of the falling rate of profit seemed to Rosa Luxemburg absurd. It was impossible to imagine the scenario of this breakdown, the more so as the tendency for the profit rate to fall was quite compatible with an absolute increase in total profits; it was hard to suppose that capitalists would one day cease production because the profit rate was too low, even though they were making larger profits than before.)

Thus, in Rosa Luxemburg's opinion, Marx overlooked the question which is vital to the existence of scientific socialism, viz. that of the precise economic reason why capitalism is bound to destroy itself. He wrote, indeed, that the increase of productive power conflicts increasingly with the limited possibilities of consumption, but his schemata of compound reproduction do not reveal the contradiction between the creation of surplus value and its realization. The schemata presuppose that capitalists and workers are the only consumers, i.e. they assume for theoretical purposes a fictional society of 'pure' capitalism, consisting of capitalists and workers only. Such a fiction is admissible in the analysis of individual capital but not, Rosa Luxemburg argues, in regard to capital as a whole: for it conceals the fundamental point that compound reproduction takes place in a world in which there is still a non-capitalist market, and the social classes or countries that live outside the capitalist system are necessary to the latter as consumers of its surplus production in both departments I and II. The surplus value must realize itself outside the sphere of capitalist production, in pre-capitalist spheres such as backward countries, the rural economy, and handicrafts: mature capitalism depends on the existence of non-capitalist classes and countries. But capitalist expansion tends inexorably to eliminate pre-capitalist economic forms by drawing peasants and craftsmen into its own orbit. Capitalism thus unconsciously prepares its own downfall by destroying the forms on which it depends. When capitalism succeeds in assimilating the whole of production, accumulation will become impossible and capitalism will be economically unfeasible. 'Pure capitalism' is incapable of surviving. At the present time there are many non-capitalist areas of the world, and the struggle to possess these as sources of raw materials and cheap labour, and above all as outlets for European goods, takes the form of imperialism. The field for expansion still exists, but it is contracting rapidly. By the fight for mar-

kets capitalism is steadily destroying all remnants of the pre-capitalist environment which is the condition of its own being.

It is noteworthy that although Rosa Luxemburg's intention was to establish once and for all the economic inevitability of the collapse of capitalism, none of the Marxist theoreticians who believed in the historical necessity of socialism endorsed her argument, and the most important of them opposed it—Hilferding, Kautsky, Gustav Eckstein, Otto Bauer, A. Pannekoek, Tugan-Baranovsky, and Lenin. Tugan-Baranovsky held that the anti-human character of capitalism, and the fact that it makes increased production an end in itself instead of a means of satisfying social needs, meant that accumulation could go on indefinitely, as industry was able to provide itself with outlets by continuing to increase production, absorbing more and more of the means of production, employing more and more workers, and so forth. No one denied, of course, that capitalism was beset by marketing difficulties that resulted in crises of overproduction, cut-throat competition, the struggle for markets, and imperialist wars, and that militarism, beside the immediate purpose of conquering markets, itself afforded a sphere of capital accumulation. But Marxists generally took the view that although capitalism would eventually be destroyed by its own manifold contradictions, it was not possible to predict the exact economic circumstances in which this would happen; and they were inclined to attach more importance to the concentration of capital, the pauperization of the working class, and the extinction of the middle class than to any insufficiency of demand, which capitalism seemed able to remedy in various ways despite its undoubted difficulties and crises. Rosa Luxemburg's Leninist critics were suspicious of the theory of accumulation precisely because it seemed to imply that capitalism would break down automatically. If capitalism was bound to destroy itself by its own expansion, irrespective of the political role of the proletariat, this would encourage a policy of passive expectation and would tend to relax the party's zeal instead of spurring it to revolutionary activity. Rosa Luxemburg herself never drew this conclusion from her theory. The critics also objected that she underrated the possibility of compound reproduction thanks to the armaments industry and military expansion, and this has been confirmed by the later development of capitalism.

In general it appears that the theory of accumulation involves assumptions concerning capitalism that were either unreal or have been disproved by subsequent events.

Rosa Luxemburg frequently makes the point that she is concerned with capitalism as an all-embracing system, a single worldwide market, and for this reason she ignores any modifications that might be due to external markets. Capitalism in a single country may be able to survive by expanding into the non-capitalist world, but if capitalism is worldwide there are no markets to

expand into. But for 'pure capitalism' to exist in this sense, it is not sufficient for capitalist production to embrace every country in the world. It is necessary in addition for the rate of profit to be the same throughout the world: for, on Rosa Luxemburg's theory, the developed countries may expand into areas which, although capitalist, are backward and where the rate of profit is therefore higher. In other words, her schema presupposes a world in which there is no difference in economic development between the Congo and the U.S.A. One may imagine a world as uniform as this, but it scarcely affords a solid basis for economic predictions. Not only is the prospect remote and unreal, but it ignores the fact that the gap between developed and backward nations is getting larger rather than smaller. This being so, to assert that capitalism will break down when this prospect becomes a reality is no less arbitrary than, for example, to suppose that capitalism can content itself with simple reproduction and could therefore survive if there were insufficient outlets to permit of compound reproduction. Rosa Luxemburg derides those who believe that the fall in the profit rate will lead to the collapse of capitalism, on the ground that one cannot see the capitalists committing suicide because their profit rates are less high than they used to be. But she fails to observe that her own theory is open to the same taunt: if capitalists one day find they cannot market an increased volume of goods, will they hang themselves sooner than be content with simple reproduction? The answer to this in Marxian terms is of course that it is in the nature of capitalism to seek after compound reproduction; but if 'nature' is not a purely metaphysical entity, we may ask whether capitalism is really unable to change its spots as an alternative to complete destruction. Such a hypothesis is no less extraordinary than Rosa Luxemburg's imaginary world in which all countries are at the same level of industry, technology, and civilization.

From today's standpoint we can see how far her theory of accumulation was based on a false estimate of the future development of capitalism. This estimate, however, unlike her specific theory of the collapse of capitalism, was shared by most of her Marxist contemporaries. The theory of accumulation assumed a growing class polarization approximating to the condition in which society consisted exclusively of capitalists and workers. As we know, things happened differently; not only were small businesses not squeezed out, but, above all, in the more developed countries the proportion of workers in the population has tended to decrease, while there has been a huge increase of what Marx called non-productive workers, i.e. those engaged in trade, administration, education, services, etc. Rosa Luxemburg disposes of these non-productive elements by saying that they are remunerated either from the uncaptialized portion of surplus value or out of wages, but that there is always a portion of surplus value that is turned into capital and so increases production in the next cycle. But it

is not clear why the increased consumption of the non-productive workers should have no effect on the realization of surplus value, even if we accept Marx's increasingly doubtful distinction between productive and non-productive labour and suppose that the latter is 'in the last resort' paid out of surplus value created by the working class.

Another false assumption of the theory of accumulation is that wages under capitalism would always be close to subsistence level: the argument being that although the laws of exploitation might be weakened from time to time they would 'in the last resort' always prevail over working-class resistance, so that a genuine increase in workers' consumption was unlikely to occur.

Further, Rosa Luxemburg did not believe that a state controlled by the bourgeoisie could regulate the process of accumulation to any important extent. But the evolution of capitalism has shown that she was mistaken. Even if, following Marx, we regard the state as a whole as the political embodiment of global capital, experience has shown that this state can play the part of an organizer, using economic and legal means to affect the distribution of investment resources, and that it can, under political pressure for instance, enlarge the internal market. That is to say, it can act as a socialist state in so far as it controls the process of production in accordance with social needs, instead of leaving everything to the 'wolfish greed for surplus value' as the sole motive force of capitalist production.

For the above reasons Rosa Luxemburg's theory of accumulation cannot, in its literal form, be accepted as an explanation or forecast of the economic development of capitalism. It does not follow, however, that her work was of no effect. As Michał Kalecki observes in the collective work (in Polish) *The economic theories of Marx's 'Capital'* (1967), the rival theories of reproduction put forward by Rosa Luxemburg and Tugan-Baranovsky were both erroneous but both helped to illustrate certain features of economic growth under capitalism. Tugan-Baranovsky held that there are no absolute barriers to capitalism in the form of limited outlets, and that its output can be marketed at any level of consumption as long as the ratio of consumption to investment is maintained. There is nothing absurd, in capitalist terms, in production being undertaken simply in order to increase production: on the contrary, production regardless of need is the strength of the system. But, Kalecki observes, Tugan-Baranovsky overlooked the fact that a system which entirely ignored the level of consumption would be very unstable, since any drop in investment would mean a decrease in the use made of the existing apparatus of production, hence a further drop in investment, and so on in a vicious spiral. On the other hand, Rosa Luxemburg's theory that compound reproduction depends wholly on non-capitalist markets has been refuted by our experience of the state's power to create, in the form of arms production, a huge market that may have a decisive effect on

economic growth. In addition she was wrong in supposing that the whole volume of goods exported to non-capitalist markets contributes to the realization of productive surpluses, whereas what actually counts is the excess of exports—both goods and capital, but especially the latter—over imports; for imported goods also absorb purchasing power. However, in a limited sense the two theories supplement each other: one shows up the absurdity of a system whose viability depends on producing for profit instead of need, while the other demonstrates the importance of foreign markets for capitalist growth. At the same time, neither theory provides a sufficient explanation of the process of compound reproduction.

To Rosa Luxemburg, however, the theory of accumulation was of fundamental importance not only as the sole possible scientific vindication of Marx's prophecy of the downfall of capitalism, but also as an ideological weapon: for it meant that capitalists could do nothing to avert the destruction of their class and that no human power could prevent the final victory of socialism, which, as she and all Marxists believed, would replace capitalism.

This belief was, it would seem, based on a more general conviction by which her thought was permeated—an unshakeable, doctrinaire fidelity to the concept of iron historical laws that no human agency could bend or break. The belief in historical laws is, of course, a classic theme of Marxism, and all Marxists at the time professed it, but some held it more uncompromisingly than others. Most of them attenuated the literal sense of the doctrine, for instance by invoking Engels's formula of the 'relative independence of the superstructure', or, like Lenin, emphasizing the role of 'subjective' factors—i.e. organized will-power—in hastening social change; or again, pointing out in a common-sense fashion the many social conflicts that do not fall into the general category of 'contradictions of capitalism' yet undeniably do affect history. Rosa Luxemburg, however, was determined to find a single key to all historical problems and believed that Marx's analysis of the dynamics of capitalism provided this key, at any rate when supplemented by an exact account of the conditions of reproduction. Her adamant refusal to believe in any individual or even collective human actions that were not pre-determined by the 'laws of history' was manifested in all important questions in which she took a different stand from her fellow Marxists. Just as no capitalist efforts could hinder the blind anarchic forces of accumulation that were bringing the whole system to ruin, so too it was impossible for any organized movement to bring about a revolution by artificial means. Men and women were instruments of the historical process, and their task was to understand it and their own part in it. No purely ideological phenomena could of themselves affect the course of history; in particular, national ideologies were powerless to deflect history from its progress towards the great transformation of all time, the worldwide socialist revolution.

Owing to this doctrinaire belief Rosa Luxemburg was frequently blind to the empirical reality of social events and showed an extraordinary lack of political understanding in regard to national questions and to the revolution itself. Her writings show a theoretical consistency of the kind which can only come from extreme dogmatic rigidity and insensitivity to facts.

3. *Reform and revolution*

If Rosa Luxemburg had believed in the 'automatic breakdown' of capitalism in the sense imputed by her critics, it would have been in glaring contradiction to the position she took up in the debate on 'reform versus revolution'. But, although she held with Marx that capitalism was condemned to self-destruction in that it would sooner or later become a brake on technical progress and economic growth, it did not follow that capitalism would collapse without the need for revolutionary action. It was rather the case that imperialism must develop to a point at which it would awaken the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat, without which capitalism could not be overthrown. Its overthrow was a historical necessity, but so was the revolutionary movement that must bring it about. This view was shared by Rosa Luxemburg and other orthodox Marxists of her time.

The question of the significance and prospects of 'reformist' action—i.e. the workers' economic struggle for better conditions, and the campaign for democratic measures within bourgeois society—was, in Rosa's Luxemburg's opinion, vital to the whole socialist movement. Her position was essentially the same as Marx's: the value of reforms was not that they brought an alleviation of conditions but that the struggle itself afforded the proletariat the necessary practice for the decisive battle. Those who regarded reforms as an end in themselves were denying the prospect of socialism and turning their backs on the ultimate goal.

Many orthodox Marxists took the view that the revolution would come when economic conditions were ripe and that meanwhile their task was to fight for democracy in public life and better conditions for the working class. The reformists, while not expressly abandoning the hope of revolution, were vague about the time and circumstances in which it would occur. The essence of Rosa Luxemburg's position (like that of all the left wing of the International, including Lenin) was that she combated both these views, although her opposition to the orthodox viewpoint took shape at a later date. In the controversy with Bernstein and those party leaders and trade unionists who supported him in practice though without evolving any special theoretical views—for example, Georg von Vollmar, Wolfgang Heine and Max Schippel—Rosa Luxemburg in effect directed her attack not only against 'revisionist' reformism but also

against the orthodox variety. Her main point was that reforms were meaningless if they were not a means to the conquest of power; they must not be treated, even partially, as an end in themselves, and those who did so, whatever their professions, were abandoning the revolutionary cause. Any struggle for reform that was not subordinated to the coming revolution was a hindrance rather than a help to socialism, whatever its immediate outcome might be. As Rosa Luxemburg declared at the party congress at Stuttgart in 1898, the unions' fight for better terms for the sale of labour-power, pressure for social reform and democratic methods were forms of activity within the capitalist system and therefore had no specifically socialist meaning except as part of the struggle for the ultimate conquest of political power. To Bernstein's dictum that 'The goal is nothing, the movement everything' she replied with the opposite formula: 'The movement as an end in itself, unrelated to the ultimate goal, is nothing to me; the ultimate goal is everything.' Concentration on short-term effects led reformists like Schippel to support militarism, as the growth of armies and war production would reduce unemployment and prevent crises by increasing purchasing power. This, Rosa Luxemburg said, was absurd economically, as crises were not due to an absolute imbalance between consumption and production, but to the inherent tendency of production to exceed the possibilities of the market, and military costs would be borne in one way or another by the working class. But the theory was also politically dangerous, as it suggested that the workers could or should give up their principal aims for the sake of temporary gains that would finally be to their detriment ('*Miliz und Militarismus*', *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, February 1899).

Rosa Luxemburg's most general treatment of this question is in her pamphlet *Social Reform or Revolution?* There is no opposition, she declares, between the struggle for reform and the struggle for political power: the former is a means, the latter an end in itself. Social democracy is distinguished from bourgeois reformism by its awareness of the ultimate goal. To treat reforms as an end in themselves means accepting the indefinite continuance of capitalism, enabling it to escape destruction at the cost of a few modifications. For example, Konrad Schmidt held that the workers' political and economic struggle would lead in time to public control over production and would limit the role of capitalists. But in fact the workers' influence on capitalist production could only have a reactionary effect: it would hold up technical progress, or align workers and capitalists against consumers. 'In general,' Rosa Luxemburg wrote in 1900, 'the trade union movement is not moving into a period of victorious development but into one of increasing difficulties. When the development of industry reaches its zenith and worldwide capitalism begins to go downhill, the unions' task will be doubly difficult. In the first place the objective state of the labour market will be worse, as demand will increase more slowly and supply more

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rapidly than now. Secondly, capital will be even more unscrupulous in seizing that part of the product which is the workers' due, so as to recoup its losses on the world market.' The state cannot intervene in any other interest than that of capital, since it is an organ of the capitalist class and can only pursue general policies in so far as they accord with the interests of that class. This applies equally to democratic political institutions, which the bourgeoisie will maintain as long as, and to the extent that, it suits them to do so. Hence no amount of reform can overthrow capitalism or achieve revolutionary objectives by degrees. The proletariat's economic and political struggle can only help to bring about the subjective conditions of revolution; it does not, as Bernstein argues, lead objectively towards socialism or restrict exploitation. What the struggle achieves is not the transformation of society but the transformation of the consciousness of the proletariat. To treat short-term successes as ends in themselves is contrary to the class viewpoint and can only breed illusions; 'in the capitalist world, social reform is and always will be a nut without a kernel'. In despite of Bernstein, Marx's predictions concerning the development of capitalism are being fulfilled to the letter. The fact that there are no crises of overproduction at the moment does not invalidate his views or signify that capitalism is changing or is capable of adaptation. The crises that Marx knew at first hand were not the same as those he predicted: the former were crises of the growth and expansion of capitalism, not its exhaustion—the real crises of overproduction have yet to come. The system of share capital is not, as Bernstein maintains, a sign that small capitalists are on the increase: it is a form of the concentration of capital and therefore intensifies contradictions instead of curing them. The proletariat cannot avert or invalidate the laws of capitalist economy: its defensive struggle for the right to sell labour-power on normal terms is a Sisyphean task, though necessary to prevent wages falling still more. But, whatever the workers' efforts, their share in the wealth of society must diminish 'with the inevitability of a natural process, as the productivity of labour increases'.

Thus revolution and reform are different in nature, not merely in degree: reform does not amount to a gradual revolution, or revolution to a telescoped reform. To think otherwise is to believe that capitalism need only be amended, and that its overthrow is unnecessary.

Rosa Luxemburg's refusal to admit that reforms had any value in themselves, and her mistrust of any conspicuous success in the proletariat's economic struggle, inclined her to make pessimistic forecasts and to disparage the results obtained. Her revisionist adversaries, such as Bernstein and David, regarded Britain as a model country as far as the workers' struggle was concerned; she, on the other hand, saw in it a pernicious example of how the proletariat could be corrupted by temporary gains. In an article in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* in May 1899 she declared that the British trade unions had

achieved successes by abandoning the class viewpoint and bargaining within the framework of the capitalist economy. The British proletariat had adopted bourgeois ideas and sacrificed class objectives for immediate gain. But we are now at the end of this period, and the class struggle—in the true, not the reformist sense—is about to begin again.

All this is fully in accord with Marx's theory, but not with the celebrated text from Engels on which the reformists relied. At the first congress of the German Communist party on 30 December 1918 Rosa Luxemburg made no attempt to interpret Engels in a sense favourable to her own views, but criticized him for taking a reformist line in the Introduction to Marx's *The Class Struggles in France*, under pressure, as she claimed, from Bebel and the social democrats in the Reichstag. The text in question had done harm to the socialist movement by providing a permanent excuse to those who based their hopes on purely parliamentary action and in practice ignored the prospect of revolution.

Rosa Luxemburg did not speculate deeply as to the basis of Marx's view that the working class, by virtue of its position, must evolve a revolutionary consciousness. Marx formed this opinion in 1843 on purely philosophical grounds, and never abandoned it. Its only basis at that time, however, was the conviction that because the working class is subject to the maximum of dehumanization it cannot liberate itself as a separate class but only as a movement restoring the humanity of mankind as a whole. This is scarcely a cogent argument. Because a particular class is oppressed, exploited, and dehumanized it does not follow *a priori* that that class must aspire to world revolution, still less that its aspiration will succeed. In any case, the modern working class is no more dehumanized than the slaves of antiquity. In his later writings Marx used what appeared to be more pragmatic arguments. The capitalist system would soon lose control over technological progress, and the working class stood for a society that would remove obstacles to such progress and subordinate production to human needs instead of to the multiplication of value for its own sake. But this argument involves premisses which are far from obvious. It assumes that indefinite technical progress is in the nature of things, or rather that the desire for technical improvement is an inseparable part of human nature—for technical progress is a human activity: as Lévi-Strauss puts it, one axe does not produce another. But Marx did not make this assumption; on the contrary, he believed that the urge for technical improvement was peculiar to capitalism and had not existed in other economic systems. Thus, if he was right in holding that capitalism was bound to lose the power to improve technology, the consequence would be that capitalism would cease to exist in its present form, i.e. as characterized by technical progress; but it would not follow that its role would be inherited by the working class, still less that the working class would inherit the ability to control technical progress and that this ability would ensure its politi-

cal triumph. It could equally well be supposed that capitalism would go on existing in a stagnant form or be replaced by another society that might not necessarily depend on the continual improvement of productive forces and need not be socialist in Marx's sense.

This, it is true, was not the whole of Marx's argument. He also thought that the historical prelude to the proletarian revolution would be the increasing polarization of classes, the disappearance of the intermediate class, the increasing size of the 'reserve army' and of the proletariat, and the development of the latter's class-consciousness. But even on Marx's premisses these events are not sufficient to justify belief in the inevitability of a proletarian revolution. Poverty does not in itself produce a trend towards revolution, nor does the preponderance of the exploited class, nor, least of all, the fact that justice is on its side. On the other hand, according to Marx the growth of revolutionary consciousness depends on social conditions 'objectively' tending towards revolution: it is not a spontaneous mental phenomenon, but must be the reflection of an actual historical trend. In order to know whether to expect an upsurge of revolutionary consciousness, we must first find out whether a socialist upheaval is on the way in accordance with the historical process. But it has not been shown that this condition is fulfilled, since the proletarian revolution as predicted by Marx has not yet occurred anywhere and there is no reason to expect it soon, or indeed at all.

Neither Marx nor Rosa Luxemburg makes it clear which statement logically comes first: that capitalism cannot be reformed, or that the working class is bound to destroy it by revolution. Since the two propositions are not the same, either they must be proved independently or one must follow from the other. In her polemics with the reformists, Rosa Luxemburg appears to make most use of the former proposition. Her theory of accumulation supplies proof (which, according to her, Marx failed to give) that for purely economic reasons capitalism cannot go on indefinitely. But even if we accept that theory for the sake of argument, it is not clear how it follows that there must be a proletarian revolution. Assuming that capitalism must collapse because private ownership of the means of production leads to overproduction and crises, it is still not proved that the system of ownership must be transformed in that particular way. The conclusion is more likely, though still not certain, on the further assumptions that society is coming closer to a state in which it consists of nothing but the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, that the latter's situation cannot be really improved, and that the bourgeoisie is bound to resist any attempt to break its monopoly of the means of production. But of these three additional assumptions, only the last is credible.

Since, however, Rosa Luxemburg believed unalterably that the working class was revolutionary by nature, her account of social reality was often based

more on theory than on observation. She was convinced that revolutionary consciousness was on the increase, and when the facts belied this she was more inclined to blame the leaders' opportunism than objective circumstances. Believing that the workers were 'essentially' revolutionary, she placed more hope in an elemental outbreak than in organized party action.

4. *The consciousness of the proletariat and forms of political organization*

THE question of spontaneity versus party organization was the crux of Rosa Luxemburg's most violent disagreement with the Bolsheviks; but she saw similar dangers in every branch of social democracy. Lenin, Kautsky, Jaurès, and Turati were all guilty in her eyes of underrating the spontaneity of the masses and tending to discourage it by the doctrine of 'leadership'. Here again, she was almost the only one of her opinion in the social democratic movement.

By spontaneity, however, she did not mean a blind impulse devoid of ideological self-awareness. Not only had Marx predicted the proletarian revolution, but his prediction must itself become part of the proletarian consciousness in order for the revolution to come about. 'It is fundamental to the historic upheaval as formulated in Marx's theory that this theory should become the form of the working-class consciousness and, as such, a historical factor in its own right' (article on Marx in *Vorwärts*, 14 March 1903). Since the revolutionary consciousness that is to be, or is now taking shape, has already been formulated in terms of theory, the working class has every opportunity to become aware of its own destiny, and there is no need of leaders to educate the masses or look after their consciousness for them. Lenin's ultracentralism was a piece of opportunism, typical of the intelligentsia—so Rosa Luxemburg declared in 'Problems of the organization of Russian social democracy' (*Die Neue Zeit*, No. 42-3, 1903-4). According to Lenin, the Central Committee could arrogate to itself full power *vis-à-vis* party organizations, turning the whole party into a mere passive instrument.

The centralization of social democracy, based on these two principles—firstly the blind subjection of all party organs and their activity, down to the minutest detail, to a central authority which thinks, acts and decides for everyone, and secondly the strict separation of the organized core of the party from the surrounding revolutionary milieu, as Lenin would have it—seems to us no more or less than a mechanical transference of the Blanquist principles of the organization of conspiratorial groups to the social democratic movement of the working masses. Lenin has defined his own point of view more trenchantly, perhaps, than any of his opponents could have done when he speaks of his 'revolutionary democrat' as a 'Jacobin linked with

an organization of the proletariat conscious of its class interests'. But social democracy is not 'linked' with the organization of the working class, it is itself the working-class movement.

Lenin failed to distinguish the mindless discipline of the barrack-room from conscious class-action, and his centralism was imbued with the 'sterile attitude of a night-watchman'. Revolutionary tactics could not be invented by leaders, they must develop spontaneously: history came first, leaders' consciousness second. The effect of the Bolshevik policy was to paralyse the free development of the proletariat, deprive it of responsibility, and make it an instrument of the bourgeois intelligentsia. The agency of revolution must be the collective mind of the workers and not the consciousness of self-styled leaders. The errors of the true workers' movement were more fruitful than the infallibility of a Central Committee.

The Russian Revolution of 1905 convinced Rosa Luxemburg that mass strikes were the most effective form of revolutionary action. In her view, that revolution afforded a pattern for other European countries: an elemental outbreak without a leader, a plan, or a co-ordinated programme, and not initiated by any political party. In 1914 Kautsky, in *Der politische Massenstreik*, decried Rosa Luxemburg's views as an aberration: how could she suppose that a few months of accidental, disorganized strikes, without a unifying idea or plan, could teach the workers more than thirty years of systematic work by parties and trade unions? But this was precisely what Rosa Luxemburg believed; and she held that the revolutionary potential of the working masses was indestructible, though it might be temporarily stifled by arrogant leaders. This did not mean that the party was superfluous, however. The concept of an advance guard of the proletariat was a sound one; but it should be a group of active members, not a sovereign body. The party's task was not merely to await the revolution but to hasten the course of history; this, however, was not a matter of conspiracies and *coups d'état*, but of cultivating the revolutionary consciousness of the masses, who would in the end decide the fate of socialism without help from their leaders.

Although Rosa Luxemburg criticized Lenin for his barrack-room ideas and manipulation of the socialist movement, she did not join issue directly with Kautsky's doctrine which Lenin adopted as the basis of his theory of the party, viz. that revolutionary consciousness should be instilled into the workers' movement from without. Lukács, in his article 'Rosa Luxemburg as a Marxist' in *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein (History and Class-Consciousness, 1923)*, maintained that she herself accepted this doctrine, as she held that the party was the vehicle of the proletariat's class-consciousness and that its task was to turn theory into practice by imbuing a spontaneous movement with the truth

already implicit therein. Rosa Luxemburg would probably have agreed with this formulation, but she would not have gone on to say that the intelligentsia was the prime source of the consciousness of the proletariat, or that the party in its role of standard-bearer could be replaced by a group of leaders. To her the party was the self-organizing proletariat, not the proletariat organized by professional functionaries of the revolution. In her comments and criticisms she maintained the position that Marxism was not merely a theory of the historical process but an articulation of the consciousness, latent though it might be as yet, of an actual workers' movement. When that consciousness took shape, i.e. when the spontaneous movement achieved theoretical self-knowledge, the distinction between theory and practice would cease to exist: the theory would become a material force, not in the sense of being a weapon in the struggle, but as an organic part of it. There is in this sense a kind of pre-established harmony between Marx's doctrine and the revolutionary movement that was to make it its own. Marx did not 'invent' the philosophy of history: he expressed the content of the proletariat's self-awareness, which was still dormant, and was, one may say, the instrument by which that content was first manifested.

This account of the matter is consistent with Marx's view of his own theory and with Rosa Luxemburg's dominant idea, but she did not herself use this or similar language. It is clear that the above interpretation does not remove the difference between Leninism and Rosa Luxemburg's philosophy of the party, but is compatible with either of them. If the party's function is to inspire a spontaneous movement with the truth that is immanent in that movement, we are still free either to accept Lenin's view of the party as a manipulator or to agree with Rosa Luxemburg that the workers' movement is always a spontaneous process and that all the party has to do is to explain to the workers their true objectives as laid down by history.

Rosa Luxemburg's belief that the workers' movement should not be manipulated or forced into a tactical mould by party leaders was the basis of her criticism of the Bolsheviks after their first year of rule in Russia. This fell under three main heads: their policy towards the peasants and towards the nationalities, and the question of democracy in the state and party.

Rosa Luxemburg criticized Bolshevik tyranny in the same way as Kautsky, but not for the same reasons. Kautsky defended democracy on general grounds that were not specifically Marxist but might also be recognized by liberals, whereas Rosa Luxemburg was actuated by her Marxist faith in the unique value of the spontaneous political activity of the masses. She brushed aside the arguments of Kautsky and the Mensheviks about Russia's economic backwardness and the desirability of a coalition with the liberal bourgeoisie. This, she said, would be a desertion of the revolutionary cause. The Bolsheviks had been right to start the revolution when they did and to bank on its spreading

to the rest of the world. Here Rosa Luxemburg was in agreement with Trotsky and Lenin: the party should seize power when it was politically feasible to do so, regardless of doctrinaire objections about economic maturity—always on the assumption, which was generally accepted, that a socialist revolution in Russia could only succeed if it touched off a revolution throughout Europe. She also rejected the social democratic principle that the party must first gain a majority and only then think about taking power. This was 'parliamentary cretinism': the proper course was to use revolutionary tactics to gain a majority, not the other way round.

This did not mean, however, that the party, having seized power despite the majority of the population, should maintain itself by terror and reject all normal forms of political freedom and representation. The turning-point of the Russian Revolution was the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly. Lenin and Trotsky had done away with general elections altogether, basing their power on the Soviets. Trotsky declared that the Assembly summoned before October was reactionary and that universal suffrage was needless as it did not truly reflect the state of feeling of the masses. But, Rosa Luxemburg replied, the masses could influence their representatives after the elections and make them change course, and the more democratic the system, the more effective such pressure could be. Democratic institutions were not perfect, but to abolish them was much worse, as it paralysed the political life of the masses. The restriction of the suffrage to those who worked for their living was absurd in the general state of chaos, with industry in ruins and unemployment on a huge scale. The curbs on the Press and on the right of assembly turned the rule of the masses into a fiction. 'Freedom only for supporters of the government, only for members of a single party, however numerous—this is not freedom. Freedom must always be for those who think differently' (*The Russian Revolution*). Socialism was a live historical movement and could not be replaced by administrative decrees. If public affairs were not properly discussed they would become the province of a narrow circle of officials and corruption would be inevitable. Socialism called for a spiritual transformation of the masses, and terrorism was no way to bring this about: there must be unlimited democracy, a free public opinion, freedom of elections and the Press, the right to hold meetings and form associations. Otherwise the only active part of society would be the bureaucracy: a small group of leaders would give orders, and the workers' task would be to applaud them. The dictatorship of the proletariat would be replaced by the dictatorship of a clique.

For Lenin and Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg wrote, democracy was the opposite of dictatorship, as it was for Kautsky. Because of this opposition Kautsky thought the proletariat should give up the power it had seized in an unripe situation; because of it, Lenin and Trotsky decided that power should be wielded

by means of coercion. But the proletariat is supposed to exercise the dictatorship of a class, not of a party or a clique, and it should do so openly, in democratic conditions. 'If we have revealed the bitter kernel of inequality and slavery beneath the husk of formal equality and freedom, it is not in order to throw the husk away, but to persuade the working class not to be satisfied with it but to press on to the conquest of political power and fill it with a new social content . . . Dictatorship is not a matter of abolishing democracy but of applying it correctly' (ibid.). True, the Bolsheviks had come to power in circumstances in which full democracy was impossible. But they were now making a virtue of necessity by seeking to impose their own tactics on the whole workers' movement, turning the distortion of an exceptional situation into a universal rule. They were to be commended for seizing power in Russia, but the socialist cause was a matter for the whole world and not for a single country.

Rosa Luxemburg's criticism of the Bolshevik dictatorship was consistent with her earlier critique of Leninism. In 1906 she wrote that 'the very idea of socialism excludes minority rule' ('Blanquism and social democracy', *Czerwony Sztandar*, 27 June). She also said at that time that when the Tsardom was overthrown the Russian proletariat, after seizing power, would hand it over to a government elected by a majority of the population, and, as the proletariat was a minority in Russia, this government could not be predominantly social-democratic. It is not clear how she imagined the Bolsheviks could keep themselves in power in 1918 while allowing free elections, since the proletariat was only a minority and it could not by any means be supposed that the whole of it would vote for them. Martov and Kautsky did not have to meet this difficulty in their criticism of the Bolshevik dictatorship, since they took the view that authority must derive from general representative institutions, so that there could only be a government of the proletariat if the latter constituted the bulk of society. Rosa Luxemburg, on the other hand, seemed to believe that the Bolsheviks could have held on to power by democratic means under a system of popular representation. This strange notion could only be based on her mythical, unshakeable belief in the innate revolutionary character of the masses, which, left to themselves, were bound to evolve socialist forms of public life. Lenin and Trotsky were a good deal more circumspect and realistic than this.

5. The national question

THE question of nationality was a permanent, unsolved theoretical difficulty of Marxism and a practical difficulty of socialist movements. It was not easy to reconcile the principle that class divisions were fundamental to social analysis and prediction and to problems of practical policy, with the historical fact that people were and always had been divided on a national basis. Ethnic units were

divided by quite other criteria than those of class, and a nation was historically a unit transcending class; how then could a purely class viewpoint be combined with the traditional recognition of the right of nations to independence? The brotherhood of peoples against their exploiters had been a popular slogan in the mid-nineteenth century and no doubt expressed the natural attitude of the democratic revolutionaries of the Age of Emancipation, but on inspection it clearly failed to solve the inveterate problems of national frontiers and minorities and colonial exploitation. When countries were ruthlessly exploiting their colonies it was hard to show in despite of all practical experience that the interests of the subject peoples were 'in the nature of things' identical with those of the metropolitan population.

Marx and Engels left nothing that could be called a theory of the nationality question. Their attitude to the problem was a mixture of Hegelian reminiscences, the slogans of 1848, and their personal likes and dislikes, which they expressed forcibly at times, especially in letters. Their views are marked by a strong European orientation and by contempt for small 'unhistorical' peoples, which are doomed to destruction as nations and are meanwhile supporters of darkest reaction and puppets of great-power intrigue. Marx was systematically hostile to Russia, believing that the desire for world domination was the mainstay of her policy; he suspected the British government of conniving at Russian expansionism, and regarded Britain's part in the Crimean War as due to proletarian pressure. He was little interested in ancient civilizations other than that of Greece, dismissing them as infantile periods of spiritual weakness and barbarism: both India and China were written off in this way. He once wrote in a letter that the Orient had given us nothing but religion and the plague. He had no doubt that socialism was the mission of the advanced and dominant countries. By creating a world market the bourgeoisie was setting the stage for revolution, and when it took place in the developed countries the rest would follow. Engels welcomed the United States' conquest of territory from Mexico and the French colonization of Algeria: the Bedouin were a race of bandits anyhow. Marx emphasized Britain's revolutionary role in India, roused by colonization from its millennial slumbers. In a letter of 9 August 1882 he rebuked Bernstein for taking a sentimental view of Egyptian nationalism. Engels made no secret of his contempt for the Balkan peoples: the Bulgarians were a race of swineherds who would do best to keep quiet under Turkish rule pending the European revolution. All these small nations were allies of the Tsar and enemies of the developed West. The 'historic' peoples—Germans, Poles, Hungarians—should rule over the other Slavs (except Russia); Poland should be restored to her pre-1772 frontiers, including Lithuania, White Russia, and a large part of the Ukraine. The Hungarians were entitled to rule over the Slovaks and Croats, the Austrians over the Czechs and Moravians. All these small

subject peoples had played no part in European history and would never be independent. France should rule over Belgium, Alsace, and Lorraine; Germany over Schleswig. In general the higher civilization should prevail over the lower, progress over barbarism and stagnation. Both Marx and Engels were especially interested in the Polish question. Engels thought the Poles had done more for the revolution than Germany, Italy, and Hungary put together. Both men regarded the partition of Poland as the corner-stone of European reaction: the freeing of Poland from Russian rule would be the first step towards overthrowing the Tsardom and destroying reaction throughout the world.

Engels's distinction between historical and non-historical peoples is a reflection of the mood of 1848 rather than a deliberate historical theory, and the same may be said of his sympathy for Poland and his belief that it would play a key part in the revolution. Marx, however, towards the end of his life became seriously interested in the prospect of a revolution in Russia; he also thought the Irish question might hasten the revolution in England. However, national questions in general played no part in his theory of revolutionary strategy.

The socialists of the Second International, especially those from the multinational empires of Russia and Austria-Hungary, could not fall back on general formulas and summary classifications of nations into 'progressive' and 'reactionary', especially as they canvassed for support from the proletariat of the subject nationalities. It was thus natural for the Russians, Poles, and Austrians in particular to endeavour to find a socialist solution to the national question. Lenin, Otto Bauer, Karl Renner, Stalin, and Rosa Luxemburg all in their different ways sought to integrate the national problem into the corpus of Marxist doctrine.

The theme is one which naturally recurs incessantly in Rosa Luxemburg's correspondence. The SDKPiL proclaimed itself first and foremost, in opposition to the PPS, to be against the policy of Polish independence. Not that Rosa Luxemburg was indifferent to the oppression of one nation by another, but she regarded it as a consequence and a function of the rule of capital. After the socialist revolution the problem would solve itself, as socialism by definition would do away with all forms of oppression. In the meantime it was no use fighting for national independence, and it would be harmful to the revolutionary cause as it would divide the movement into sections, destroy the international solidarity of the proletariat, and divert its attention to nation-building, which was supposed to be the concern of the whole nation and not only of the oppressed classes. In general, concern over the national question as a separate problem was the result of bourgeois infiltration and tended to undermine the class viewpoint which was the *raison d'être* of social democracy. Marx's attitude towards Poland was understandable as a matter of policy in his time, but it was outdated or erroneous and in conflict with Marxist theory, which forbade the

labelling of Poland and Russia, regardless of class divisions, as respectively progressive and reactionary. The attempts of Limanowski, continued by the PPS, to link the cause of socialism with that of an independent Poland were reactionary in the highest degree. The PPS sought to involve the international workers' movement in the cause of a reconstructed Polish state by foisting on it the traditions of the Polish nobility's struggle for independence. As early as 1896 Rosa Luxemburg protested against the introduction of a 'Polish' resolution at the London Congress of the Second International, arguing that it was not true that Russia's strength depended on the subjugation of Poland and that the Tsardom would collapse if she were freed. The strength of the Tsardom depended on conditions inside Russia, and the development of capitalism would lead to its downfall in due course.

The idea of restoring Poland was not only reactionary inasmuch as it tended to destroy the class solidarity of the proletariat in the Tsarist empire, but it was utopian and hopeless as well. In all her writings Rosa Luxemburg never ceased to emphasize that Polish capitalism was an integral part of Russian capitalism; two-thirds of Polish exports went to the east; the irreversible process of economic integration could not be arrested by childish patriotic dreams. No social class in Poland was interested in independence: neither the bourgeoisie, whose livelihood depended on Russian markets, nor the gentry, fighting desperately to preserve as much as they could of their way of life, nor the proletariat, whose concern was the class struggle, nor the majority of the petty bourgeoisie, nor the peasants. At the most, some small groups of the intelligentsia who lacked social advancement, or of the reactionary petty bourgeoisie threatened by the rise of capitalism, dreamt impotently of an independent Poland. In general, national problems had no significance of their own; national movements were always in the interest of particular classes. Since there was no class that could represent the national cause on the basis of strong, irrefutable economic principles, that was the end of the matter: an independent Poland was an impossibility. What was true of Russian Poland applied equally to the provinces ruled by Prussia and Austria. Polish capitalists attempted to turn the workers' thoughts to ideas of independence so as to cloud their minds and persuade them that the enemy was not capitalism but the Germans and the Hakata (an organization for eroding Polish rights in the Poznań province).

Holding these views, Rosa Luxemburg combated from the outset the principle of national self-determination that figured in the programme of the Russian social democrats; she inclined instead to the Austro-Marxist idea of cultural autonomy as a solution to the national question after the revolution. Her opinions were set out in an article 'The nationality question and autonomy' in *Przegląd Socjal-demokratyczny* (No. 6, August 1908), and in her pamphlet on the Russian revolution. In the former she states that the right of

self-determination is a slogan of bourgeois nationalism, implying that every nation has an equal right to decide its own destiny. In fact, national movements are progressive or reactionary according to historical circumstances. This was recognized by Marx and Engels when they emphasized the reactionary character of national aspirations on the part of the southern Slavs and Czechs, the Swiss revolt against the Habsburgs in the fourteenth century, or the separatism of Scots, Bretons, and Basques; many of these movements supported reactionary monarchies against republicans. The natural tendency of history was for small nations to be absorbed by larger ones; cultural and linguistic unity was bound to be the ultimate goal, and it was reactionary and utopian to seek to reverse this process. 'Can one speak seriously of "self-determination" for the Montenegrins, Bulgars, Romanians, Serbs and Greeks, or even to any real extent of the Swiss?' In any case a nation was not an integrated social whole, but a congeries of hostile classes opposing one another in everything.

Rosa Luxemburg held that the recognition of the right of nationalities to self-determination was one of the Bolsheviks' gravest mistakes. This so-called right was 'no more than an idle petty-bourgeois phrase and humbug': the Bolsheviks had hoped by it to secure the support of the non-Russian peoples of the empire, but the result was that the Poles, Finns, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, and the peoples of the Caucasus used their freedom to combat the revolution, though formerly they had been active in its cause. Instead of defending the integrity of the Russian state, now the bulwark of the revolution, and 'crushing separatism with an iron hand', the Bolsheviks had allowed the bourgeoisie of the non-Russian peoples to decide their own fate and had even stirred up national feeling among peoples like the Ukrainians, who had never been a nation.

The acerbity with which Rosa Luxemburg fought the idea of national independence, especially for the Poles, brought her and the Leninists into sharp opposition, but it must be emphasized that this was a question of strategy and not of different views as to the intrinsic value of nations and national culture. Lenin's attitude on this point was the same as Rosa Luxemburg's. He conceded the right to self-determination, but he regarded it as the duty of socialists to fight against the separatism of their own nation; in any case self-determination was far less important than the interest of the revolution, i.e. of keeping the Bolsheviks in power. The proletariat of a nation should speak for it as regards separation versus integration, and the mouthpiece of the proletariat was its party, which expressed the most progressive tendencies of any national group. Lenin's disapproval of the brutality of the Soviet occupation of Georgia in 1921 had no practical effect, and the party's programme afforded ample justification of the violent measures by which most of the Russian patrimony was regained. However, Rosa Luxemburg's quarrel with the PPS was a fundamental one.

With hindsight it may appear incredible that she could be so blind to social realities, but this was not the only instance of its kind: she was a doctrinaire intellectual through and through. Her accounts of social phenomena are deductions from a Marxist schema, with the minimum of correction in the light of experience. Since capitalist society was in the nature of things divided into hostile classes, and as the interest of each class was identical throughout the world, at least as far as the class war was concerned, it was a theoretical impossibility for any nation 'as a whole' to aspire to independence, for aspirations on the national plane simply could not exist. Rosa Luxemburg was not shaken in this opinion by the outburst of nationalism in 1914 and the resulting collapse of the International: she merely blamed the social democratic leaders for betraying international ideals. Like many doctrinaire Marxists, she ceased to think in terms of social analysis when experience failed to bear out her theoretical presuppositions; instead, she looked for 'guilty men' and blamed the discrepancy on subjective factors. Since nations did not exist as integrated communities, there could be no such thing as a true national movement. If there appeared to be, it was a case of 'bourgeois fraud' or 'revisionist treachery', and the Marxist schema remained unscathed. The working class was essentially revolutionary, and any appearance to the contrary must be due to corrupt leaders instilling reformist ideas in the workers: the disparity between the essence of things and superficial experience could be ignored or attributed to individual bad faith, or explained as a 'dialectical contradiction'. Reasoning in this way, Rosa Luxemburg was able to preserve her views unaltered even though her predictions were almost always falsified by events.

Lenin for his part criticized Rosa Luxemburg on the ground that by one-sidedly combating Polish nationalism she was favouring the more dangerous nationalism of Great Russia. Others who criticized her were the PPS theorists, Feliks Perl and Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz. The latter wrote in 1905 that the 'economic conditions' that were supposedly an obstacle to Polish independence were no more than a matter of trade between provinces, and that Rosa Luxemburg was in effect advocating that the proletariat should adapt its activity to the temporary requirements of the bourgeoisie. National states were in the natural interest of capitalism, but independence was also necessary to the working class, as it was a necessary condition of democracy.

The Polish Communists, on the other hand, wholeheartedly accepted Rosa Luxemburg's doctrine on the subject of national independence. The later criticism of 'Luxemburgism', which was of a general and summary character, accused her of 'underestimating' the bourgeoisie's interest in the internal market and that of other classes in the national cause. But this criticism never went so far as to call in question the principle that the class struggle is 'in the last resort' the only decisive historical conflict; national questions are either

transient, unimportant issues or a disguise for 'real', i.e. class, interests, or else they represent a potential source of revolutionary energy that must be used for tactical reasons but can hardly be taken seriously 'in a historical perspective'. In short, Marxism in its Communist version never came to terms with national realities.

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ROSA LUXEMBURG is an outstanding example of a type of mind that is often met with in the history of Marxism and appears to be specially attracted by the Marxist outlook. It is characterized by slavish submission to authority, together with a belief that in that submission the values of scientific thought can be preserved. No doctrine was so well suited as Marxism to satisfy both these attitudes, or to provide a mystification combining extreme dogmatism with the cult of 'scientific' thinking, in which the disciple could find mental and spiritual peace. Marxism thus played the part of a religion for the intelligentsia, which did not prevent some of them, like Rosa Luxemburg herself, from trying to improve the deposit of faith by reverting to first principles, thus strengthening their own belief that they were independent of dogma.

Rosa Luxemburg's main theme was the theory of accumulation, linked closely with her belief that capitalism must bring about increasing class polarization. (All orthodox Marxists shared this belief, and in Kautsky's view Marxism would have collapsed without it.) She endeavoured to give Marxism a final consistent shape by defining the circumstances in which capitalism becomes an economic impossibility. Marxism was to her the universal key to the meaning of history, enabling the mind to reject as insignificant trifles any adventitious factors that might disturb its course. In this way historical materialism could be looked on not as an extreme impoverishment of reality but as a process of scientific abstraction, preserving the essence of things and eliminating what was merely accidental. No one seemed to notice, however, that this meant treating the whole of actual history as a series of unimportant contingencies, leaving science to contemplate only the general framework of the transition from one economic system to another. All the rest—wars, national and racial conflicts, constitutional and legal forms, religions, artistic and intellectual life—was relegated to the scrap-heap of 'accidents', of no concern to the theoretician brooding over the majestic phases of 'great' history. In this way the barrenness of simplistic schemata was endowed with a false sublimity.

The fate of Rosa Luxemburg's writings illustrates the tragedy of the attempt to preserve the integrality of Marxism while rejecting the only means of doing so, viz. an institutional body with authority to distinguish finally between truth and error. Rosa Luxemburg sought to be the champion of orthodoxy, but instead of regarding the party as the infallible fount of orthodoxy she preferred

to believe in the revolutionary mission of the masses as the spontaneous source of truth. Lenin was not guilty of this inconsistency, and his form of Marxism was effective in practice because its doctrine was made the exclusive property of an organization of professional revolutionaries. In the case of Rosa Luxemburg, strange results followed from believing absolutely in the predetermination of history and also in the 'essentially' revolutionary character of the masses. In her pamphlet on the Russian revolution she urged Lenin to introduce unfettered democracy and at the same time to crush all nationalist movements with an iron hand, not suspecting for a moment that there might be any inconsistency in these two demands.

On the basis of her theory of accumulation Rosa Luxemburg foresaw increasing market difficulties and pressure of capital on wages, the radicalization of the working masses, and the class polarization of society. This is why she attached no practical importance to national and peasant movements, whose effect must diminish as capitalism expanded, and she neglected the role of colonial territories as theatres of revolution. In short, she believed in a proletarian revolution in the classic Marxian sense, whereas Lenin realized that no 'pure' proletarian revolution would ever occur and that as capitalism approached the 'ideal' of two-class society the socialist revolution became less probable, not more. Thus Rosa Luxemburg opposed Lenin on three points, each of which was a necessary precondition of the Bolsheviks' success in 1917: their policy towards the peasants and the nationalities, and their military conception of the party.

In an article written in 1922 and published posthumously in 1924 Lenin drew a picture of Rosa Luxemburg which was accepted as definitive by the Communist movement: she was an 'eagle of the Revolution', but she had been wrong in her opinions concerning accumulation, the national problem, the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, and the October Revolution itself. (Her ideas on 'spontaneity' and the role of the party do not figure in this list of her mistakes.) The German Communists, after their failure to bring about a rising in 1920 and 1923, blamed their miscalculation on the ideology of 'Luxemburgism': prominent in this were Ruth Fischer and Maslow, the former of whom compared Rosa Luxemburg to a syphilis germ. The whole tradition of the Spartacus League was written off as a series of theoretical and tactical errors. In 1926, when factional and personal conflicts in the Soviet party leadership brought the so-called 'rightists' to power in the German Communist party, Rosa Luxemburg was rehabilitated for a brief period, while Ruth Fischer and Maslow lost their influence; but soon the old stereotypes were revived and intensified. In an article in 1931 Stalin closed the discussion by stating that Rosa Luxemburg was responsible for the theory of 'permanent revolution', later adopted by Trotsky in opposition to the doctrine of 'socialism in one country'.

In consequence, all that was distinctive in Rosa Luxemburg's political and

theoretical views became a dead letter, and she was remembered only in verbal tributes by Polish and German Communists commemorating her martyrdom for the revolution. Her critique of revolutionary despotism was not noticed until long after the Second World War, when such criticism had become current coin, and was treated as a historical curiosity rather than an incentive to change. In the 1960s, however, some interest in her ideas was shown by the so-called 'New Left' in its search for an alternative model of Marxist orthodoxy which, while rejecting Lenin's theory of the party, would set its face against revisionism and continue to rely on the inexhaustible revolutionary potential of the proletariat.

IV

Bernstein and Revisionism

1. *The concept of revisionism*

THE TERM 'revisionism' has never been precisely defined, but has been used in a wider or narrower sense according to circumstances. In present-day Communism it is no more than an arbitrary label affixed to any group or individual who in any way criticizes the policy, programme, or doctrine of a particular party; but at the turn of the century 'revisionism' existed as a specific phenomenon, though with fluid boundaries, in Central and East European socialism. The term denoted those writers and political figures who, while starting from Marxist premisses, came by degrees to call in question various elements of the doctrine, especially Marx's predictions as to the development of capitalism and the inevitability of socialist revolution. 'Revisionists' were not people who abandoned Marxism completely or had never been Marxists, but those who sought to modify the traditional doctrine or who held that some of its essential features were no longer applicable in the present state of society. Jaurès, for instance, was seldom called a revisionist, because he never set up to be an orthodox Marxist in the German sense. Later the term was also applied to those who attempted to supplement Marxism on Kantian lines. In general, however, revisionism is typically found within the parties that insisted on their fidelity to Marx's theory, i.e. especially those of Germany, Austria, and Russia.

Strictly speaking, revisionism was regarded as a theoretical position, but its articulation by Bernstein in the later 1890s was preceded by political tendencies which led to the same direction. The first sign of the revisionist crisis in the German party appeared in a discussion of the agrarian question in the early 1890s. At the Frankfurt Congress in 1894 the Bavarian social-democratic leader Georg von Vollmar (1850-1922) urged that the party should defend the interests of peasants as well as workers. This appeared to be a purely tactical question, but it involved an essential point of theory. The orthodox, following Marx and Engels, held that agriculture under capitalism must develop on broadly the same lines as industry, i.e. that fewer and fewer owners would hold more and more of the land, and that small peasant proprietors would be squeezed out of existence. Hence Kautsky and those who thought like him were against taking up the cause of the small farmers, who were doomed to extinction as a class