

**ROSA
LUXEM-
BURG**

J. P. NETTL

Rosa Luxemburg

J. P. NETTL

In Two Volumes

VOLUME I

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Photographs by courtesy of: International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam; Zakład Historii Partii, KC PZPR, Warsaw; SPD Archives, Bonn.

ABBREVIATIONS

The following are used regularly:

Bulletin BSI	Bulletin Périodique du Bureau Socialiste International.
D & M	Dokumente und Materialien zur Geschichte der Deutschen Arbeiterbewegung. (Bibliography Section III, anonymous collections.)
IISH	International Institute of Social History at Amsterdam.
IML (B)	Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus, Berlin (East). Party historical institute for the SED.
IML (M)	Institut Marksizma-Leninizma, Moscow. Party historical institute for the CPSU.
<i>LV</i>	<i>Leipziger Volkszeitung.</i>
<i>NZ</i>	<i>Neue Zeit.</i>
<i>PSD</i>	<i>Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny.</i>
<i>SAZ</i>	<i>Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung.</i>
<i>SM</i>	<i>Sozialistische Monatshefte.</i>
<i>SDK</i>	<i>Sozialdemokratische Korrespondenz.</i>
ZHP	Archiwum Zakładu Historii Partii, PZPR Warsaw. (Archives of the party historical institute, Polish United Workers' Party, Warsaw.)

Parties

CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union (from 1952 onwards).
KPD	German Communist Party.
KPR (B)	Communist Party of Russia (Bolsheviks) (from 1918–1925). (Known as All Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) from 1925–1952.)
PPS	Polish Socialist Party.
RSDRP	Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party (from 1898–1918).
SDKP	Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland.
SDKPiL	Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania.

SED	Socialist Unity Party (following on the amalgamation of the Communists and Social Democrats in East Germany in 1946).
SPD	German Social-Democratic Party.
USPD	Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany.



Rosa Luxemburg as a school girl

PREFACE

THIS book is the product of haphazard growth. My interest in Marxism is, I suppose, professional; the concern with Germany an historical accident as a result of which I participated marginally in the allied liquidation of the Third Reich and then helped carry odd towels for the midwives who brought into the world the misshapen bastard that is post-war Germany. Even then, in the vintage years of Stalinist orthodoxy, I was struck by something peculiar, distinctive, about German Socialism—West as well as East. An effort at contemporary analysis failed to satisfy; even while I was writing a study of the then Soviet Zone I knew I would have to go back into history, and specifically to the First World War. This delving into a chronicle of continuous failure and subsequent bad conscience led sooner or later to the controversial figure of Rosa Luxemburg. There the matter rested for twelve years. My own circumstances then opened out to produce a free year in the purposeful, bleached-oak comforts of Nuffield College, Oxford, and I determined to write a short, political profile of the person and the period. The present lengthy but I hope comprehensive biography is a compound of various subsequent discoveries: my own ambition and loquacity, the discovery of much unused material, the absence of any readable, available, or balanced biography in any language—finally, the fact that the cool preoccupation of the political historian soon gave way to a biographer's obsession with an endlessly fascinating subject. If nothing else, therefore, I hope my own enthusiasm will carry the reader, particularly the English reader, through many pages of facts and ideas which are far removed from his own cultural and intellectual background.

It is often held that the importance of a biography can be measured *prima facie* by some notional consensus about the importance of the subject. Reviewers especially equate 'proper' book weight with subject status. This seems to me nonsense—or at least true only at a very crude level of judgement. Every person is interesting if interestingly presented; it is the context that matters. If this were not so, there would be no novels at all. I shall attempt

to assess the historical importance of Rosa Luxemburg in Chapter I; here, however, I want to state the claim that I would prefer this book to be judged irrespective of its subject's status, but as a depiction of life—that of an individual and her surroundings. The weight of *reality* is thus intended to be entirely separate from, and different from, the weight of *facts*.

The arrangement of the book necessarily reflects the many-sidedness of the subject. It is basically chronological. But for the period 1898–1904, and again for 1906–1914, the German and Polish-Russian events are treated separately and consecutively in a sort of historical parallelogram; Rosa Luxemburg, too, kept her two political lives in strictly separate compartments. For the rest, one or other context predominates: from 1885 to 1897 Rosa was fully immersed in Polish or Russian affairs; during the First World War her entire activities were German. The chapter on the 1905–1906 revolution is again divided into two parts, German and Polish-Russian. Thus the consecutive German story can be followed by reading Chapters IV and V, the first part of Chapter VIII and Chapters IX–X in Volume I; Chapters XI and XIV–XVII in Volume II. The Polish-Russian story consists of Chapters II, III, VII and the second part of Chapter VIII in Volume I; Chapter XIII in Volume II. To the omnibus reader I apologize for the necessary back-peddalling at the beginning of Chapters VII and XII.

In order to do justice to Rosa Luxemburg's important political ideas and their implications in the context of contemporary and later Marxism, two special chapters have been devoted to a fairly rigorous and detailed theoretical discussion. Chapter VI deals with revisionism, Chapter XII with the mass strike, the action doctrine, and imperialism. There are separate appendixes on Rosa Luxemburg's economics and the national question. The last chapter (XVIII) is a post-mortem on Luxemburgism—the *via dolorosa* of Rosa Luxemburg's ideas and reputation under the political exigencies of Stalinism. All these are difficult for the general reader and anyway partly rebarbative; the main outlines are indicated in the general chapters and the specialist sections are intended for specialists.

I would also like to explain three major omissions—before they are pointed out to me. I have deliberately not delved into philosophical problems (like the materialist–idealist dichotomy, the moral and ethical content of Marxism in general and Rosa Luxem-

burg in particular, and the extent to which any non-Bolshevik Marxist 'lapses' into the now notorious condition of so-called Neo-Kantianism). I am not a competent philosopher; to treat this problem seriously requires an addition to the length of this book which would, I consider, be unwarrantable. Most important of all, such a discussion in this context identifies one too closely. I would prefer not to disrobe in philosophical terms.

Secondly, I have avoided fairly strenuously—even in the 'ideas' chapters—any temptation to monitor Rosa Luxemburg's ideas with the political philosopher's standard recognition equipment: a set of 'quickie' abstractions attractively labelled with the name of their originator (Thomist, Aristotelian, Hobbesian, Hegelian, Anarchist, etc.). I have always been sceptical about the receptivity of such equipment, and in the present case it would not only be of doubtful relevance, but lead to those sterile arguments which always await those who *unnecessarily* try to turn philosophical platitudes into paradoxes. Finally, and as a special case of the foregoing proposition, this book is not a Marxist critique of Rosa Luxemburg, a confrontation between her and Marxism—real or supposed, classical or neo. In this context I unhesitatingly accept Rosa Luxemburg's claim to be a whole-hearted Marxist and also her claim to be one of the contemporary exponents and appliers of Marx's findings. This presumption is implicit throughout; perhaps it needs stating explicitly here.

Instead of the usual 'think-piece' summary at the end of the book (usually a stage of some exhaustion), I have chosen to set out the framework of the subject and the parameters of relevance in an opening chapter—as well as painting a short word-profile of Rosa herself; the sort of things that do not always emerge in the biography itself and may help to make the story sharper and more comprehensible. There are also as many photographs as I could get hold of.

Finally a word about method. Every history is a matter of selection and emphasis. Since Marxism is anyhow rhetorical as well as repetitively centripetal, I have made a virtue of necessity. For one thing, certain basic themes are brought in again and again, from different angles and through the eyes of different participants. It is a continuous process of boxing the compass. The disciplinary approach is also a multiple one. Modern sociology and political analysis has made formidable conceptual contributions to many of

the issues which are discussed in this book—and I have made frequent use of them. Reference to academic studies of this sort and all discussion of the questions involved are generally confined to footnotes. Apart from this, footnotes are used in the usual way for reference to persons and issues marginal to the main story of Rosa Luxemburg, and for fairly systematic cross-referencing. I hope this somewhat lavish use of footnotes will fulfil its intended purpose of providing some optional sallies into related subject matter, without cluttering up the narrative of the text. They can, after all, be skipped.

The dating is western throughout; the use of old-style Russian dating on a few occasions is specifically pointed out in the text.

I have used for the most part what I am told by David Shapiro is standard English transliteration for Russian and Yiddish, except where variants have become fully conventional (like Trotsky, Zinoviev, Gorky). In quotations translated from Polish or German the original writer's spelling has been retained (i.e. Plekhanow or Plechanoff for Plekhanov).

The use of names or pseudonyms depends on the incidence of contemporary usage. Marchlewski-Karski is Marchlewski throughout, Feinstein-Leder is Leder, Radek (Sobelson) and Parvus (Gelfant or Helphand) are referred to only by their pseudonyms. In the most important cases the use of names or pseudonyms is discussed in a footnote at the first appearance of the person concerned. I have not attempted to provide biographical information about people except where it is strictly relevant.

My acknowledgements are of two kinds. With as controversial a subject as this, I have preferred not to discuss my interpretation with anyone, and thus accept by implication all blame and praise. All the same, many people have helped me. Adam Ciołkosz put his library and locally unrivalled knowledge of early Polish Socialism unhesitatingly at my disposal; he first got me off the ground on my Polish material. Frau Rosi Frölich, widow of Rosa Luxemburg's most distinguished biographer who was himself a militant Socialist of long standing, gave me a lengthy and useful interview—we shared a common devotion to the subject. The Librarian of the SPD archives in Bonn was helpful and kind; my thanks are due for an almost blank cheque to quote and reprint documents. The Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus in East Berlin

also received me cordially and gave me valuable assistance. The at first sight somewhat strict rules of the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam were relaxed, when it came to the point of access and reproduction, by much personal sympathy and understanding on the part of the Director and others on the staff. Herr Werner Blumenberg gave me much useful information, which I have gratefully acknowledged in the text. But my time at Amsterdam was made outstandingly pleasant and fruitful by the kindness of Dr. Siegfried Bahne. The latter's detailed knowledge and unfailing assistance have been invaluable to me. I have considerably benefited from the unpublished work of Dr. Winfried Scharlau on Parvus, Dr. Harry Shukman on the *Bund*, and Dr. Ken Eaton on the political ideas of Rosa Luxemburg. Professor Leonard Schapiro allowed me to pester him repeatedly on minutiae of Russian party history. Many others provided helpful facts and references.

I acknowledge with thanks the following permissions to reprint: from Europäische Verlagsanstalt, Hamburg, for *Briefe an Freunde*; from Kösel-Verlag, Munich, for the extract from *Widerschein der Fackel* in Vol. IV of the *Selected Works* of Karl Kraus; from Weidenfeld and Nicolson for the resolution of the Stuttgart congress of the International in James Joll, *The Second International*.

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Without my secretary, Miss Christine Haley, and her willingness to adopt my erratic and unpredictable work habits, this book would never have reached the light of day; my debt to her goes far beyond just typing and consequently also beyond the usual routine acknowledgement.

My special thanks are due to the Institute for Party History in Warsaw for their great liberality with material and for making my stay in Poland so productive and enjoyable. Dr. Feliks Tych, himself a distinguished historian of Polish Socialism, helped me in innumerable ways with advice, information, and constructive criticism. I owe him a great debt.

Finally a general word of thanks to all those at the Oxford University Press whose task it is to transform the physically and intellectually untidy manuscripts of wayward authors into well-

ordered books. David Shapiro read and helped to correct proofs. His meticulous scepticism was invaluable; his willingness to undertake this most unrewarding of chores was the act of a friend.

No institutional, financial, or foundation assistance in the writing of this book was asked for or given—with one exception: my family, who gave several years' hospitality to another demanding and fascinating woman—and let me spend (almost) as much time with her as I pleased.

Oxford/Leeds 1965

J.P.N.

CREDO

‘COMMUNISM is in reality nothing but the antithesis of a particular ideology that is both thoroughly harmful and corrosive. Thank God for the fact that Communism springs from a clean and clear ideal, which preserves its idealistic purpose even though, as an antidote, it is inclined to be somewhat harsh. To hell with its practical import: but may God at least preserve it for us as a never-ending menace to those people who own big estates and who, in order to hang on to them, are prepared to despatch humanity into battle, to abandon it to starvation for the sake of patriotic honour. May God preserve Communism so that the evil brood of its enemies may be prevented from becoming more bare-faced still, so that the gang of profiteers . . . shall have their sleep disturbed by at least a few pangs of anxiety. If they must preach morality to their victims and amuse themselves with their suffering, at least let some of their pleasure be spoilt!’

Karl Kraus in *Die Fackel*, November 1920; reprinted in *Widerschein der Fackel* (Volume IV of *Selected Works* of Karl Kraus), Munich 1956, p. 281.

I

ROSA LUXEMBURG—WHO, WHAT, AND WHY?

WHY a biography of Rosa Luxemburg at this great length—or any length for that matter? She is well known to those who study or believe in Marxism. The main outline of her life and work is established. There are biographies, even though none recent and only one in English. Has important new evidence recently come to light? Is there a case for diffusing knowledge about Rosa Luxemburg among a wider public—and if so, is a book of this length not far more likely to repel than to attract? Since I have had to convince myself of having good reasons for writing this book, I want to start by outlining them.

Many people actually know Rosa Luxemburg's name, but its associations are vague—German, Jewish, and revolutionary; that is as far as it goes. To those who are interested in the history of Socialism she emerges in clearer focus, as the spokeswoman and theoretician of the German Left, and one of the founders of the German Communist Party. Two aspects of her life seem to stand out: her death—which retrospectively creates a special, if slightly sentimental, interest in a woman revolutionary brutally murdered by the soldiery; and her disputes with Lenin in which she appears to represent democracy against Russian Communism. The translator and editor of her works in America has seen fit to put out an edition of her polemics against Lenin under the title *Marxism or Leninism*, presumably because he too thinks this neatly sums up her position.¹ To many casual readers in the West she has therefore come to represent the most incisive defender of the democratic tradition in Marxism against the growing shadow of its misuse by the Bolsheviks. In so far as revolutionary Marxism can be democratic, Rosa Luxemburg stands at its apex. She has become the intellectual sheet-anchor of all those old, but ever

¹ Bertram D. Wolfe (ed.): Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution and Leninism or Marxism?*, Ann Arbor (Michigan) 1961.

young, radicals who think that Communism could have been the combination of violence and extreme democracy. In their frequent moments of nostalgia it is the name Rosa Luxemburg that they utter.¹ Her death in action ended any possibility of giving effective battle to the Bolsheviks and also sanctified her views with the glow of martyrdom. But the difficulty is that these same Bolsheviks and their followers, whose ascendancy she is supposed to have resisted, have also claimed her for their own. In spite of her alleged mistakes and misinterpretations they see her ultimately committed to Communism in its struggle against Social Democracy; had she lived she would have made the choice even more decisively than in the confusion of 1918. Once again the date of her death is crucial—as well as its form. Communist tradition can no more afford to ignore a martyr than any other embattled faith—and so someone who later might well have been buried with all the obloquy of a renegade, today still retains her place in the official pantheon, by dying early and by dying hard.

So the first reason for Rosa Luxemburg's importance in the history of political Marxism is the unique moment of her death. She and Karl Liebknecht were perhaps the only Marxists who committed themselves to the Bolshevik revolution in spite of fundamental criticisms, which are as old as that revolution itself. What makes Rosa Luxemburg's case especially interesting is that her debates with Lenin on certain fundamental Marxist problems date back to 1903—they are central to her philosophy. Others in Russia had departed from or quarrelled with Bolshevism long before 1917—quite apart from those who were never within sight or sound of sympathy with Lenin. These had nothing to contribute to orthodox revolutionary Marxism after 1917. An even more important group came to differ from Leninism as it evolved into Stalinism; they opted out of the charmed circle of Communist

¹ Sometimes in the most improbable places. 'I remember sitting up [with some girls in Los Angeles who had a "strange set-up with some football players" from College] one night and trying to explain patiently, I mean without patronizing them or anything, how the Third International might never have gone off the tracks if only they had listened to Rosa Luxemburg. I would have liked to have known, for instance, just what Radek and Bukharin felt when Rosa said her piece about over-centralization. . . . [The girl] seemed to think about [all] this at least as seriously as when one of the USC football boys asked her whether she preferred the quick-kick punt or a quarter-back sneak. . . .' (Clancy Segal, *Going Away* (2nd edition), New York 1963, p. 46.)

Quite a number of English and American poets and painters find a continuing source of artistic protest in Rosa's life.

politics. Trotsky and his followers, and all those purveyors of a precise conscience who orbited on the periphery of revolutionary Marxism from the 1920s onwards, suffered from the same two major disabilities: lack of a disciplined mass following to compensate for the organized support of Soviet power, and the ideological distress of having suddenly to prise themselves loose from their inheritance of the October Revolution. There was little political and even less psychological room for a genuinely uncommitted middle position between friend and foe—the limbo of sophistry that characterized Trotsky and many lesser spirits for so many years. The awful alternative was either to deny the validity of the original event—the revolution—or to claim that it was those in power in Russia who deviated from some purely intellectual norm set by the dissidents. The lack of a ‘neutral’ tribunal made it all too easy for official Communism to elbow these people out as traitors—by the reality of sheer power and weight of argument. Rosa Luxemburg, however, could neither be brushed aside as irrelevant before 1917 nor denounced as a traitor afterwards. When she died she was a critical supporter; in her own words, ‘Enthusiasm coupled with the spirit of revolutionary criticism—what more can people want from us?’¹ She too would no doubt have had to make a more concrete choice had she lived. But death is final, it freezes into perpetuity the views, however tentative, held at the time. The most that could be done was to speak of Rosa Luxemburg’s ‘errors’—and to avoid any detailed analysis of her contribution and attitude in their historical context. There is a strange but severe honesty about Communist historiography. Trotskyism, Bukharinism, even Menshevism, are historical deviations, their ‘treachery’ has a beginning, a middle (development), and an end (discovery and condemnation); their ‘theory’ is the product of historical action and is welded to it irrevocably. It can be proved by identifiable actions during specific events. Not so Luxemburgism. This is pure inductive theory, built up mostly from writings; once established (posthumously), it could be deduced in turn from other writings. It hangs in the air—a purely theoretical construct. Even during the worst Stalin period, Luxemburgism never became treason; it *led to* opportunism but was never one of its ‘proofs’, or essential components. Silence was

¹ Adolf Warski, *Rosa Luxemburgs Stellung zu den taktischen Problemen der Revolution*, Hamburg 1922, pp. 6–7.

the rule for twenty years after 1933, or occasional stiff and stilted references—brickbats accompanying the political slaughter. As in an old-fashioned cartoon, Luxemburgism was trapped in a bubble and taken away to safe storage—while Luxemburg herself remained without blemish, an active but unthinking revolutionary personality of the second rank. No one else has had their person and their ideas separated so assiduously. Even though Stalin always insisted that errors could not be abstracted from those who made them—‘it is wrong to separate Trotskyism from the Trotskyites’—this connected condemnation of sin and sinners was never applied in the same way to Rosa Luxemburg.

None of this is new. Our continuing interest in the life and works of anyone who left behind so many unresolved ideas, and who was handled so uniquely, is only natural. But there are also good reasons why the relevance of Rosa Luxemburg’s ideas should be greater today than at any time since the 1930s. With the death of Stalin, Communist theory has ceased to be merely the iron-clad accretions and deposits of the dictator’s own notion of Marxism–Leninism. The bands have burst and with them a lively, if uneven, froth of speculation has broken out. The impetus came directly from the top—but was taken up and carried forward from lower down. To take an example: Khrushchev and the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party have carried out a reinterpretation of war, both as a feature of competing imperialisms and as an ‘inevitable’ consequence of the confrontation between capitalism and socialism. Now, with the destructive power of modern technology, war has become the ultimate disaster once more, very like the *summum malum*, the blight of all civilization, which it was to Rosa Luxemburg. The fact that the proletariat, as the majority of the population, provides also the majority of victims was as obvious to Khrushchev as it was to Rosa Luxemburg—and both put it in very similar terms.¹

¹ From the turn of the century there was an innate contradiction in Marxist attitudes to war—inevitable and yet deeply abhorrent. No one represents this dichotomy more sharply than Rosa Luxemburg; war was necessary and logically inevitable in a capitalist world, yet war was abhorrent and insupportable when it came—and every effort had to be made to end it. She was the last to suffer on the horns of this dilemma. Lenin was (and Mao Tse-tung is) much more inclined to make the best revolutionary use of the inevitable, while Kautsky was (and the Russians are) willing to search for agreed inter-capitalist (or socialist-capitalist) arrangements to make war avoidable. For a recent though shallow discussion of this problem in its modern context, see ‘The dialectics of co-existence’ in Robert C. Tucker, *The Soviet Political Mind*, London 1964.

This leads straight to the large-scale Marxist excavation which' at the time of writing, blaringly accompanies the Russo-Chinese conflict. And it did not take long for the digging to reach the revisionist controversy—one of the great watersheds of Marxism (though the thesis of this book is in part an attempt to shift its impact to a different time and a different dispute).¹ No one spans these two great issues of war and revisionism more comprehensively than Rosa Luxemburg, and on both questions her conclusions are at least as authoritative and relevant as Lenin's, though they differed on the solution to the one and about the total applicability of the other. The whole problem of revising Marx—which is none other than the problem of capturing the only authoritative interpretation of Marxism—was of great concern to Rosa Luxemburg. She expended some of her most important political analysis on the difference between Marxism and revisionism and on the consequences of the attempts to revise Marx. The contrast between *postulating* revolution and *being* revolutionary, which today agitates the Russians as much as the Chinese, was precisely the central issue which Rosa Luxemburg tried to emphasize for the first time in her much neglected polemics against Kautsky in 1910. In addition, the inevitable confrontation, not of alternative philosophies but of the two different worlds of socialism and capitalism, was central to Rosa Luxemburg's thesis just as it is the mainspring of the Chinese attack on the Soviet Union. Placid and well-fed capitalism leading to an equally placid and well-fed socialism was as much Rosa Luxemburg's bogey as it is that of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. If Lenin's works are now being used in this controversy as the main arsenal of ammunition for both sides, Rosa Luxemburg's writings could just as well serve for this purpose—except that the Chinese could find better and more systematic weapons in Rosa Luxemburg's armoury than in Stalin's.

But if the interpretation of the new line comes from the top, the pressure for it comes diffusely from below. The areas of free expression in Russia and the People's Democracies have suddenly become much larger. Though transgression of the limits is still a serious offence against Communist discipline, there is at least more room for manoeuvre. The notion that art is not the completely disciplined tool of political will but a spontaneous expression

¹ See below, Chapter XII.

which merely requires a censor's check in the light of stated political needs; that art needs social control but need not stem from controlled social inspiration, is slowly seeping its way upwards through the Russian Communist Party—and has made even further progress in Poland and Hungary. Here again the whole notion of art as *conforming*, as being analysed for good or bad content, corresponds much more closely to Rosa Luxemburg's conception than Stalin's idea of a disciplined expression of social purpose.

Rosa Luxemburg was not alone, out of her time, in the expression of ideas. Some things she said were exclusive to her, the emphasis often particular; but there was a whole consensus of similar views and aspirations. The relevance Rosa Luxemburg has re-acquired with recent changes in the complexion and emphasis of Communism applies equally to others. But few covered the ground as thoroughly and vivaciously, as totally as she. Before we look at those of her merits which are justifiably unique we must be clear about the present-day importance of a wider trend in Marxist thinking of which she was but a part, albeit an important one.

For a start, the cyclical revival of particular ideas should not be exaggerated. Many of the concepts advocated by Rosa Luxemburg are still anathema to present-day Communism. Her disregard, even contempt, for the problems and techniques of organization can have no place in a society as highly organized as the Soviet Union or China. Those societies that have become Communist since the Second World War are also preoccupied with 'correct' organization and to that extent Rosa Luxemburg has no place in them. As in other areas of stark disagreement—between Lenin and herself, between the German Left and the Bolsheviks—the debate has simply become out of date. It refers to problems which have no more bearing on existing Communist societies, even though they might once have altered the course of history. To extrapolate views specifically concerned with past issues into a totally different present or future is an exercise on which we shall not waste any time.

Thus I do not claim complete relevance or justification for all her work today. The most that can be said is that some neglected aspects are coming into their own. Surely it is already a mark of greatness for part of a political writer's work to have retained even partial relevance for fifty years, particularly when that writer was

not concerned with general philosophy but with analysis of and influence on contemporary events. Yet even so, Rosa Luxemburg's importance does not end here. While history has decided some of the issues against her, a substantial part of her so-called errors prove on closer examination to be based not on what Rosa Luxemburg said or meant but on later interpretation of her work—hammered out in the course of political controversy. She is relevant because of, as well as in spite of, these interpretations. We shall have to disentangle them. But both matter. As long as Marxism exists politically, no contributor can ever become irrelevant. Marxist writers may be deliberately annihilated, but they never die or fade away.

This is, in a very special sense, true of Rosa Luxemburg. The refined implications of her ideas fade into a colourless background compared with the freshness of their presentation. She had much of that vital quality of immediate relevance which she praised so highly in Marx himself—often to the detriment of his actual arguments. She made Marxism real and important in a way which neither Lenin nor Kautsky nor any other contemporary was able to achieve—even more so than Marx himself, for his most attractive writing was also the most dated. She was total where Lenin was selective, practical where Kautsky was formal, human against Plekhanov's abstraction. Only Trotsky had the same vitality, but—as far as his pre-war writing was concerned—only in retrospect, a belated attribute of his post-revolutionary stature. Though there are hardly any Luxemburgists, in the way that there were Stalinists and still are Trotskyites, it is almost certainly true that more people at the time found their early way to revolutionary Marxism through *Social Reform or Revolution* and other writings of Rosa Luxemburg than through any other writer. And justly so. The very notion of Luxemburgism would have been abhorrent to her. What makes her writing so seductive is that the seduction is incidental; she was not writing to convert, but to convince.

Not only the quality of her ideas, then, but the manner of their expression: the way she said it as much as what she said. The bitter tug-of-war for Rosa Luxemburg's heritage was a struggle for the legitimacy bequeathed by an important Marxist and in even more outstanding exponent of revolutionary Marxism. Social Democracy of the 1920s, particularly the German Social-Demo-

cratic Party (SPD), thought that it could see in her an ardent advocate of democracy who sooner or later was bound to come into conflict with oligarchical and arbitrary Bolshevism. Such an interpretation was cherished particularly by the many ex-Communists who left the party in the course of the next thirty years. They found in Rosa Luxemburg's undoubted revolutionary Marxism, combined with the frequent use of the words 'masses', 'majority', and 'democracy', a congenial lifebelt—to keep them afloat either alone or at least on the unimportant left fringe of official Social Democracy. Nearly every dissident group from official Communism—German, French, or Russian—at once laid special and exclusive claim to the possession of Rosa Luxemburg's spirit, and it is significant that Trotsky, whose relationship with Rosa Luxemburg had been impersonal and hostile for a decade, claimed her spiritual approval for the Fourth International from the day of its foundation.¹

The Communists were in no way prepared to let her go. However, to answer Social Democracy and their own dissidents it became necessary to interpret her work in such a way that those items and quotations on which the enemy based its case could be knitted together into a whole system of error. It no longer sufficed to shrug these off as so many isolated mistakes, and in due course Communist theorists constructed for and on behalf of Rosa Luxemburg a system called Luxemburgism—compounded from just those errors on which Social Democracy relied. The person became increasingly separated from the doctrine—rather like the English notion that the Crown can do no wrong. The fiercer the Communist struggle against Luxemburgism, the greater the attachment to the revolutionary personality of Luxemburg, stripped of its errors. As we have seen, this delicate surgery made Rosa Luxemburg unique in Communist history. Though the result of later political controversy, the fact that the operation was worth doing at all is striking evidence of the continuing importance of the victim—or beneficiary. One of the tasks of this book is to undo some of the effects of surgery and show how much of Luxemburgism can genuinely be attributed to Luxemburg and how much is later addition. The ideas of Rosa Luxemburg will be examined afresh after all the accretions of politically inclined historians have been scraped away. But camouflage is never neutral. In eradicat-

¹ L. Trotsky, *Rosa Luxemburg et la quatrième Internationale*, Paris 1933.

ing one vision it creates another, like a badly restored fresco. We have not merely to remove the screen but to destroy a false image before we can appreciate the real one. This is a more difficult and lengthy task than merely commanding the presence of something which previously was not known at all.

Beneath the caricature of 'Luxemburgism' and its 'spontaneity' there can be seen a consistent set of principles with which Rosa Luxemburg hoped to arm nascent Communism in Germany. She never set out to produce a comprehensive or even logically cohesive system. Almost invariably her ideas found expression in the form of criticisms or polemics against what she considered to be errors. Out of this negative aspect of her own correction (and often over-correction, like Lenin's 'bent stick' of orthodoxy), we have to construct the positive content of her intentions. To do this it is sometimes necessary to postulate a neutral no-man's-land, arbitrarily empty except for the clear and present conflict—as though each dispute were new and unique. Why? Because the later Communist construction of a Luxemburgist system for the sole purpose of demolishing it in public showed that what Rosa Luxemburg imparted to the German Labour movement was sufficiently powerful and pervasive to require systematic demolition. No one else in Germany, not even Kautsky, was elevated to a Communist-created, proprietary 'ism'. In Russia only Lenin and Stalin on one side, Trotsky and the Mensheviks on the other, were given such an honour. While it would therefore be wrong to construct a 'true' system in place of the false one—and no such attempt will be made—certain dominant ideas remain and these must be examined with all their 'true' implications. The strong emphasis on action as a prophylactic as well as a progressive social impulse is deeply rooted in Communism today—deeply enough for its specific reincarnation in China because of its allegedly formal abstraction in Russia—and this was Rosa Luxemburg's most important contribution to practical Marxism. What has usually been ascribed to Lenin's peculiar genius for action, asserting itself against the bureaucratic and cautious hesitations of his closest supporters in 1917, was no more than the specific and longstanding recommendation of the German Left, most ably expounded in Rosa Luxemburg's writings. For most of her life revolution was as close and real to her as to Lenin. Above all, she sensed and hammered home the difference between theoretical and real revolutionary

attitudes long before Lenin was aware that such differences could exist in the SPD. Modern revolutionary Marxism is thus peculiarly her contribution even though the debt may not be acknowledged.

The German Communist inheritors of Eastern Germany have never quite succeeded in obliterating the real image of Rosa Luxemburg with a false one and thus reducing the actual person of Rosa Luxemburg, as it were, to the pages of Socialist history. The whole ideology of the Socialist Unity Party in East Germany is permeated by its inability to digest the Communist role in the German revolution of 1918/1919 and get it out of its system. East German ideology can most suitably be described as Marxism plus a bad conscience. Under the pressure of Stalinist orthodoxy, the old failure was measured by the extent to which the Bolshevik example was not followed, step by irrelevant step. Where *Spartakus*, the precursor of German Communism during the First World War, differed from the Bolsheviks it was always wrong; where these differences were substantial—separation from the body of Social Democracy at a much earlier date than 1918 or even 1914, organizational self-sufficiency, weakness in turning opposition to the war into social revolution, etc.—they provide the direct cause of the revolution's failure in Germany. The history of Stalinism is among other things an experiment with time: every new moment of the present instantly reverberated through the last forty years and altered the authoritative reality only just established by the previous echo. Since 1953 party history in Russia has at last been catching up with itself a little, after slumbering so long. But in East Germany today the 1918 revolution is still being fought all over again. Every posture against West Germany has its parallel in 1918, its historical significance—just as every act by the German Federal Government can be and immediately is compared with the doings of the counter-revolution after the First World War. Even the terminology deliberately harks back to the fashions of forty years ago. In this atmosphere Rosa Luxemburg is perforce very much alive. Her actions are being repeated with conscious avoidance of her 'mistakes'. History is being treated as repeating itself precisely—with all the benefit of hindsight. It is of course only too sad and obvious that the leaders of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) are significantly less successful than *Spartakus* in levering their own society into revolution from within, not to mention their attempt to influence West Germany. Eventually this will be

realized and interesting consequences may arise from a second and much more severe dose of historical reappraisal.

As long as Communism exists, the views of those who helped to shape it can never entirely lose their actuality. The more important the contribution the greater its relevance. This is in the nature of Communism which, backward as well as forward looking—or dialectical—can never deal with its past except in terms of the present. Rosa Luxemburg, never formally condemned, need not wait for formal rehabilitation. On the other hand, the October Revolution is likely to remain the central experience of modern Marxism for a long time, if not for ever; those who were not direct participants will never get pride of place. In the last resort, Rosa Luxemburg's importance will be incidental, derived by analysts, rather than induced by participants; it will be defended and cherished by those who wish to understand and teach understanding more than those who presently act or rule. Hence she obtrudes herself consistently on the historical preoccupations of East Germany: the portrayal of contemporary West Germany as the lineal descendant of counter-revolutionary Weimar makes her analysis of the society around her urgently relevant. Selected aspects of her writings on such present problems as militarism are published with all the emphasis on their relevance.¹ The Poles too are hard at work, though the emphasis is more historical. They are interested in the activities of the great figures of the past in their own right and less in the extent to which they approximated to Bolshevism, or whether their 'mistakes' are still dangerous today.

Next, Rosa Luxemburg's revolutionary Marxism may yet conceivably become a specific political doctrine in its own right—intellectually, Trotskyism in the West today is really Luxemburgism. Trotsky pre-empted the devotion of all Marxist revolutionaries who opposed Stalin because of his enormous prestige, and the majestic tragedy of his political defeat in Russia. His person and his polemics drew nearly all anti-Stalinists into his orbit for a while. By identifying every opponent as an ally of Trotsky and using the vast and disciplined slander-factory of the entire Soviet state to discover Trotsky behind every real or imagined plot, Stalin helped to divide the world of revolutionary Marxism into

¹ For instance, *Rosa Luxemburg im Kampf gegen den deutschen Militarismus*, Berlin (East) 1960. This is in contrast to the type of all-round biography accorded to people like Mehring and Clara Zetkin.

two camps, and only two—orthodox Communists and Trotskyites, with the latter presented as the Marxist allies of counter-revolution. Yet the history of Trotskyism since 1930 is not a glorious rally of oppositional forces but a sad series of sectarian disputes. Trotsky's historical position as one of the chief architects of the October Revolution prevented him from developing a critique broad enough to generate an all-embracing anti-Stalinist movement, intellectually committed to proletarian revolution in all its Bolshevik ruthlessness—yet without Stalin's narrow and fearful bureaucracy, itself terrorized and terrorizing. Instead Trotsky fell out with group after group of his non-Russian supporters over talmudic minutiae in the precise and dogmatic interpretation of Stalin's Russia as an example of valid Socialism. The Stalin/Trotsky antithesis, which both parties helped to make into an overriding and irrevocable division between revolutionary Marxists, actually subsumed all preceding arguments and pushed them into limbo. There was simply no room for anyone else. But Rosa Luxemburg, fervent supporter and at the same time profound and immediate critic of the Bolsheviks, would have provided just the rallying point for a broad rather than narrow opposition to Stalin: untainted by original participation—yet wholly revolutionary in its own right. Perhaps one day revolutionary—as opposed to reformist—Marxists will go back all the way to the beginning, to the primacy of highly developed capitalist countries in the calendar of revolutionary experience, to the 'enthusiasm coupled with revolutionary criticism' of the pre-emptive October Revolution. It is admittedly improbable—and even less probable is any loosening in this direction within Russia or China, the established Communist giants, for all the present unravelling of Stalinism.

Finally, and perhaps most important of all, there is Rosa Luxemburg's position as an autonomous political thinker—irrespective of whether one believes in, repudiates, or is simply indifferent to Marxism. Her ideas belong wherever the history of political ideas is seriously taught. Though she herself was fully committed to Marxism, the validity of her ideas transcends the Marxist framework. For hers was an essentially moral doctrine which saw in social revolution—and socialist revolutionary activity—not merely the fulfilment of the laws of dialectical materialism but the liberation and progress of humanity. Rosa Luxemburg preached participation above all, not merely the passive reward of

benefits from the hands of a conquering élite. And participation is the problem that still occupies most political analysts today, Marxist and bourgeois alike. Rosa Luxemburg's controlling doctrine was not democracy, individual freedom, or spontaneity, but participation—friction leading to revolutionary energy leading in turn to the maturity of class-consciousness and revolution. Though it is undesirable and meaningless to try and lift her writings one by one out of the context of Marxism (to which they most emphatically belong), the significance of her life's work and thought is not confined to Marxists alone—just like Marx's own achievements. The value of the few really original political thinkers cannot be tagged with the artificial label of any school or group. Even the most orthodox disciples can become a burden; like barnacles they have to be painfully scraped away. The claim of universal validity beyond context is precisely what distinguishes the great from the merely partisan.

This is quite apart from any claim that can be made for Rosa Luxemburg on purely historical grounds. Even without any present relevance she would be a figure of great historical importance, both in the Polish and the German Socialist movements. Her little-known role in the Russian movement, though not of first-rate importance, yet deserves mention and research at least as much as those of some of the very marginal figures who have benefited from the prevailing interest in the minutiae of Bolshevik history. It would be a distortion to base the excuse for this book entirely on the permanent relevance of all Rosa Luxemburg's views. This will be indicated where deserved. The bulk of what she wrote and did belongs to history. But what history! To more than a quarter of thinking people in the world today the period we deal with is the prophetic years, the Old Testament of the Communist Bible, without which the final incarnation of revolution has little meaning. In this context the history of any prophet is important, even if his vision was often cloudy and inaccurate.

An intelligent if incomplete assessment of Rosa Luxemburg's ideas and work is possible from her published writings alone. Almost all these have been used by at least one of her previous biographers, especially the German part of her story. Her activities in the Polish movement have remained much more obscure. This is partly due to the break of continuity in Polish Communist

research resulting from the moratorium on Polish party history in the early 1930s, and even more to the total extinction of the Polish Communist leadership in the *Yezhovshchina*, the great purges of 1937 and 1938. It has been overcome by renewed efforts since 1945 and particularly since 1956. But the language is a barrier. Hardly any recent Polish work on party history is available to a wider European public, and strict inter-party courtesy demands that researchers shall concentrate mainly on their own back-yard. I have tried to do justice to both the Polish/Russian and German aspects of her activities. In my view the historical importance of Rosa Luxemburg is still weighted in favour of her German activities, but not to anything like the extent to which the availability and predominance of German sources and research might suggest.

But where previous work is particularly deficient is in the illumination of Rosa Luxemburg's private life. This was not an accidental omission. Marxist biography on the whole plays down the personal aspect except in so far as it illustrates political purpose. In Frölich's case there was much about Rosa Luxemburg that he simply did not know, and his picture of her *personality* is no more than an exercise in formal hagiography. Those who used their personal knowledge to draw a more intimate and lively portrait did so for political reasons. Both Henriette Roland-Holst and Luise Kautsky promoted Rosa Luxemburg the woman into a political counter-weight to the Communist version of Luxemburgism as a political process. The picture drawn by these writers is one-sided in spite of every effort to be 'objective'; the idea of having to choose between the woman of the red revolution and the woman of the pink window-boxes is ludicrous and arbitrary. Even more absurd of course is the attempt to present Rosa Luxemburg's life and work as a revolutionary Marxist in terms of a political extension of a tendency to personal hysteria evidenced by her discourses on the world of animals and plants.¹

¹ When Rosa Luxemburg's letters from prison began to be published, reactions varied considerably. Typical of the concessionless enmity and incomprehension of middle-class spectators of the post-war upheavals was a letter from Innsbruck (bastion of Catholic reaction and antipode of 'red' Vienna) to *Die Fackel* in Vienna, a literary and political journal at that time in intellectual sympathy with revolutionary left-wing aims. The correspondent, a woman who had herself been brought up on a large Hungarian estate, took exception to Rosa Luxemburg's sentimental description of the maltreatment of captured buffaloes in Germany during the war. Rosa Luxemburg's letter about this to Sonia Liebkecht had been reproduced in *Die Fackel* (*Letters from Prison*, Berlin 1923, pp. 56-58; see below, Chapter xv, pp. 666-7). The anonymous

To that extent the present work is one of synthesis. I do not believe that anybody but a schizophrenic can be two different people, but I do believe that everyone is several sorts of people for different purposes. A biographer's task is to make sense of the varied, often scintillating and apparently contradictory facets of personality; to present a composite whole in a relevant setting. Rosa Luxemburg's private life cannot be separated from her political life nor does the one contradict the other. Nor do I believe that her private life can simply be ignored or subordinated to her political activities. It is precisely the clarification of this relationship that has been greatly helped by the hitherto inaccessible sources which I have been able to use—the large collection of letters to Jogiches, to Warszawski, to the Zetkin family, to Mehring, and to various other people in the Polish and Russian parties. Rosa was an inveterate letter-writer: one almost wonders how she found time to do anything else. The letters were written hurriedly but always with deliberation and to a purpose—as such they provide valuable primary evidence for the setting and motives of her politics, and secondary evidence of private relations and attitudes (secondary because most of her letters were not instinctive but manufactured). Their very haste enables us to capture the mood of the moment, which was often at variance with the public mood of official writing in the party press. In short, this biography sets out to provide a fairly complete picture of Rosa Luxemburg as a living and active person, in both her private and political roles. One of the reasons for the length of the work is that it moves simultaneously on several levels. I have taken

correspondent pointed out that buffaloes were unsentimental animals, largely incapable of feeling, who had for years been used for heavy transport duties.

'The Luxemburg woman would no doubt have preferred to have preached revolution to these buffaloes and to have founded a buffalo republic. . . . There simply are many hysterical women who like to interfere in everything and stir up people against each other; if they have wit and a pleasing style they will always be listened to respectfully by the masses and cause a lot of harm in the world. One must not therefore be astonished when those who preach violence come to a violent end.'

This brought forth an incandescent assertion of faith from the author and playwright Karl Kraus, editor of *Die Fackel* from which the quotation at the front of this book is taken. (Karl Kraus, *Widerschein der Fackel*, pp. 278-85.) Kraus and *Die Fackel* later turned away from their left-wing sympathies to fulsome support for Dollfuss after 1932. The hostile reaction, and this sympathetic free-thinking defence, are fairly typical of non-Marxist attitudes to Rosa Luxemburg and her movement at the time, and suggest the impact of her life and death on her contemporaries.

particular problems and events and have examined Rosa Luxemburg's attitude to them from various points of view—political and personal, Polish and German, tactical and strategic, practical and theoretical, historical and contemporary. Thus I hope to illuminate the events themselves in more than one dimension and also do justice to the complicated process of living which is much more than a simple progression from one point to another along a straight line. This method has the further advantage that the real insights are incidental, and not the carefully engineered conclusions of most social scientists and historians—surprises you can see coming a long way off. The reader thus participates in the acquisition of knowledge, instead of having it served up to him like cold joint.

What sort of a person was Rosa Luxemburg? Small, extremely neat—self-consciously a woman. No one ever saw her in disarray, early in the morning or late at night; her long hair was carefully but simply combed upwards to add to her height. She had not been a pretty child and was never a beautiful woman: strong, sharp features with a slight twist of mouth and nose to indicate tension. Her appearance always commanded respect, even before she opened her mouth. Her dark eyes set the mood of the moment, flashing in combat or introspectively withdrawn, or—if she had had enough—overcast with anger or boredom.

The fastidiousness extended to her clothes right down to her polished shoes: plain but expensive, simple yet carefully chosen clothes, based on a precise evaluation of the image which she wanted to create; clothes that were never obtrusive or claimed an existence in their own right; accompaniment not theme. A hip defect acquired in early childhood was overcome completely in all postures but walking—and Rosa Luxemburg was a substantial walker precisely because of the difficulties of this exercise. She judged people—though with admitted humour—in accordance with their ability and willingness to walk; Karl Kautsky's physical laziness was one of the first black marks chalked up against him.

Her own appearance she viewed with slightly mocking contempt which never for an instant approached masochism or self-hatred. The imperceptible border between humour and bitterness was never crossed. Her long nose, which preceded her physical presence like an ambassador on permanent attachment, her large head

which soured the lives of several milliners, all were captured in brief and flashing images of literary self-caricature. She called her self-portrait in oils, presented to Hans Diefenbach, *ein Klumpen von Lumpen* (an assortment of lumps). But such comments were reserved for intimates. In public her appearance was neutral; she did not use it to achieve any effect but was never inhibited by it either. The long imprisonment and the spells of ill-health during the war turned her hair white and lined her face, but it is only from the evidence of friends who saw her in prison or after November 1918 that we know it. In moments of crisis her body became an anonymous vehicle to achieve her purposes.

The only aspect of which she was always consciously aware was the fact that she was small. She admitted a penchant for tall and big-boned maids and housekeepers—‘I would not like anyone to think that they had entered a doll’s house’. Her domestic staff was subjected to the same demands of fastidiousness both in their personal appearance and in their work; breakages roused Rosa Luxemburg to fury and hatred. These were feudal relationships. Though she half-humorously complained to her friends about her involvement in the uninteresting private lives of her staff, she took on this task as manfully as any party assignment. There was a succession of such persons. The one to whom she was most attached was Gertrud Zlottko, who left for other jobs intermittently but somehow always returned. When her household had for all intents and purposes to be liquidated after her second arrest in 1916, a part of her personality went with it.

Her apartment was a faithful reproduction of her person: books carefully stacked in cases, manuscripts put away tidily in a desk, ornaments, paintings, and botanical collections all neatly labelled and instantly to hand. From 1903 onwards she had her own neatly embossed notepaper—for special occasions. Rosa Luxemburg could write for a book from province or prison, and secretary, housekeeper, or friend were able to lay their hands on it instantly. The favourite apartment was at 58 Cranachstrasse in Berlin—the red room and the green room, the old but well-preserved furniture, the carpets, the collection of gifts large and small which, once they had passed her critical taste in the first instance, were treasured for ever. She gave up this apartment in 1911, ostensibly because the city and its growing noise and traffic had engulfed it. More probably its associations had become too painful—the years of

gregarious optimism. She then moved to the outskirts of the city at Südende, where she remained until 1916, and nominally to the end of her life. Her home, her privacy, were always sacred. Already in Switzerland her rooms near the University of Zürich had fulfilled an overpowering need for refuge and escape for those hours which so many of her contemporaries argued away in smoke-filled cafés. The closing of doors against all comers was always one of the pleasantest moments of her day. Though many people stayed with her, sometimes for long periods, it was always *her* home: her guests were welcome but the extent to which they could make themselves at home was carefully circumscribed. She entertained often but fastidiously. Unlike so many émigrés from Poland and Russia, there was nothing easy-going about her hospitality, and those who abused it were quickly shown the door. The English phrase 'make yourself at home' was unknown to her. In every respect she was as houseproud as any middle-class German; the German mania for cleanliness which as a symptom she held in such contempt was none the less discharged meticulously *chez* Rosa Luxemburg. Instead of making it a major subject of conversation, she employed others to carry out the work unobtrusively. No wonder that those of her students from the party school who were privileged with a Sunday invitation would sit hesitantly on the edge of the sofa and clutch the proffered plate of cake to their bosom for fear of dropping crumbs!

Such an establishment needed money and Rosa Luxemburg's problems in this regard were precisely those of any middle-class career woman, whose appetite for minor luxury constantly exceeds the supply of funds with which to meet it. Her private bank account—strictly to be distinguished from the party funds—was delicately balanced between credit and debit; most of the time projected income had already been pledged, if not actually spent. Apart from extraordinary sums needed to help close friends in trouble, an annual crisis centred round her summer holiday; Rosa Luxemburg always planned a year in advance and began to consider the possibilities the day after she returned from the current year's excursion. These holidays were mostly in the south—Switzerland in the early days to see friends, and particularly Leo Jogiches; later Italy whenever she could afford it. Always there was the mirage of a long trip farther afield—Corsica, Africa, the East. None of it—except Corsica—ever happened.

Among her closer friends she had the reputation of a spend-thrift. Hans Diefenbach left her money in his will—strictly in trust: 'Her management of her personal economy is less sound than her knowledge of political economy.' Rosa's *fata morgana* of ready cash was something of a joke with her German friends but a harmless one, since she was punctiliously correct about repayment and refused to borrow money from anyone if she sensed the slightest danger of distorting a relationship. When she went on holiday her funds were available to those who accompanied her. Again and again Konstantin Zetkin's pleas of penury were dismissed by the assurance that she would have enough for them both. There were periods when her journalistic work was largely inspired by the need to earn; the sense of urgency in her writing, which always suggested that she was bursting with things to say, was contradicted by private admissions that she had not the slightest notion what to say until she actually sat down to write it. Touchy, then as ever, for fear of letting money dominate her relationships, generous to a fault with friends, unable by nature to save and quite uninterested in trying, she was one of those secure in the knowledge that, if not God, at least her own abilities would always provide. The only evidence of meanness was in her dealings with shopkeepers and printers. To her these were a special class of twisters whose every account had to be carefully checked and with whom negotiation and much oriental bargaining, though she would never entertain it in other spheres, was a necessary and sensible proceeding. Rather than be cheated, she was prepared to engage in endless guerrilla warfare; her staff was taught—sometimes tearfully—to do the same. She would bow only to the ultimate deterrent of legal action. 'In the last resort,' she wrote to her housekeeper, 'it doesn't suit me to have a court case over a baker's bill—even though I am bound to win.'¹

The whole problem of money, the need to relate earning in some way to spending, was something that, as an objective aspect of the human condition, came to Rosa Luxemburg relatively late in life. As long as she was living with Leo Jogiches in Switzerland, his own substantial remittances from home—he came from a wealthy family—were enough for them both. But money played a curiously symbolic role in their relationship right from the start. Rosa Luxemburg, who in the last resort would not defer judge-

¹ Rosa Luxemburg to Gertrud Zlottko, 1913, IISH, Amsterdam.

ment about her own opinions and actions even to Leo Jogiches, almost eagerly seized on money as a symbol of total deference. Whenever she was away from him she accounted at length and in detail for every penny, and craved indulgence for her often imaginary extravagance—while he in turn played out his part in the mannered comedy by scolding her soundly. On this subject his word was law; to borrow or not to borrow, to take from the German executive or to ask for support from home—he developed an absurd stinginess as part of the role of comptroller. And Rosa, who would circuitously but firmly reject his criticisms of her policy in Germany after 1898, when she went to live in Berlin, who berated him for his clumsy proof-reading of her doctoral thesis and much besides, none the less beat her breast under his financial strictures. This continued as long as their personal relationship itself.

Rosa Luxemburg was never an easy person to get on with. Her passionate temperament, of which she was aware and very proud, generated a capacity for quick attachment but also an unpredictable touchiness which acted like trip-wire to unsuspecting invaders. Her rigid standards of behaviour were partly the moral superstructure of her philosophy of life. But, though rigid, they were not constant; she deliberately adjusted them to what she thought was the capacity of the other person. A man like Parvus, who had a strong temperament himself, was granted more latitude than most run-of-the-mill members of the German party. Devotion and a willingness to please were no use by themselves. Anyone servile or self-pitying, anything routine, above all anything *mechanical* started at a disadvantage; so did self-satisfaction and a display of public virtue—German qualities all, but English too; Rosa Luxemburg's private hell was Anglo-German. Other Nordic nations suffered too, more by ethnic generalization than personal dislike since she had few Dutch or Swedish acquaintances. Henriette Roland-Holst, a close friend for a time, was specifically exempted; Rosa's 'blonde madonna' was the exception to prove the rule. In private at least there was no doubt that Rosa sometimes used the collective over-simplifications of a racist—but in her dislike more than her approval. The Russians came off best. There was always an innate sympathy for Russians—in a German context; against their own background they were at once judged more severely. Her friends in the Russian and Polish movements always

appeared much more attractive among Germans than they were when compared with their own compatriots. One aspect of Rosa's internationalism was always to prefer the foreign.

To make things more difficult, her standards rose the closer people were to her; her demands for privacy became more exacting. Those admitted to the inner circle of friends were always in danger of trespassing on areas which were totally 'off limits'. Part of the reason for the chronic difficulties with Franz Mehring was due to the stop-go attitude which he adopted, the rapid change from intimate friendship without reservations to complete rupture and back again, with the additional risk that all the fruits of intimacy would be used as public ammunition during the next stormy period. Following her initial experience of Mehring after her departure from the editorship of *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, she was determined not to leave valuable parts of herself in pawn to him again, and it was not until the war that their relationship once more became suffused with any genuine warmth. Close friends also had to have some measure of intellectual strength—she was incapable of intimacy with a stupid person. In spite of her close attachment to Clara Zetkin, the disparity of their intellectual capacities obstructed the friendship. It was only Clara Zetkin's acceptance of Rosa's primacy and her agreement with nearly every view propounded by Rosa on important questions that enabled the latter to put up with Clara's personal obstinacies and her political sentimentality.

There were a few people whom Rosa Luxemburg disliked beyond all reason. This was connected only marginally with politics. Kurt Eisner, an intelligent, sensitive, and kind-hearted person, was anathema to her. The few letters she wrote to him were couched in a tone of outstanding pettiness. 'Oh, anxious ethical colleague,' she began an epistle in 1905, 'may you drown in the moral absolutes of your beloved *Critique of Pure Reason*.'¹ Similarly Trotsky, whose intellectual and personal characteristics were very similar to her own, was always referred to like an enemy in whom she could find nothing creditable. Where personal dislike cut across political alliance, dislike predominated: one of the most curious examples of Rosa Luxemburg's personal attitudes in the German party was her ferocious dislike of Karl Radek and her refusal to accept or even notice the contribution he was making to

¹ From a private collection of letters in Israel.

her cause—and this at a time when she badly needed allies, particularly intelligent ones who shared her views on imperialism.

One type that Rosa Luxemburg always disliked was the 'great man'. She resented Plekhanov's authority even before she attacked his views; as she wrote to Jogiches, one looked for opportunities to put out one's tongue at him. Much of her resentment against Kautsky was generated by his unchallenged supremacy in all matters of theory—a position she did not automatically accept even in 1898. Authority was a matter of present performance, not the capitalized glories of the past. Thus she denied Plekhanov, Kautsky, and Wilhelm Liebknecht, but never begrudged Bebel; even after they had fallen out openly in 1911 Rosa Luxemburg never attempted to belittle his role in the SPD. On the whole she was uncharitable in her personal judgements. Her letters to the few people with whom she was really intimate—Leo Jogiches and later Konstantin Zetkin—show that even those who considered themselves close friends or allies were not immune from sarcastic epigrams which played up their faults and gave them small credit for their virtues. The letters to Leo Jogiches from Germany shortly after her arrival in 1898 present the SPD leadership as a cabaret turn of caricatures. Of course she felt an outsider and to a large extent chose to remain one; she proudly differentiated her own attitude to life from that of the Germans. None the less, her judgements were far too specific for a mere culture-clash. She despised those whose opposition was merely the product of resentment, and had an unerring eye for *personal* weaknesses—just as Lenin could usually spot *political* weakness however well hidden or camouflaged.

But these judgements are not only evidence of her particular personality: they show a rare self-confidence which was not only psychological but also social, a product of the secure political group in which she was firmly anchored from 1893 until after the first Russian revolution. All those who have written about Rosa Luxemburg have seen only the personal aspect and have ignored the social one. Without it no portrait of these thirteen years can be complete; and even afterwards, when the original close-knit group began to disintegrate, its influence lingered on. The Polish Social Democrats (SDKPiL), that small body of intellectual activists who broke out of the main Polish Socialist Party (PPS) in

1893, a year after it had been founded, was much more than a mere doctrinaire sect. This Social Democracy of Poland and Lithuania was a group of intellectual peers long before it became a political party. It provided its members with all the attributes of a primary group, an association which all the other émigrés lacked—a family, an ideology, a discipline, in short a constant and reliable source of strength. This function is almost unknown and we shall examine it at some length when we come to discuss the creation and activities of the SDKPiL (Chapters III and IV)—in some respects as conspiratorial and tight a group as Lenin's Bolsheviks, but open and outward-looking in others. The discipline was largely voluntary and was confined to public action; for the rest, it left large areas of freedom and choice to the participants, even room for profound intellectual disagreements. That is why the comparison with the Bolsheviks is instructive and at the same time meaningless. Trotsky, with all his friends, admirers, and disciples, never had the benefit of a peer group; hence his difficulty in building a following before the revolution and the fragility of his political support after 1923.¹

The leading members of the SDKPiL were people of singular intellectual distinction and ability—or, if not contributing themselves, at least sharing in the intellectual glory. Men like Dzierżyński, Marchlewski, Hanecki, and Unszticht all achieved positions of importance in Bolshevik Russia. One of them, Dzierżyński, occupies a central place in the revolutionary pantheon. Marchlewski and Hanecki were too individualistic to fit into the tight party apparatus of the post-revolutionary period; they found their roles among that distinguished small circle of Lenin's *hommes de confiance* who could be entrusted with special missions outside the party routine. Adolf Warszawski was intimately associated with the Polish Communist Party of which he remained one of the leaders until he was liquidated in 1937 along with almost the entire Polish leadership—Stalin found the spirit and tradition of independence among the Poles too great for his comfort. Jogiches

¹ A peer group is a sociological term denoting a latent relationship among a group of people of roughly similar age and outlook, whose opinion is of particular importance with reference to one's own. Thus it is intended to express both the concept of reference group as well as convey a group source of ideological and moral strength, but not to imply a sense of conformity strong enough to subsume self-made decisions; other-directedness as opposed to inner-directedness as used by David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, New Haven 1950, or Winston White, *Beyond Conformity*, New York 1961, pp. 16 ff.

and Rosa Luxemburg played brilliant roles outside the Polish movement, particularly in the creation of the German Communist Party: the one an indefatigable organizer, the other a formidable debater and publicist. Nowhere in the Second International was a small group so brilliantly led; nowhere for that matter was any leadership shared between such brilliant individuals. Unlike the Bolsheviks who, by the end of 1911, had submitted completely to the powerful personality of their leader, the SDKPiL was not the party to submit to anyone—and split in two because Jogiches attempted to emulate the personal ascendancy of Lenin. The strength and importance of this social group cannot be sufficiently stressed. We tend to consider the members too much as individuals without giving sufficient regard to the additional strength which they derived from their association. On the one hand there is the study of party and political process as an autonomous power structure, and on the other hand there are individuals. The connection between them and above all the *mutual* augmentation of strength have been overlooked.

Rosa Luxemburg's relations with the rest of this group are a fascinating study in themselves. With the significant exception of Jogiches, she was not especially close to any of them. She criticized them all severely on occasions; both their views and their persons. But all the same she was attached far more profoundly to this group than ever to the German party. Her criticisms and comments are part of the intellectual elbow-room which the SDKPiL permitted, indeed almost forced on its members. In so far as the old-fashioned word 'companion' has any political meaning in a modern context, it applies to this relationship—more than ally yet less than friend: a connection more secure than personal sympathy but at the same time more colourful than any purely functional, political relationship.

Naturally Rosa Luxemburg's role in the SDKPiL cannot be understood except in terms of her special relationship with Leo Jogiches. In the eyes of the world they *were* for many years the SDKPiL. It is rare for an intimate personal relationship to be matched by a political one without one dominating the other. Yet here no political concessions were made for personal reasons, nor personal allowances for the sake of political harmony; there was no question of either one leading the other. In her letters the varied strands of their lives were so completely intertwined that the very

distinction between personal and political lost all meaning. Only with Leo Jogiches did she ever achieve such fusion. This woman, whose personality was built out of concentric, increasingly impenetrable rings of which the last and innermost was the loneliness of absolute privacy, always needed one and only one person with complete access, someone from whom nothing must be hidden. Precisely because further access became proportionately more difficult for friends once they had passed from the antechamber of acquaintance into the living-room of friendship, precisely because Rosa Luxemburg found it so difficult to open the last doors of frankness and intimacy, she made a point of stripping herself almost ritually naked before the one person whom she loved. This was the meaning of love. Far from the usual diffuse glow, from the see-saw agony of ecstasy and despair, love was something clinical and precise to Rosa—complete frankness. Again and again she demanded ruthless honesty in return—it was the one quality of which her love would not permit the slightest diminution. To a man like Leo Jogiches—closely compartmented, secretive and reserved by nature, unwilling to commit and reluctant to communicate—Rosa Luxemburg's insistent demand for frankness posed a constant challenge. He was jealous, both of her success and of her person. The required frankness thus forced his jealousy out into the open—with the result that Rosa had often to make difficult choices and flout the wishes she had forced him to express. They clashed often and hard, especially during her early months in Germany, when her judgement was pitted against his remote control. But comments and instructions were anyhow not the full measure of frankness she demanded. He was open enough about her—it was with regard to himself that she had to insist on communication, often simply on scraps of information. 'Why have you not written?' was her constant complaint. By 1905 she suspected that some of the doors of access to him, which she had so painfully forced open for many years, were being closed against her once more; she rushed to Cracow in September of that year just to 'look straight into his eyes', and the fear of losing him may well have been a contributory reason for her going to Warsaw in December 1905, in the middle of the revolution.

Her devotion to Jogiches ended brutally fourteen months later when she heard that some of the doors closed to her had been

opened to someone else. Rosa Luxemburg saw only black and white in personal matters; the strain of maintaining constant political contact with someone whom she was now determined to shut out of her personal life proved enormous. None the less the relationship survived, fossilized for a time in the iron clamp of sheer political necessity. In the midst of the spiritual desert of the First World War, with many of her old friendships brutally broken off, the resurrection of the old comradeship with Leo Jogiches must have helped them both to survive. But it was furtive and unspoken—and has left almost no trace for historians. Touchingly, Jogiches spent valuable time in ensuring that she was supplied with the right food for her increasingly delicate and nervous stomach. During the last few months of their lives he was constantly at her side, advising, guiding, cheering. This man, who had set his sights at the personal leadership of both the Polish and the Russian parties, whom his opponents thought ambitious to the point of madness, was finally content to accept a subordinate role to the brilliant woman who had for all practical purposes been his wife. After her death he concentrated his own last months' efforts on the identification and punishment of her murderers, and on ensuring that her ideas should survive.

When she learnt of his betrayal in 1907 it was Rosa herself who insisted on her freedom. For a long time Jogiches would not let her go—and beneath the hectic political activities from 1906 to 1909 a dark and grotesque comedy was played. From those who knew of their relationship—and this was already a privileged minority—the carefully preserved front of political collaboration hid the vacuum that was now between them. The role of Rosa's unique confidant was transferred to another man—a young, sensitive, talented, and unhappy boy whose mother was one of Rosa Luxemburg's closest friends. This touching interlude, which Rosa herself described as straight from the pages of Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir*, is totally unknown. Rebound, loneliness, disappointment—all the scientific claptrap of psychology—no doubt played their part. But there was more. Rosa Luxemburg's temperament was capable, in her own words, of setting the prairie on fire, her passion for life more than enough for two; one wonders how the young man's frail shoulders were able to bear the torrents of intellectual and emotional discharge which Rosa Luxemburg unleashed on those she loved. In the end it was too much: twice

she sensed a restiveness which immediately made her withdraw the extended antennae of her personality as rapidly as she had at first extended them. Twice she released him and yet on each occasion she felt his need for her to be greater than his revolt. It was not until the war that she finally recognized the frailty of the vessel into which she had poured so much of herself. But the need in her which he had filled was still as constant and real as ever. So she promoted her devoted Hans Diefenbach to the privileged place instead. Her letters to him mark a tragic but profoundly moving inflation of a small personality into the needed image of a big one—yet shot through with flashes of sad irony at this very process of self-delusion. Again one wonders how uncomfortable she must have made pale, precise, fastidious, and reserved Hans Diefenbach, who worshipped Rosa Luxemburg and her exotic temperament with fear and trembling. He died in the war, and then there was no one left. The errant, irrepressible warmth had to be shared out between faithful and deserving friends like Luise Kautsky and Marta Rosenbaum. No lover, no intimate confidant waited for Rosa Luxemburg to come out of prison. And when she did emerge there was no more time for the exquisite business of love and living.

‘Civilized’—the epitome of Rosa Luxemburg’s attitude to life. She was as tight in her personal relationships as with the arrangement of her possessions. Everyone had an allotted place which could not be exceeded except by invitation—and then only to advance a step at a time. Yet there was nothing dry or formal about her relationships. She inspired enormous loyalty and devotion in her immediate circle which, had she permitted it, would have itself become a form of love. People like Mathilde Jacob and Fanny Jezierska, themselves basically unpolitical or only on the fringe of politics, were largely inspired by loyalty to Rosa Luxemburg. After Rosa’s death Mathilde Jacob soon put active politics behind her. Her bewildered plea in the pages of *Freiheit* in answer to the Communist charge of absconding with Rosa Luxemburg’s literary remains speaks volumes for Rosa’s personal magnetism. This capacity to inspire purely personal devotion was one of the complications in the later struggle for Rosa Luxemburg’s heritage; to many it seemed inconceivable that someone so free and ‘unpolitical’ could really have carried her

allegiance to incipient Communism through to the bitter and unforeseeable end.

The same problem was raised by Rosa Luxemburg's approach to art. Once more she appeared above all as a civilized person, very much the product of her age and time, scion of a cultured international optimistic bourgeoisie which sat appreciatively at the pinnacle of many centuries of artistic achievement. Rosa Luxemburg did not so much deny the existence of a valid proletarian culture; even the notion of such a thing was utterly incomprehensible to her. She was quite oblivious of the self-conscious efforts in the SPD to produce workers' songs and poems, to create a deliberately 'popular' art. At the same time, however, the revolutionary new forms of expression that were breaking through in painting and music were lost on her. She went to a few of the exhibitions—when Diefenbach succeeded in dragging her along—but she did not enjoy them. The other Russian revolution of the first decade of the twentieth century, that of the painters Kandinsky and Jawlensky, the movements of the *Blaue Reiter* and the *Brücke*, were as remote to her as the realities of the 1905 upheaval in Russia were to the German bourgeoisie.

Her tastes were conservative and classical. She liked the same music as any cultured *fin de siècle* citizen of Berlin—or, better, of Vienna. She had neither the pioneering disdain for convention of an aristocrat nor the self-satisfied and rather squat certainties of working-class realism; her sole demands were clarity and honesty of purpose, and a harmony of means. Imperceptibly, her judgement advanced from a basic series of 'doubts' to a selective approval of such art as stood her severe tests, an *agrégation* of merit. There was little instinctive about it. Any 'clever' appeal to the intellect, any romantic invasion of the emotions, any too obvious *purpose* in art—even social—meant automatic disqualification. Art was *sui generis*. It had above all to reflect the realities of its time, at most foreshadow the immediate future but never extrapolate into the distance; what made art timeless was not vision but quality. As a means of social change she preferred direct political activity. Yet in speaking of 'art' in general we are already doing Rosa Luxemburg a major injustice. She hardly used the word, and never generalized about it. It was as private and individual a sphere as politics were public—and as such not susceptible to systematic analysis. Rosa strenuously resisted the many

attempts of her friends to get her to indulge in literary criticism, and only wrote an introduction to her translation of Korolenko with great reluctance at the insistence of her publisher. All the generalizations made here are therefore no more than my perhaps impermissible interpretation of Rosa Luxemburg's individual comments.¹

The great classical names were her familiars—in music Mozart and Beethoven; Titian and Rembrandt as painters. Her favourite contemporary composer was Hugo Wolf and among her circle of close friends was Faisst, a well-known and enthusiastic performer of Wolf's songs. Cause and effect? The enthusiasm for Hugo Wolf is intriguing. Apart from any intrinsic merit in his music, he was perhaps the first composer of songs who really succeeded in balancing text and music into a composite whole instead of a limping dichotomy. Moreover, he set to music many of Rosa's favourite poems by Goethe and Mörike.

Her literary preferences were wider, for writing was her natural element. First the German masters—Goethe, Mörike, Lessing—then the great French classics. She did not like Schiller, partly because she had been spoon-fed on his *Geist* in the parental home but also because a worshipful legend was being woven around him by the literati in the SPD. Rosa Luxemburg and Franz Mehring campaigned against the attempt to make political capital out of Schiller as a potential revolutionary poet.² Yet what she denied Schiller she accepted from a much less important romantic poet. Rosa Luxemburg shared, with most of the German Left—Socialist as well as Liberal—the passion for quoting Konrad Ferdinand Meyer, particularly his poem 'Ulrich von Hutten' which contained a rather facile embodiment of the revolutionary mentality at its most romantic:

¹ Yet Rosa Luxemburg's standards of classification appear very similar to the much more specific doctrine put forward by the great Marxist literary critic, Georg Lukács, in, e.g., *Der russische Realismus in der Weltliteratur* (Berlin (East) 1949) and, more generally, in his *Studies in European Realism* (London 1950) and *Probleme des Realismus* (Berlin 1955). But she always insisted on remaining a recipient rather than a critic; she never systematized and rarely argued about her opinions. Thus her assumptions resemble those of Lukács's great antithesis of realism—naturalism, though she never formulated it in such conceptual or general terms. (See Georg Lukács, 'Erzählen oder Beschreiben?' [Narrate or depict?] in *Probleme des Realismus*, pp. 103–46.) Significantly it is as a literary critic only that Rosa Luxemburg has recently (1961) been reprinted and commented on in Russia—the first time for forty years that her views have appeared in Russian. See below, p. 823.

² For Rosa's articles, see *NZ*, 1904/1905, Vol. II, pp. 163–5, and her elaboration in a more political context in *SAZ*, 9 May, 16 May, 22 May 1905.

‘... Jetzt findet Ruhe hier,
 Horcht nicht hinaus, horcht nicht hinüber mir,
 In dieser stillen Bucht erstirbt der Sturm der Zeit,
 Vergesst Hutten, dass Ihr Hutten seit!’
 Und darauf Hutten:
 ‘Dein Rat, mein teurer Freund, ist wundervoll;
 Nicht leben soll ich—wenn ich leben soll!’¹

But this was used to make a political rather than a literary point—and for political purposes even Wagner was occasionally pressed into service. The promotion of Hutten, the Don Quixote of the German sixteenth century, into the literary ancestor of the Left probably had little to do with Rosa Luxemburg’s private appreciation. She always had her Polish equivalent, Adam Mickiewicz, another half-political promotion, but at least ‘Pan Tadeusz’ could be quoted more fluently than ‘Ulrich von Hutten’.

Undoubtedly the most important aspect of Rosa’s interest in literature was her profound feeling for the Russian nineteenth-century writers. She was not the person to experience the sudden all-engulfing whirlpool of empathy which Lenin felt when he first read Chernyshevsky’s *What is to be done?* No single literary figure blazed her moral trail. Instead a whole tradition, a discipline, had captured her admiration; not what they said but how they said it. Year in year out she preached the importance of the Russian novelists into German Socialist ears that were intermittently attuned but more often blocked—a philistinism which roused her to a grotesque fury.

In prison during the war she tackled a full-scale translation of Korolenko’s *History of my Contemporary* and wrote a preface in which for once her views on literature in general and the Russian writers in particular were systematically set down. Almost unconsciously she established a general classification of merit which is

¹ e.g. in *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 88: letter to Hans Diefenbach, 27 March 1917.

‘... now find rest here,
 Do not give ear outside nor over there,
 In this still bay the present tumult dies.
 Hutten forget that you still Hutten are!’
 And Hutten in reply:
 ‘Your counsel, dearest friend, is wonderful;
 I must not live that I may yet live on!’

Another favourite line from the poem was: ‘Das grösste thut nur, wer nicht anders kann’ (the greatest acts we do in spite of us). These and other quotations are spattered liberally about the writings of Rosa Luxemburg and other German Social Democrats.

most revealing.¹ Among other things it underlined the acute Russian-German dichotomy which played such a significant part in Rosa Luxemburg's life. For her this was the central axis of contemporary civilization—the achievements of western bourgeois culture tempered with the emerging Socialist future in the East. Just because Rosa Luxemburg made no artistic concessions to politics, it would be a mistake to suppose that art and politics were not related on the highest level of personal consciousness. There was no conflict here—conflict was only created by self-conscious attempts to manipulate art for political purposes instead of letting it play its own autonomous, possibly even superior, role. The greater the art, the more important its ultimate political effect—that of heightening civilization.

It is in this context that the fascinating interplay of German and Russian influences must be viewed. When Rosa first went to Germany in 1898 the political quality of German Socialism dominated her thinking. Much as she disliked place and people right from the start, this was on account of personal, psychological faults; the German contribution to political civilization was still predominant and the task of spanning West and East consisted in emphasizing German unity and self-discipline to the disorganized and inchoate Russians. In course of time all this changed. Closer acquaintance with Russian writers—in her home, self-consciously permeated with western *Kultur*, they had been relatively neglected—now opened up vistas of civilization from the East which made the German contribution look increasingly formal and unreal. Participation in the Russian revolution of 1905 accelerated the process. Not that she appreciated masters like Goethe less; it was rather their irrelevance to the German present when compared with the immediacy of writers like Dostoievsky and Tolstoy which obsessed her. More and more the particular German virtues became so much debris in a torrent of social confrontation. The real hope of cultural as well as political salvation now seemed to lie in the East. A touch of the conscious Slavophil was there, though it did not come to the surface. The official criterion of excellence was the relationship of art to society, the inescapable concern for social questions in Russia which seemed so strongly to contrast with the dead weight of formal *Kultur* in Germany.

¹ See below, pp. 668 ff.

In the last resort Rosa Luxemburg shared the common misunderstanding about the real nature of the German virtues. It still exists today; understandable as they are, these misconceptions none the less carry a great share of responsibility for the tragedies of the last fifty years. And in a way the Socialists are most to blame. For it was they who took up the great cry against the patriarchal discipline, the authoritarian tradition of obedience in the Prussian-German empire—and in attacking these only reproduced them *chez eux*. But what they pilloried (and copied) as public 'virtues' were in fact poor compensations for a lack of them. German virtues were and are essentially private, lonely ones, a tradition of *Einsamkeit*, of deprivation, of seeking to compensate for loneliness. The real home of public virtue is England, with its team games, its group loyalties, its tradition of different faces in public and in private. *Kadavergehorsam*, or *Friedhofsdisciplin*, and all the other emanations of the German tradition on which Rosa Luxemburg laid such sarcastic emphasis, were in fact vices derived from a lack of public virtues, rather than consequences of public virtues themselves. She would have been astonished to think of the sheep-like obedient Germans as lonely and lost.

Throughout her life in Germany she remained a self-conscious Easterner. It was a difficult situation and she never tried to make it any easier. Germany was in no sense a refuge to be grateful for. Rather it was the duty of any progressive and advanced Socialist party to welcome foreign participants, while *their* duty, far from abstaining, was to involve themselves in the new domestic environment as thoroughly as possible. Rosa Luxemburg's allegiance was not to Germany but to the SPD. The frequent references to a fatherland were not merely a sarcastic caricature of a sentimental and chauvinistic phrase but a positive acknowledgement to the only real fatherland she knew or wanted—the proletariat in general and German Social Democracy in particular. She was not alone in this. It was an allegiance shared by many of the intellectual émigrés, mostly Jews, who deliberately renounced the attempt to find refuge in any particular nationalism of the present or future. The fight against Polish national self-determination carried out by a ferocious and highly articulate group in the Second International, for whom Rosa Luxemburg was the most prominent spokesman, cannot be understood merely in terms of a negation, but by the superimposition of nationalist sentiment on to political and class

ideology. The only attainable fatherland was the working class—or, more correctly, the proletarian revolution. This concept was not just a political abstraction or even an inspired tactical expedient; it had all the hidden strength of patriotic attachment. Most of the protagonists were Jews, who found even in the limited 'national' articulation of the Jewish *Bund* an echo of the more rigid geographical patriotism of the PPS. But there were others, like Marchlewski and Dzierżyński, whose anti-nationalism was obviously not due merely to the neurosis of national dispersion and oppression. Their presence and strength within the group proves more clearly than anything else that, far from being a mere negation, the onslaught on national self-determination was a positive substitution of one fatherland for another. Why, after all, should the notion of patriotism be confined to arbitrary political or ethnic frontiers, and be based on the artifact of a nation state?¹

This deeply shared attitude was one of the main links which bound our peer group and provided a cohesive factor for people who were otherwise individualist and often very egocentric. Some historians have been puzzled by their rejection of any form of national self-expression but have not understood the substitution function of Socialism in this regard. Yet without it the whole history of the SDKPiL makes little sense. From 1907 to 1914 the political differences between the PPS-Left, which had broken away from the open nationalism of Piłsudski, and the SDKPiL appear increasingly irrelevant to the historian. Apart from ventilation of personal spleen the polemics are incomprehensible—except that the difference between *playing down* existing nationalist sentiment and acknowledging a totally *different* fatherland is somehow enormous. Rosa Luxemburg's whole career in the SPD, the fact that she put up with the strongly anti-Semitic and anti-Eastern tinge of the criticisms levelled against her from within and without the SPD, was due to her insulation: she was genuinely impervious to anti-Semitism and the charge of national vagrancy. Why, after all, stay in a country that you admittedly dislike, and insist on participation in its political affairs, unless you deny

¹ J. L. Talmon claims to have 'discovered' the significance of Rosa Luxemburg's anti-nationalism and to see in it a peculiarly Jewish quality. 'The attempt to rescue Rosa Luxemburg for Jewish causes is not new, though it is lamentably absurd. In deference to his 'discovery', passing reference should therefore be made to this third Jewish force tugging at the essential Rosa, alongside the 'democratic' Marxists and orthodox Communism.

the very basis of the opposition which your presence creates?

People like Rosa Luxemburg, Parvus, and Marchlewski brought into German politics a quality hitherto unknown. It was not a matter of different policy or original views, but was what Trotsky himself called 'the Russian method'—the idea that action was of a superior order to any other facet of political life, and that it was the one and only cure for social rheumatism. For those who felt like this, the ability to align themselves with German methods became a measure of their patience. Parvus, the most impatient and untrammelled of them all, gave up after fifteen years of intermittent attempts to galvanize the SPD and went to amass a fortune in Turkey until the war opened up new possibilities of action for him. Rosa Luxemburg was more self-disciplined. In spite of intense frustration, she pursued her efforts to influence events in Germany, though even she retired for lengthy periods. Besides, Rosa was more closely involved with Germany than any of the others—Parvus, Radek, Marchlewski, Jogiches; and her contribution as a revolutionary in Germany is therefore unique.

Behavioural scientists have a yearning to create types, while historians study and seek comfort in the unique—this is the greatest difference between them. This divergence in approach becomes relevant here as soon as we confront the history of Rosa Luxemburg with the general problem of the intellectual in politics, which has fascinated modern sociology. That we may have been approaching the possibility of some such generalization may well have become obvious. Yet the surface appearance of felicity in applying the general concept is deceptive. Everyone who has analysed the intellectual has seen his participation in politics as something which perverts his natural functions. Thus 'absence of direct responsibility for practical affairs' is the intellectual's hallmark—and so the intellectual is defined as a deviant product of modern capitalist industrialization, with all its emphasis on achievement and role-differentiation.¹ How does someone like Rosa Luxemburg, whose primary interest was the analysis and amendment of these capitalist processes, fit into the category of unpractical? Schumpeter's definition clearly accents the cultural preoccupation of the intellectual. More recent analysis, specifically concerned

¹ See Josef Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, New York 1950, p. 147. See also below, p. 438, for precisely this accusation against Rosa Luxemburg in her polemics with trade-union leaders.

with the intellectual in politics, provides little more help. He is either the propagator of chiliasm—the millennium on earth—or the apologist for hard-boiled and practical conspirators—*le trahison des clercs*—the scribbling admirer of Leninism seeking sublimation.¹ Perhaps the most accurate characterization is the purely negative one: ‘he who innovates is not heard; he who is heard does not innovate’—though this sad verdict is the product of research into the limited and specific problem of modern bureaucracy.² As we shall see, Rosa Luxemburg’s tentative participation in the ‘modern’ bureaucracy of the SPD ended in failure and contempt—so far the analogy holds. Similarly the SDKPiL—Rosa’s ‘ideal’ party—was deliberately orientated towards correct theoretical formulations, and practical problems were not, before 1905, allowed to restrict the preferred intellectual activity of the leading élite. But Rosa Luxemburg’s reluctance to participate in practical work was limited to the most obvious manifestations of bureaucracy; far from abstaining from practical affairs, she not only kept her writing strictly aligned to political immediacies but also participated in the highly practical events of revolution whenever the opportunity presented itself. To this extent the abstentional definition of intellectuals applies much less to her than to people like Plekhanov and Kautsky. Rosa Luxemburg accepted politics at their face value; she never self-consciously promoted culture in opposition to politics and only occasionally tried to subordinate political activity to considerations of conceptual neatness. Politics are analysed, not beautified; there is no apology for mud and blood. She recognized that revolutionary politics brought confusion and much personal unpleasantness; violence was necessary, an instrument—yet not a proper subject for cult worship as it was for Sorel, and even for the Bolsheviks, with their specific dialectical ‘theory’ of terror, alias the dictatorship of the proletariat. Either we must create a special sub-category of intellectuals for her and her peers,—and run the risk that it will still prove neither exhaustive nor exclusive—or we must handle the ‘type’ with care and reservations.³ The contrast between influence and power

¹ See the collection of writings in G. B. de Huszar, *The Intellectuals: A controversial portrait*, Glencoe (Illinois) 1959.

² See R. K. Merton, ‘The Intellectual and Modern Public Bureaucracy’ *Social Theory and Social Structure*, Glencoe (Illinois) 1957.

³ There is a school of (political) thought in America which has rescued the intellectual from his sociological *cul-de-sac* and enthroned him as the originator

which Rosa Luxemburg raised to a unique relevance, is not quite the same as that between practical politicians and intellectuals. The latter are rarely front-line casualties in battle.

The politics of influence failed in the Second International—together with the whole International itself; power was still the centrepiece of all politics, whether reactionary, reformist, or revolutionary. The question was, who should wield it, and Leninism's most enduring lesson was that it should, and could, be wielded by intellectuals—not of course scribblers or apologists, but those political intellectuals like Rosa Luxemburg and himself whose choice lay between influencing those with power and displacing them. It is here that both Mao and the leaders of the new Afro-Asian countries trace their legitimate ancestry back to Lenin, and that Khrushchev's impressive bureaucracy had less to offer. Subversion is one thing, but positive revolution requires the fusion of ideology and power.

Rosa Luxemburg was primarily a journalist, a pamphleteer. She wrote fast and with few corrections; as with any good practitioner, her work was self-generating so that she did not always know at the beginning of the article what she would say at the end. This is why so many of the really interesting flashes of insight come not in the main argument but are incidental illustrations. Her style was demanding: long sentences with a logic of their own which often have to be read two or three times to do full justice to her intentions. She was much misquoted—her critics found it all too easy to pick out gaudy daubs from the composition of a balanced whole. Though she could write simply and popularly—

and carrier of industrial and political modernization in backward countries. This theory works back from mid-twentieth-century nationalism in underdeveloped countries to the Bolshevik revolution—and makes the latter merely the first of the current nationalist and modernizing revolutions. The intellectuals are thus nationalists above all, and Marxism exists only in the mind—and on paper. Lenin, Stalin, Nasser, Nkrumah, and Nehru differ only in method. See John H. Kautsky, *Political Change in Underdeveloped Countries*, 2nd ed., New York 1963, pp. 44–90, and references cited there.

Another way out of the difficulty is to broaden the category of intellectual almost to the point of emasculation: an intellectual now becomes 'any person with an *advanced modern education*, and the intellectual concerns and skills ordinarily associated with it'. (Edward Shils, 'The Intellectuals in the political development of the new states', *World Politics*, April 1960, Vol. XII, No. 3, p. 333.) The author of this definition, admittedly qualified in a footnote limiting its adequacy to conditions of severe underdevelopment, claims the authority of no less a writer than Max Weber and his thesis of 'diplomatisation' in modern society.

more so in Polish than in German—the elaborate use of classical illusions, metaphors, and even quotations, typical of the period and abounding also in the writings of Franz Mehring and Karl Liebknecht, necessarily limited her faithful circle of readers to the party intellectuals. But she reached a wider audience through her speeches, and it is on these that her best prose was expended—and on the letters; she was a better communicant in private than in public, to one person rather than to the lowest common factor of the crowd.

Unlike Kautsky, she had no interest in expounding Marxism for its own sake—not even with a view to making it popular. The only object of quotations from Marx was to illustrate a particular political point. But here again she differed from people like Lenin, who constantly searched the works of the master for concrete evidence in support of a current view of a political argument. She treated Marxism and Marx much as Trotsky did—as a view of life, a technique, and the great man himself primarily as a superb publicist. What she admired in Marx was not so much his intellectual achievement—which she took for granted as a *necessary* even more than an *excellent* analysis of reality—but the forcefulness of his style. Though she never produced any *over-all* comment or criticism of Marx, she repeatedly asserted that many of his practical conclusions were limited in value as merely the product of his period. Thus she was able to fly in the face of specific doctrine from time to time. On the national question she brought Marx up to date; by using his own techniques she arrived at precisely the opposite conclusion. In *The Accumulation of Capital*, too, though she did not reverse his analysis, she altered both the method and the impact. And in her private correspondence she readily recommended her friends to read Marx for the ‘freshness of his style and the daring of his thoughts, the refusal to take anything for granted’, rather than for the value of his conclusions. His mistakes in political analysis were self-evident, indeed inevitable; that was why she never bothered to engage in any lengthy critique.

The analyst of political theory comes up against a major difficulty here—one that is usually abstracted or played down. Comparing ideas is difficult enough *in vacuo*—even when they are specifically related through deliberate comment on or criticism of each other. When it comes to differences of personality and method, the difficulty of confrontation is greatly enhanced. Nor is it solved by

explaining these differences extraneously; they have to be borne in mind and used continuously as an organic part of the comparison. Let us take Rosa Luxemburg, Kautsky, and Lenin. The last was a disciplined thinker, acute rather than profound, who used theory and system sparingly—enough to ‘prove’ his points and no more: not a word, not a thought wasted; disciplined combat with just the right application of ideas and analysis to make what was generally a simple, political point. That is why Lenin’s theories have been so useful—imperialism, organization, the state. In contrast to Lenin, Kautsky was a theorist by disposition, who could hardly handle discrete facts without at once knitting them into a theory. Thus he produced a theory for every occasion—and in the process vulgarized theory into a convenient and respectable cloak for every tactical adjustment, objective or subjective. Rosa Luxemburg was more original than either. She always overshot her limited political objective; her argument bursts with assumptions, ideas, and hints, sometimes supporting it but occasionally running far beyond and contrary to her intentions. Her mind was a complicated machine; once stimulated, it generated its own energy and ranged way beyond the original problem. Consequently we find things in unexpected places. Like Lenin, her basic theories were few; like Kautsky, however, she subordinated tactics to basic theoretical propositions. Comparing Rosa with Kautsky is like comparing a compound equation with a host of simple ones; compared with Lenin she was atomic fission instead of fusion—releasing energy rather than compressing it. A three-way comparison (or four, or five) thus becomes almost impossible.

But this did not mean that she was a Marxist only *in partibus*. To her what we call Marxism—the combination of history, economics, sociology, and philosophy into one over-all process of analysis—was unchallengeable reality, and Marx merely the best interpreter of reality of them all. She used the word ‘Marxism’ rarely; in many ways it was a meaningless term. This was in the tradition of the Second International, where Social Democracy was the modern term for the contemporary and political application of the laws first postulated by Marx.¹

¹ The exclusive identification of revolutionary Socialism with Marx and Marxism and the consequent re-establishment of Marx’s pre-eminence was really a short-circuit process created by the Bolshevik revolution. It happened that Lenin was particularly faithful to the works of Marx. In Germany, too, the foundation of the Communist Party in December 1918 was seen as a

Here, too, Rosa Luxemburg was the product of her times—the optimistic pre-war world of peace and progress. Her personality as much as her political ideas made her the champion of active revolution. Imperialism, with all its overtones of violence and inescapable confrontation of classes, was the hand-maiden of her obsession with the self-satisfaction and immobility of German Social Democracy. War was objectively inevitable but subjectively beyond imagination—and no one, except perhaps Lenin, was more surprised than she when one day it broke out and engulfed pre-war Social Democracy. For her, peace and progress were not the usual bourgeois notions of economic development and a growing liberalism, but a Socialism strong enough to withstand the impact of international war and reassert the fundamental necessity of class conflict against it. Thus before 1914 wars no longer had their primeval overriding power of pre-emption; their impact was now limited by the requirements of the class struggle. All this of course proved an illusion, in 1914 as in 1939; and when the illusion was exposed the basis of her world collapsed. Unlike Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg was acute and revolutionary enough to realize that the collapse was final. She drew the consequences. But she herself had been too much part of this world. She survived the political collapse of Social Democracy, but the revolutionary requirements of the future, the kind of personality that built the modern Soviet Union, that created twelve years of the thousand-year Third

reconnection to a tradition that had been broken in the Second International. (The analogy is actually Rosa Luxemburg's: see below, pp. 755 f.) But this deliberate attempt to reconnect directly to Marx was only a reaction to the failure of the Second International. In 1914 such a need was still unthinkable. In the Second International those who preached and popularized specific Marxism were few and isolated—Plekhanov, Kautsky, Mehring, and some others. Plekhanov particularly complained again and again of the reluctance of his fellow Socialists to take an interest in philosophy. For the rest, the relationship between Social-Democratic policy and Marxism was tenuous and purely historical; a debt that only needed formal acknowledgement on a few solemn occasions.

According to this view, therefore, the enthronement of Marx on the Left after 1918 was at first an incidental part of the formal act of negating the immediate past. The notion of textually confronting pre-war Social Democracy with Marxism and evaluating the former in accordance with the extent to which it departed from the latter, was not really a contemporary exercise but the later contribution of Communist history *as a form of* current political combat. The revisionist controversy was perhaps the one significant exception, when a contemporary confrontation was undertaken. Perhaps *this* is why the revisionist controversy has been continuously invested with such excessive importance. It would be interesting to pursue this point with further research. It is, for instance, striking that from the whole range of Marx's work certain parts only were widely read and quoted over and over again in the period before the war, while other important works remained entirely neglected.

Reich, even the socially inclined conservatives of England, France, and America—these were alien monsters to Rosa Luxemburg. Her brilliant and devoted efforts during the German revolution were still no more than an attempt to deal with the problems of a new world by using the best tools and precepts of the old. In the last resort the relevance of her ideas to the world of today must mean a return to the basically optimistic enthusiasms of the Second International.

Probably Lenin's single most remarkable achievement was his confrontation of the Socialist collapse of 1914. He saw it as a constructive beginning, not a sad end. In this he was alone. It does not make him very lovable, but it certainly made him great. He never had to look back, either in sorrow or in (genuine) anger.

II

POLAND—THE EARLY YEARS

1871-1890

THIS story moves back and forth across the eastern half of Europe, from St. Petersburg to Berlin. But we must begin in the East, with the murder of Tsar Alexander II. His assassin, Ignacy Hryniewiecki, was a Pole, working for a Russian terrorist organization. The heart of the old kingdom of Poland had been incorporated in the Russian empire since the end of the eighteenth century. There had been several disastrous attempts to prise it loose, the last of which, the revolt of 1863-4, brought about an intense campaign of Russification in the intellectual and administrative life of Poland. In its dealings with the Poles the Russian government was never as efficient and thorough as that of Prussia, but it was more brutal and consequently much more notorious. The Russian autocracy was the outstanding target for liberal and left-wing European indignation, including Karl Marx's.

A combination of brutality and inefficiency creates effective opposition. For some of its subjects and for nearly all of Europe Tsarist Russia was, throughout the whole of the nineteenth century, the symbol of obscure, rigid, and ever less effective reaction. But it continued to be viable as a power factor in Europe, still enjoying the apparent loyalty of most of its subjects, especially when compared with the empires of China or Turkey with their stiff and ancient outer shell whose living inside was visibly rotting away. At least there were some changes and attempts at self-renewal in Russia. The second half of the nineteenth century brought a great revival of Russian studies in the whole of central Europe and this linked up with an intellectual fermentation in Russia itself. Some of the greatest writers of the age were working in Russia at this time, not only producing escapist and obscure literature but also social novels which described and took issue with the world in which they lived. In the 1860s the Russian government, under the impact of western ideas and of the buffets

sustained in the Crimean War, put a more liberal policy into operation.

Russian Poland during this period benefited especially from this loosening of the reins. On the one hand there was intense Russification, the precautionary destruction of a national élite after the 1863-4 insurrection to ensure that there would never be another attempt. All the power was centred in the hands of the governor-general whose rule was more or less equivalent to permanent martial law. Russian became the official language of the country and a host of Russian officials moved into 'Vistulaland'—even the name of Poland was abolished. In 1869 the Polish university in Warsaw became a Russian one. Banks, clubs, and other manifestations of local economic and cultural life were either abolished or Russified. The Polish governing classes lost their jobs and with them the reason for existence.

However, Poland benefited more than proportionately from the economic boom in the Russian empire. The industrial development of Poland proceeded at a greater pace than that of Russia. As a refuge from the destruction of national aspirations, Polish industrialists and businessmen concentrated on the exploitation of the enormous Russian market, on increasing their ability to supply it. This development, at first unconscious, later a valued prerogative of Polish industry, was later analysed and explained by Rosa Luxemburg in *The Industrial Development of Poland* and became one of the main pegs on which those who had a vested interest against Polish independence could hang their views.

The economic development of Poland continued more or less steadily throughout the whole of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, necessarily affected by the periodic economic crises that shook Russia but always in advance of the rest of that country. Of course comparison with Russian conditions is one thing; with European conditions, particularly in those countries—Germany and Austria—that contained a settled Polish population, quite another. By the beginning of the twentieth century the average wage of an industrial worker in Russian Poland was still a quarter lower than that of a Polish coal-miner in Silesia, though he in turn was the lowest paid worker in Prussia, well behind the German workers.¹

¹ J. Grabieć, *Współczesna Polska w cyfrach i faktach* (Contemporary Poland in Figures and Facts), Cracow 1911, p. 10.

So the Polish workers in the mines of Upper Silesia or in the oilfields of Austrian Galicia were economically better off than their counterparts in Russian Poland. Industrial development is always relative, at least in its effect on the people involved; perhaps the difference between the economic situation in East and West Poland provided just the incentive to make Russian Poland the motor of industrial development in Russia. In many respects the industrial revolution in Poland had all the aspects of savage pioneering of England fifty years earlier; Łódź was justly called the Manchester of the East. And with economic development came a new form of pressure for social change, socialist rather than merely political or nationalist.

In 1881 Tsar Alexander II was murdered. Already, in the latter part of his reign, his government had become disillusioned with the liberal experiment. His death brought a stronger reaction. The new Tsar, Alexander III, and his advisers, drew the most convenient conclusion from the death of his predecessor: force must be answered with force. The social forces of reaction were mobilized to assist the police repression of terrorist and revolutionary movements. This mobilization, coupled with the new emphasis on Russian national supremacy over the minorities in the empire and on the Slav 'mission', affected all the minority nations and particularly the most dispersed and vulnerable, the Jews. It was the beginning of the great period of Jewish emigration, of Zionism and Jewish socialism. Thus apart from any Utopia of independence, one of the answers to discrimination was a re-emphasis on the distinct character of these minorities, the demand for a greater means of national self-expression and the right to an equal, if distinct, life within the country. In the case of the Jews this trend was especially strong, since there was no possibility of national independence except by 'swimming'—away to Palestine. The hope of finding salvation within a better Russia was bound to be given special emphasis among them. Even before any specifically Socialist movement emerged among the Jews, there was a division between the Zionists and those who wanted to fight for improvement at home and who later became supporters of the *Bund*. The issue was quite sharp. While the great centres of Zionism were in Russia itself, the main centre of Jewish Socialism was Vilna, the capital of Lithuania, a mixed town where no single nationality dominated to the same extent as in Russia or Poland proper, though

numerically the Poles were in a majority. The city, like Jerusalem, was the centre of aspirations for a troïka of discordant nationalities, living together in uneasy harmony. Both Zionism and Socialism were ideologies perfected and polished abroad and brought back to Russia from the West. Meantime this nascent split in Russian Jewry was superimposed on the older issue of assimilation, and the conflict between *Khassidim* and *Maskilim*, between extreme religious orthodoxy and a more social and cultural revival.

From 1880 the opposition to the existing state of affairs became broader and more radical. Oppression was felt, no longer only as a national factor, but as a political and, by some, a social one; the remedy was general social change. Naturally enough it was this movement that was most susceptible to the 'evangelization' of Marxism.

Economic and political influences do not always move in step, either chronologically or geographically. The satisfactions of economic development and the consequent improvement in the standard of living in Russian Poland was one thing, and the frustration among all the politically articulate sections of the population in the last two decades of the nineteenth century was another. After the end of the liberal era, there was a feeling that only the overthrow of Tsarism could end the unsatisfactory system, that reform or persuasion was hopeless because the government was not amenable to agreed change. But as far as the bulk of the population was concerned, the dissatisfaction did not find any immediate or obvious form of political expression. A particular sense of hopelessness descended on the Jewish population. Rosa Luxemburg herself described the state of mind among thinking Russians of the day in her introduction to Korolenko's *History of my Contemporary* which she wrote while she was in a German prison during the First World War:

... After the murder of Alexander II a period of rigid hopelessness overcame the whole of Russia. . . . The lead roofs [prisons] of Alexander III's government contained the silence of the grave. Russian society fell into the grip of hopeless resignation, faced as it was by the end of all hopes for peaceful reform, and the apparent failure of all revolutionary movements. In such an atmosphere there could only emerge metaphysical and mystical tendencies. . . .¹

¹ Vladimir Korolenko, *Die Geschichte meines Zeitgenossen*, Berlin 1919, Vol. I, pp. 47-48.

In the 1880s the dominant revolutionary party in Russia were the Populists and a terrorist organization which grew out of it, the *Narodnaya Volya* (People's Will). Its ideas about the future—a form of national regeneration through the peasantry—were vague and, in Marxist terms, utopian. However, the terrorist organization relieved itself of the necessity of political and economic analysis by concentrating on the technical means of eliminating prominent members of the administration, as symbols of the hated Tsarist régime. For a time the reputation of the 'People's Will' was very considerable, a series of raids and assassinations gave it an aura of success, and the Polish social revolutionary movements of the time were glad to co-operate with it as closely as possible. In spite of this association, in which the Poles ceded seniority and supremacy to the Russian group, Polish groups like *Proletariat* as well as *Lud Polski*, the 'Polish People', wanted from the start to create a mass base instead of relying exclusively on individual terrorist achievements. The Russians had the simpler, more romantic notion that once you removed the hard crust of autocracy, which bottled up the natural development potential of human beings, the possibilities of liberty and a better life would emerge by themselves. Like most movements strongly tinged with anarchism, the 'People's Will' believed in the essential goodness of human nature once it was 'liberated'. Such idealism could not long survive the harsh continued impact of reality, but the very process of its disillusion and decay brought at least one famous recruit to Marxism, Georgii Plekhanov. The Poles were for once more sanguine from the start.

The *Proletariat* party was founded by Ludwik Waryński, a magnetic personality who travelled all over Poland (Russian as well as Austrian) and also spent some time in Switzerland, at that time the intellectual power station from which East European revolutionary movements were supplied. Waryński returned to Warsaw from Geneva in 1881, the year of Alexander II's death, and by 1882 had founded the *Proletariat* which can be described as the first Polish Socialist party.¹

In common with the general anarchist aversion from political action in Europe at the time, Waryński and his friends articulated,

¹ See M. Mazowiecki, *Historia polskiego ruchu socjalistycznego w zaborze rosyjskim* (History of the Socialist Movement in Russian Poland), Cracow 1904, pp. 54 ff.

and took back to Poland with them, a predilection for economic rather than purely political thinking. For the time being they urged the primacy of economic problems; hence the interest in mass support. Among this small band there was little time for or interest in the problem of Polish independence. But right from the start Waryński found himself up against the strong if inchoate force of Polish patriotism. To buttress his own programme, he argued that the well-to-do classes in Poland, interested only in profits, were not revolutionary; in their absence there were no real revolutionary factors making for Polish independence. The workers, on the other hand, the only truly revolutionary group, were concerned primarily with their own state of subjection and were at least as much exploited by their own capitalists as by the Russian autocracy.

Simultaneously with the *Proletariat*, the 'Polish People' was organized by Bolesław Limanowski who deliberately took for his organization the name that had been used by the first Polish group tinged with embryonic socialist tendencies. This had been founded in Portsmouth in 1835, its members—mostly soldiers and intellectuals—having emigrated to England after the insurrection of 1830-1. There for some years they had existed precariously as a separate little community on the south coast and marginally influenced early English and continental Socialism. Where Limanowski was an imaginative writer, an exciting personality, Waryński was a quiet and close organizer. Waryński played down the traditional romantic element in the aims of his *Proletariat* party. For the purpose of a revolutionary movement based on mass support, the workers had to be rallied round familiar, everyday problems. This precluded the appeal to national sentiment. For a workers' party, immediate betterment of conditions and rights was important, not the theoretical liberation of the human spirit or the liberation of an abstract 'nation'. Limanowski on the other hand gave greater priority to the national question. He believed that no Socialist development could take place as long as one nation oppressed another, as long as Russia was occupying and exploiting Poland. From the weakness of Russian populism, particularly from the writings of Peter Lavrov, he drew the conclusion that the Poles could not afford to rely too much on Russian revolutionary initiatives. Socialism and patriotism were anyhow not incompatible. Consequently the movement must comprise not only workers and

peasants, but intellectuals as well, especially the younger generation. He expressed these ideas in a pamphlet published in Geneva in 1881.¹ In pursuing this policy he claimed freedom of action for his Polish organization, and the right to decide its own policies, though he was willing to collaborate on equal terms with any Russian group or party.

The ideas of both groups, *Proletariat* and 'Polish People', were embryonic; they were associations of people with ideas rather than parties with programmes—better still, they were followers grouped around an individual personality. It is important to stress the personal aspect in these nineteenth-century Russian and Polish movements. Later history, a back projection from important political events into the history of ideas—the descent and transformation of ideas from person to person—makes both the cohesion and the ideas themselves much too formal. Thus a person who joined one of these groups could in the present wisdom be said to have adhered to one programme in preference to another. This conception makes little sense and does not correspond to reality. If a personality cult has any historical meaning, it is precisely in the emergence of these small revolutionary groups or sects. None the less, the emergence of two different trends in Polish Socialist movements at this time is worth emphasizing—even over-emphasizing—because here is foreshadowed in embryo the major difference between the two schools of Polish Socialist thought which would divide them until after the First World War. The problem of Polish independence was always to be the main bone of contention between the two Polish Socialist parties; it was present from the start. Unlike most of the Marxist arguments in the twenty-five years preceding the First World War, this was not a matter of tactics or even of Marxist theory; but a profoundly personal and violent difference in approach to a question that had run like a deep red gash through the entire history of Polish life for over a hundred years. Waryński tacitly admitted this problem when he said: "There is only one nation more unfortunate than the Polish nation; and that is the nation of proletarians."²

In 1884 Waryński's *Proletariat* party in Poland and *Narodnaya Volya*, the Russian 'People's Will', actually signed an agreement.³

¹ *Patryotyzm i socjalizm*, Geneva 1881.

² Quoted by M. K. Dzięwanowski, *The Communist Party of Poland*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1959, p. 15.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Waryński himself had been arrested in 1883 and the alliance with the 'People's Will' was carried through by his second-in-command, Kunicki. Conforming to the general—perhaps inevitable—tendency, all top decisions on theory, strategy, and organization were taken abroad, in this case in Paris.¹

In this joint programme an autonomy of operational control was reserved to each party within its own territory, Russia and Poland. The *Proletariat* party accepted the Russian formula of 'economic in addition to political terror in various forms'. Both parties were to consider themselves under the tactical leadership of the Russian group—at least until after the revolution. Since there was to be free interchange of action between Poland and Russia and free movement of operatives, the division of responsibility became largely a matter of geographical accident. The main effort of the 'People's Will' was in St. Petersburg.² As a result of this flexible exchange of personnel a number of Polish revolutionaries remained permanently in Russia, and later figured among the membership of the more orthodox Socialist organizations.

The *Proletariat* party succeeded in organizing a series of strikes in Poland in April 1883, including a mass strike near Warsaw. The government used troops against this strike and, during the next two years, the new 'tough' policy of the authorities resulted in large-scale arrests. There had been several attempted assassinations of police agents and gendarmes, and with these assassinations as a particular excuse, many of the leading members of the *Proletariat* were imprisoned by court sentence or by administrative order. Four of the leaders—Bardowski, Kunicki (who had signed the agreement with the 'People's Will'), Ossowski, and Pietrusiński—

¹ Paris and, to a lesser extent, London were and remained the traditional centres of nationalist emigration. For almost 100 years many of the Polish émigrés had found their spiritual homes there, and it is interesting to observe that some of the birth pangs of Zionism too, for instance the decision of Ben Jehuda never to speak another word in any language but Hebrew, took place in Paris.

In contrast, the main threads of Russian and Polish Socialist activity abroad came in the 1870s to be centred more in Switzerland, particularly Geneva and Zürich. There was naturally a certain amount of antipathy between these two centres of different revolutionary activity—apart from the inevitable disputes within each group itself. Later the Russian Socialist emigration became dispersed to France, Germany, Austria, and London, but Paris remained the traditional centre for nationalist emigration.

² For this programme see Feliks Kon, *Escape from the Gallows* (London 1933), Chapter 1; Res (Feliks Perl), *Dzieje ruchu socjalistycznego w zaborze rosyjskim* (History of the Socialist Movement in Russian Poland), Warsaw 1910, Vol. I, p. 42.

were hanged on 28 January 1886 in the Warsaw Citadel, fortress and prison and the symbol of Russian domination.¹ Waryński himself was sentenced in the same year to sixteen years' hard labour in the notorious Schlüsselburg fortress near St. Petersburg, where he died three years later in 1889. Among those condemned to long sentences of penal servitude was Feliks Kon, one of the few *Proletariat* leaders to return after many years in prison, who was destined to play an important part in the Polish Socialist Party and eventually in the creation of the Polish Communist Party after the First World War.

Polish Socialism now had its first martyrs, a necessary form of self-perpetuation in any revolutionary movement. Most of the names of these early Socialists in Poland have disappeared in the relative obscurity arranged for them by their later, more 'orthodox' Marxist successors, though in the last few years they have been honourably excavated.² It is the particular fate of any vanguard, mostly groping its way without a complete theoretical formulation of first principles, to fall into obscurity near the entrance to the revolutionary pantheon precisely because later followers are more successful, and more explicit as well. On the other hand, if there had been no Social Democracy of Poland and Lithuania, no Polish Socialist party, the first *Proletariat* and the 'Polish People' would have been largely forgotten. Both wings, Left and Right, claimed their ancestry from the first 'great' *Proletariat*; a fact which made its history a bone of contention for a long time.

The arrests and trials, and the particularly savage sentences meted out, effectively broke up the *Proletariat* party. Among the few who escaped arrest were Szymon Dickstein and Stanisław Mendelson, both of whom became important Socialists. In spite of its wish, *Proletariat* had never succeeded in being a mass movement. Out of the remains of the membership, three small groups continued to function, the so-called 'Second *Proletariat*', the Union of Polish Workers, and the Association of Workers, the last an offshoot of the Second *Proletariat*, determined to break with the terroristic methods of the 'People's Will'. Unlike the national

¹ Parts of the Citadel and its notorious Pavilion X—the political prison—still exist today. In the summer of 1963 a memorial exhibition of photographs and documents relating to the period 1863–1914 was held there.

² See for example the contributions in *Z Pola Walki*, 1963, Nos. 1/2 (21–22). Almost the whole number is devoted to the significance of *Proletariat* in Polish Socialist history (articles pp. 16–149, and discussion pp. 150–286).

rising of 1863-4, the activities and destruction of the *Proletariat* party caused hardly a ripple on the surface of Polish life; indeed, most Poles outside Warsaw were probably unaware that it existed. The revolutionary vacuum, the political silence of Russia, now covered Poland as well; for a time the Tsar ruled his extended family, the Empire, in a hush of surface deference.

When Waryński was sentenced in 1886, a Warsaw student called Rosa Luxemburg, not yet fifteen years old and already connected with dissident student circles in Warsaw, was probably feverish with excitement and anger. She had been born on 5 March 1871, the youngest of five children, three boys and two girls.¹ Zamość, province of Lublin, in the flat agricultural area of south-eastern Poland, was then a large town, but of declining importance, overshadowed by Lublin to the north. More than one-third of the town's population was Jewish, one of the highest proportions in the country.² But it was not the 'poverty-stricken place with a population of low cultural level' which Rosa's biographers describe.³ In fact, Zamość had long been a town of importance under its local lords, the Zamoyskis, big landowners with great power and influence. Under Austrian rule (in the first partition of Poland) until 1809, the district finally became Russian in 1815. Zamość was thus at the cultural crossroads, and Russification was better resisted there than elsewhere in the north and east. Nor was Jewish life 'narrowly fanatic, out of the way, a backward world of resignation and greed, obscurantism, dirt and poverty, a rotting morass'.⁴ On the contrary, Zamość had a Jewish community of great importance, a particular kind of Jewish middle-class atmosphere graced by a setting of architectural splendour—a majestic

¹ Many sources say 1870, including Luise Kautsky, Rosa's close friend (see *Ein Gedenkbuch*, p. 8); also H. Roland-Holst, *Rosa Luxemburg: ihr Leben und Wirken*, Zürich 1937, p. 5. The error may be due to the fact that for a long time Rosa Luxemburg used false documents which made her out to be older than in fact she was. (See letter to Henriette Roland-Holst, 30 January 1907: 'Thank you and Rik heartily for your birthday card which made me laugh; my "official" date of birth is in fact false—I am not as old as all that! Unlike any decent person I do not have a genuine birth certificate, but an "acquired" and "corrected" one. . . .') H. Roland-Holst, *op. cit.*, p. 229.) Rosa Luxemburg herself gave 1871 in her *curriculum vitae* submitted to the University of Zürich (see below, p. 63). I am unable to explain the prevalence of this wrong date even among close friends, except as evidence of Rosa's reticence about herself.

² Compare the next highest figures, for Warsaw in 1876: 98,698 Jews out of a total of 307,451. *The Jewish Encyclopaedia*, Vol. XII, p. 472.

³ Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg*, p. 13. The other German biographers, Henriette Roland-Holst and Fred Oelssner, follow Frölich in this fallacy.

⁴ Frölich, *loc. cit.*

Town Hall surrounded by a late-Renaissance square complete with arcades.¹ It was a centre of the *Haskalah* movement, a reaction against the over-zealous fanaticism of the *Khassidim*; one of its most important writers was Yitskhak Leyb Peretz who was born and lived much of his life in Zamość. The Jewish community of this town was actually one of the strongest and most cultured in Poland.²

But the Luxemburg family had little or no part in this life. They had already become assimilated in the time of Rosa's grandfather. Such assimilation was more common in Zamość than elsewhere, precisely because of traditional links with Western literature and learning, an improvement on the more usual and miserable alternative of having to fall back on a surrounding Polish community of much lower culture. Already in the 1860s Jewish writers in Zamość were protesting against people who changed their name and traditional habits; this tendency to assimilation actually encouraged the rigid *Khassidist* section of the community against the *Maskilim* enlightenment.³ Rosa's parents thought and spoke Polish; her father especially took an interest in Polish affairs. According to one biographer, hers was 'one of those homes where Western culture, particularly German, was at home'.⁴ They were moderately well off—'comfortable' in middle-class terminology. The Luxemburgs lived on the main square right opposite the magnificent Town Hall with its flamboyant curving sweep of staircase. It was—and still is today—an attractive Renaissance house, one of a row, over an arcade; but inside, the stone front still gives way to wooden landings and a small dingy courtyard with a fountain.⁵ But the comfort was intermittent. On one occasion Rosa recalled that the spill for lighting the lamp in fact turned out to be the last banknote in the house.⁶ According to her friend Marchlewski, who knew her parents, the linen had to be pawned from time to time. But at best these were temporary and isolated instances. Rosa's father had

¹ Y. L. Peretz, *Bei nakht oyfn altn markt* (At night in the old market place), in *Collected Works*, (*Ale Verk fun Y. L. Peretz*), Vol. VI, p. 181.

² There is a vast Yiddish and Hebrew literature about Zamość, summarized in Y. A. Klausner, *Studies on the life and work of Y. L. Peretz*, unpublished doctoral thesis, London 1958.

³ Klausner, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁴ Frölich, p. 13. He exaggerates the German influence.

⁵ During the author's visit, the present inhabitants clamoured vociferously to be rehoused out of town.

⁶ Frölich, p. 15. Oelssner, *Rosa Luxemburg*, p. 10. She herself must have told this story.

himself been educated in Germany and managed the family timber business. He often travelled on business as far as Germany and frequently to Warsaw.

As they did not lead a consciously Jewish life, the family were thrown back largely on their own resources. There is no evidence that they had any close Polish friends. Rosa's elder brothers were educated at high school in Berlin and Bromberg (Bydgoszcz) respectively. German was spoken and read in the house, with the emphasis on German romantic writing which in those days was more common among Jews in Vienna and Berlin than in Poland. The children all had classical names—Maximilian, Josef, Anna, Rosa herself—which were as much German as Polish. The name in fact may have been Luxenburg at one time, since Rosa's first known letters use Luxenburg or Luxemburg somewhat indiscriminately and her brother, as late as 1929, was still using Luxenburg.¹ Rosa's father, Elias or Eduard Luxemburg, 'was sympathetic towards the national-revolutionary movement among the Poles, but was not politically active himself and he devoted his attention to cultural questions and particularly to the Polish school system. He was a man of considerable energy. His material well-being and his education had given him confidence. . . .'² The Jewish community of Zamość at any rate did not approve of families like the Luxemburgs; it is significant that none of the children ever played any part in Jewish movements or affairs.³

Rosa herself spoke seldom of her youth, her home, or her parents.

¹ 'Unknown letters to Robert and Mathilde Seidel' (hereafter cited as 'Seidel letters'), *Z Pola Walki*, 1959, No. 1(5), p. 67. Although the editors of *Z Pola Walki* print the signature as Rosa Luxemburg, the original, which is among the Seidel papers at the Central Library in Zürich, was signed Luxenburg. Moreover, some of Seidel's letters to Rosa Luxemburg, copies of which are also in Zürich, use the letters 'n' and 'm' indiscriminately.

² Polish sources give his name as Elias (Z *Pola Walki*, 1959, No. 1(5), p. 77, n. 33). Luise Kautsky gives Eduard (*Gedenkbuch*, p. 20), and so do the Okhrana entries at the time of her arrest in 1906 (ZHP). His original name may have been Abraham; Peretz refers to 'the only daughter, a hunchback, of A. . . . L. . . .' (Y. L. Peretz, *Collected Works*, Vol. XI, 'Mayne Zikhroynes', p. 73.) Luise Kautsky also makes Rosa the youngest of eight children instead of five. There is at least a suspicion of some 'adjustment' of Rosa's background. Frölich and Oelssner, both orthodox Marxists, would consider it progressive for anyone to 'overcome' an orthodox religious background. It was probably not quite as 'comfortable' or as assimilated as they make out. Rosa certainly knew a little Yiddish, though she refused to speak it. Frölich met at least one of Rosa's brothers personally in connection with his work on her literary remains; he thus had the opportunity to learn about her background at first hand.

³ See J. Shatzky 'Der Bilbul . . .' ('The Deceiver'), *Yivo Bleter*, Journal of the Yiddish Scientific Institute, Vol. 36 (1952), p. 331.

There are a few incidental references in some of her letters, and she had a propensity for mildly Jewish jokes and occasional Jewish expressions. But any self-consciously Jewish atmosphere grated on her at once. The attachment to her family, though considerable, was very private; her letters are singularly bare of any expression of sentiment.¹

Even less is known about Rosa's mother, Line, born Löwenstein. Her brother Bernhard, Rosa's uncle, was said to have been a Rabbi.² Frölich says that she 'exercised considerable influence on the development of the children. She was a great reader, not only of the Bible, but also German and Polish classical literature, and there was almost a glut of Schiller in the house.' Rosa, however, seems to have rediscovered this poet only much later, with the sympathetic encouragement of Luise Kautsky. Schiller's continuous glow of romanticism was perhaps too much for a scientific but rebellious student, whose early interest in literature was largely revolutionary.³ At the height of the considerable Schiller cult among German Socialist intellectuals at the beginning of the twentieth century, both Rosa Luxemburg as well as Franz Mehring—who himself admitted that he had at one time ascribed too much revolutionary potential to Schiller—took issue publicly with what they considered his undeserved revolutionary reputation.⁴ There is no real need to grub too deeply among the literary tastes of the Luxemburg family to explain Rosa's interests; she was the type of person who would always want to fill out her knowledge of history and science with the perceptions of fiction. But she did take with her a developed critical faculty which instantly reacted to anything manufactured, excessive, or false, and anchored her own preferences firmly in the great German classics.

The only writer to whom she remained attached from early youth was Adam Mickiewicz, the major nineteenth-century Polish romantic poet. Though he was a propagandist of Polish independence, this did not diminish her admiration. Mickiewicz was to provide a rich fund of quotations for much of her Polish writing—a sure sign of approval. There is no evidence that Rosa was inter-

¹ For instance *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, pp. 80–81, dated September 1904; also Frölich, p. 15. She opened out only to Jogiches.

² Luise Kautsky, *Gedenkbuch*, p. 20.

³ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 86, n. 1.

⁴ See Rosa Luxemburg's commentary during the Schiller festival, *NZ*, 1904/5, Vol. II, pp. 163 ff. For Mehring, see Josef Schleifstein, *Franz Mehring*, Berlin (East) 1959, p. 146. See also above, p. 29.

ested in or read much Russian during her youth, though she clearly mastered the language as a child.

It is tempting but not meaningful to draw too many conclusions from the comfortable shut-in family existence in the Luxemburg household. The cultural, rather isolated pattern provided no local roots outside the immediate family. These family links were maintained throughout Rosa's life. She remained on good, if not very intimate, terms with all of them; there was no deliberate renunciation like that of many Russian revolutionaries. A letter in which she refers to her father's death expresses a rather passive regret that she had not had the chance to see more of him in his last years; life and the Second International had all too rapidly gobbled up the years.¹ But in another letter she speaks of being 'completely knocked out' by her father's death, 'unable to communicate with a soul for a long long period from which I have only just recovered'. However, this letter was to an elderly lady, the mother of a close friend, with whom Rosa's communication was almost deliberately sentimental; she may perhaps have exaggerated the intensity of her feeling.² She certainly had a bad conscience. After her mother's death in 1897 her father—perhaps with a premonition that he too had not long to live—had announced his urgent desire to come to Berlin to see her. It was the summer of 1898. The Bernstein controversy was boiling up and Rosa's career depended on her contribution; besides, she wanted to meet Leo Jogiches who was still confined to Zürich. Reluctantly she temporized with her father and this visit never took place; she spent a few weeks with him in Germany just before his death.³

But she repeatedly met all three of her brothers and her sister after she left Poland, and did not hesitate to use her elder brother's house and help during her illegal stay in Warsaw during the 1906 revolution. A niece, daughter of a brother who emigrated to England, stayed with her for some months in 1910. We know that until the war she was in correspondence, sometimes clandestine, with her family, though none of the letters exists.⁴ Up to the end of 1899, her first year in Germany, she sometimes asked for money

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 129: letter to Hans Diefenbach, 27 August 1917, from prison.

² Letter to Minna Kautsky dated 30 December 1900, in Kautsky Archives, IISH.

³ Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1962, No. 1(17), pp. 178 ff.

⁴ See Bibliography, p. 867

and they sent what they could spare—often pathetically little. But they neither understood nor supported her political views and activities, even though they no longer attempted to dissuade her after she left home in 1889. In fact the relationship was a surprisingly easy one. They respected her evident success in her chosen career and her manifest talents—the respect any family pays to professional achievements. In return they were always sure of a welcome on their way through Berlin. It was a sensible middle-class relationship, a matter of arrangements and courtesies rather than passion or intimacy. Rosa's close attachments were elsewhere: with her close political friends and their wives, with the very few people whom she loved. At the same time her brothers and sisters were the only ones whose relationship to Rosa did not need to be cemented politically. She always compartmented her life more rigidly than most political émigrés were able to do. Indeed, she rather despised those who muddled their private and political lives, like Krichevskii and her friend Adolf Warszawski.¹

In 1873, when Rosa was two and a half years old, the family moved to Warsaw. It had always been her father's wish to move to the capital, partly to benefit from the more cosmopolitan life and business opportunities, partly to give his children a better education. The family fortune had varied in accordance with the periodic slumps and booms of the Zamość region, and a period of prosperity finally decided the move. At first things were difficult for them in Warsaw. They lived in an old apartment house where the outlook on the world was confined to a few high windows and the clatter of all the other tenants reverberated through the building.²

Shortly after arriving in Warsaw, Rosa developed a disease of the hip which was wrongly diagnosed as tuberculosis and as a result wrongly treated. She was more or less confined to bed for a whole year and used this period to teach herself to read and write at the early age of five. This illness resulted in a permanent deformation of the hip which caused her to walk with a slight limp for the rest of her life, though otherwise it did not prove a serious disability. As far as her elder brothers and sisters were concerned, she was the invalid in the family and as such was treated with special care and consideration. Probably this same physical disability caused

¹ See below, p. 85.

² *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 81, dated September 1904.

her interests to turn towards literature, and she is said to have translated German poems and prose into Polish at the age of nine. Her first literary attempts were sent successfully to a children's magazine in Warsaw. At least one other attempt is more interesting for posterity. In 1884, at the age of thirteen, she wrote a poem on the occasion of the visit of the German Emperor William I to Warsaw, half reverent and half sarcastic, which may have been as much a protest against her father's excessive fuss as evidence of any early anti-monarchical convictions:

Finally we shall see you, mighty man of the West,
At least, if you deign to enter our local park,
Since I don't visit at your courts.
Your honours mean nothing to me, I would have you know,
But I would like to know what you're going to chatter about.
With our 'royalty' you are supposed to be on intimate terms.
In politics I'm still an innocent lamb,
That's why I anyhow don't want to talk to you.
Just one thing I want to say to you, dear William.
Tell your wily fox Bismarck,
For the sake of Europe, Emperor of the West,
Tell him not to disgrace the pants of peace.¹

Photographs taken during this period show her as an intelligent, rather sharp and attentive girl, not conventionally pretty, dressed in the somewhat starchy clothes of a middle-class child on parade. She was and remained small and conscious of the fact, as she was always, in a good-humoured way, conscious of her physical characteristics.

In 1884, at the age of thirteen, she entered the second girls' High School in Warsaw. This was one of the best establishments of its kind in Poland, patronized largely by the children of Russian administrators, who had first call on most of the available places. (The first High School was in fact exclusively reserved for them.) Admission for Poles was difficult, for Jews even more so; the latter were normally confined to a limited quota in specially designated schools. One of the rules of all secondary schools was that lessons and conversation should be entirely in Russian and the children were not even allowed to speak Polish among themselves.

¹ The poem, originally written in Polish, is printed in German in *Gedenkbuch*, p. 26, and Roland-Holst, *Rosa Luxemburg*, p. 10. For the brief story of Rosa Luxemburg's literary remains, see Bibliography, p. 867

The *Proletariat* party was at its zenith at the time; it was largely an intellectual affair confined to the main cities, but with considerable influence among senior pupils of high schools and universities. Students were always the best intellectual tinder. During her last few years at the school Rosa Luxemburg was undoubtedly in contact with a group of illegal revolutionaries. She was fifteen when the four death sentences on the gallows—the first since 1864—were carried out. In her last year she was known to be politically active and not amenable to discipline. Consequently she was not granted the gold medal for academic achievement which her scholastic merits had earned, ‘on account of her rebellious attitude towards the authorities’.¹ But the girl who passed out top in the final exams was not only a class nuisance; by this time she was probably a fully-fledged member of one of the remaining cells of the ‘Revolutionary Party Proletariat’ which had escaped police detection, and which formed the nucleus of the Second *Proletariat*. Rosa herself wrote a form of posthumous self-criticism of *Proletariat* some years later, when she was about to enter the ‘adult’ Socialist world of German Social Democracy. She described it retrospectively as too centralized, and too much like *Narodnaya Volya* in its emphasis on terror. This marked a definite stage—Marxist self-criticism always does—in her self-conscious growing up.²

After the destruction of the original *Proletariat*, one of the few remaining personalities of the new *Proletariat* was Marcin Kasprzak who incidentally was also one of the very few workmen to rise to a position of authority in this largely intellectual party. Kasprzak came from Poznań in Prussian Poland. He was at that time working in Warsaw and bringing together in small clandestine groups those of the members of the previous *Proletariat* whom the police had not picked up. In the course of this work he met Rosa Luxemburg, and a strong personal connection was formed which was to continue until his own death on the scaffold in 1905, seventeen years later. But the police continued to be active. After two years of agitation among the students in Warsaw, Rosa Luxemburg was herself apparently threatened with arrest. She

¹ Frölich, p. 18.

² *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 1897, Vol. X, No. 10, pp. 547–56. It was, incidentally, the only article she ever wrote for this journal, which was later to become the main vehicle of revisionism. After 1898 Rosa refused even to review books for it.

was too young and inexperienced to have developed the conspiratorial mobility and secrecy of the real revolutionary. At that time she was still living at home and at the same time working openly for her revolutionary group.

There was in the years 1888–9 something of a renaissance of Socialist activity to which both the surviving *Proletariat* under Marcin Kasprzak and the Union of Polish Workers contributed. The latter had been founded at the beginning of 1889 by Julian Marchlewski, Adolf Warszawski, and Bronisław Wesółowski.¹ At the beginning, this group concentrated on the immediate needs of the workers and on purely economic demands, though later, just before it merged with other groups to form the PPS, the emphasis was once more on political activities.² Although Rosa Luxemburg was to form a life-long friendship with both Marchlewski and Warszawski, she probably knew them only casually, if at all, in Poland at this time. *Proletariat* and the Union of Polish Workers were separate organizations, and Rosa Luxemburg was firmly committed to the *Proletariat* movement.³

The next three years saw a new wave of strikes and, more significant, the first recurring demonstrations on May Day. For political reasons, the government refused to let the employers grant wage concessions—it was a period of good business—and there were several clashes with troops. A further wave of arrests followed and almost completely wiped out the Second *Proletariat* as well. The leaders of the Union of Polish Workers went abroad, some to Switzerland, others across the border to Galicia, the Polish part of the Austro-Hungarian empire which enjoyed the most liberal and also least efficient of the foreign governments. By

¹ Marchlewski wrote and was usually known under the pseudonym of Karski, Warszawski under the pseudonym of Warski, and Wesółowski as Smutny. For the next twenty years the first two particularly were referred to indiscriminately by their real names or by their pseudonyms. (Wesółowski was caught in 1894 and spent eleven years in Siberia.) It will probably be easier if, irrespective of the name used at any particular time, I confine myself only to the real name in each case. The same problem arises with many other Polish Socialists and the same principle will be adopted throughout. In those rare cases where a pseudonym came to be adopted exclusively—as with Radek or Parvus—I shall use it.

² O. B. Szmidt, *Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy: Materiały i dokumenty 1893–1904*, Moscow 1934, Vol. I, Chapter vi.

³ Frölich (p. 21) wrongly suggests that she probably took part in the founding of the new organization, 'The Polish Workers' League' (by which he presumably meant the Union of Polish Workers). The UPW was actually founded in 1889 and the evidence does not suggest much contact between the two parties. Both were small and secretive; a menace mainly in the eyes of the police. But UPW certainly had the edge over *Proletariat* in size and importance.

then, however, Rosa Luxemburg was herself no longer in Warsaw. In 1889, warned of the imminence of her own arrest, she was smuggled abroad with the assistance of her friend and mentor Marcin Kasprzak. There were regular routes of entry and departure from Russian Poland into the Polish parts of Germany and Austria; indeed the traffic of people, literature, and money was already becoming highly organized. Few people were caught on these border crossings which, as they do on frontiers to this day, required only the active participation of the population on both sides of the border. In Rosa's case some last-minute difficulties arose in the frontier village; presumably the organized means of transport had broken down. Kasprzak persuaded the local Catholic priest that a Jewish girl wished to be baptized in order to marry her lover, 'but owing to the violent opposition of her family, could only do so abroad'.¹ The priest, inspired by a mixture of national goodwill and religious duty, gave his assistance and arranged for her to be hidden under straw in a peasant's cart.

Certainly she had been only too willing to leave. Her first acquaintance with the writings of scientific Socialism, with the works of Marx and Engels, had been made during the two years after leaving High School in 1887. For anyone interested in becoming a fully fledged Socialist, a period of study was highly desirable. (This was the real difference between Socialism and other previous revolutionary movements, which above all needed decision and courageous action but no knowledge of a set text and commentaries.) The universities of western Europe were a great deal more tempting than those of Poland or Russia. To absorb Socialism thoroughly, it was necessary first to study existing capitalist society, and modern economic and political teaching—quite apart from any study of Socialist thought—was not available in the Russian empire. Rosa must have known that she would find in Switzerland not only the institutions of learning of a free and more questioning society, but also the presence of some of the most distinguished Marxists. Switzerland also offered the additional attraction of universities which traditionally admitted men and women on an equal footing. Rosa never wanted either to claim women's privileges or to accept any of their disabilities. The possible danger of arrest may even have been a welcome excuse for

¹ Frölich, p. 22. This story is substantiated by almost all sources and presumably originates from Rosa Luxemburg herself.

departure, possibly to appease an anxious family. They offered to support her financially as best they could at least for a while, and off she went, looking forward to the freedom of a society nearer to the final stage of Socialism.

The path to the West was well trodden. The departure of actual or potential Polish revolutionaries for western Europe was an old, well-established tradition. Polish and Russian Socialists were only following in the footsteps of their nationalist and liberal predecessors. But there was another, more typically Polish tradition: émigrés, particularly from Poland, had always given their services to the revolutionary movements of their host countries. There had been Poles among the immediate followers of Fourier, of Saint-Simon; a Polish general had died on the barricades of the Paris Commune. Thus integration into foreign revolutionary movements was almost as well-established as émigré plotting for a new revolution at home. Rosa Luxemburg faithfully followed both traditions. She based her activities on the international character of scientific Socialism, but in effect her work in the SPD was in line with a Polish tradition much older than Marxism—and so was the resentment which it caused among the Establishment in the West.

While Rosa Luxemburg was embarking on the life of a young student émigré in Zürich, the Polish Socialist movement rapidly developed and crystallized during the next few years. After the police had destroyed the Second *Proletariat* as well as the Union of Polish Workers, an attempt was made to bring together the separate émigré groups into one Socialist party for the whole of Poland. In 1890 the anti-Socialist laws were lifted in Germany and at once a society of Polish Socialists was founded in Berlin which concentrated on organizing the workers in Prussian Poland—Silesia, Posen (Poznań), and Pomerania. In 1891 this group began to issue a weekly paper called *Gazeta Robotnicza* (The Workers' Journal). With the rapid development of a strong German Social-Democratic Party, the incipient movement in the Polish-speaking areas of Germany soon came under its organizational wing and for at least ten years remained within the orbit of German Social Democracy, though not always in harmony with the SPD leadership. These Poles became a minor, though persistent, problem for the German party, a matter in which Rosa Luxemburg became intimately involved.

A year later, in 1892, the leaders of the Polish Socialist groups of Austrian Galicia and Prussian Silesia formed distinct and separate Polish parties in their territories. At once this posed the urgent problem of relationship with the big Socialist parties of the two dominating countries, Germany and Austria. Both within the new parties and outside, among the émigrés from Russian Poland, there developed a more nationalistic current, as a reaction to what was held to have been the main failing of the Second *Proletariat*, its excessive negation of nationalist desires and its consequent lack of popular appeal. In a confused way, the pendulum swung between nationalism and anti-nationalism in the Polish parties, sometimes a matter of faith and conscious choice but often a reaction to previous failures. In addition, the Polish Socialists in Galicia under Ignacy Daszyński always got on much better with the Austrian party than the German Poles succeeded in doing with the SPD. In an empire which contained a host of emergent and conflicting nations, the Austrian Social-Democratic Party had to have a workable policy on national questions, and always had a somewhat federal character—in fact, if not yet in name. Indeed, perceptive members of the SPD in Germany ruefully came to envy their Austrian colleagues for their ability to manage the recalcitrant Poles. There was finally the important personal friendship between Daszyński and the Austrian leader Victor Adler, which ensured powerful support for Daszyński's party in the International and incidentally made Rosa Luxemburg an important and permanent enemy in the person of the Austrian leader.

On 17 November 1892 a congress of all Polish Socialists in exile was summoned under the joint aegis of Mendelson from the first *Proletariat* and Limanowski and the remnants of his 'Polish People'. The old differences in emphasis between the two major constituent groups had largely disappeared, and it was Limanowski who presided over the pre-congress meeting, which consisted of ten members of his group and eight members of the first *Proletariat*. Out of this congress was born the new united Polish Socialist Party (PPS), linking up with the existing organization in Galicia and Silesia, and covering, it was hoped, the whole of Poland. But no all-Polish organization was possible, for the very real borders between the occupying powers could not be ignored. Thus the new party, PPS, covered only the Russian territories of Poland. It was closely related to the other two parties, the Prussian

Polish Socialist Party and the Polish Social-Democratic Party in Austrian Galicia; at international congresses the Poles appeared as one unit—at least until the foundation of Rosa Luxemburg's SDKP, and for some ten years a special body existed in London to co-ordinate PPS activities in all three territories, the Association of Polish Socialists Abroad (*Związek Zagraniczny Polskich Socjalistów*).

The new party on Russian soil accepted terrorist activities in part and temporarily as a necessary means of action—an inevitable consequence of illegality—but it subscribed firmly to the idea of a Socialist state based on the working class. Most important, the new party issued a declaration extending the hand of co-operation to all Russian Socialists, but only as separate and equal partners.

III

SWITZERLAND—STUDY AND POLITICS

1890-1898

ROSA LUXEMBURG arrived in Zürich towards the end of 1889. She settled into rooms at 77 Universitätsstrasse, on a hill above the stately complex of University and Technical High School. There was a distant view over the lake and the wooded hills to the north of the city. She was immensely proud of her rooms—well furnished, comfortable, and above all, cheap. Next year she enrolled at the University of Zürich in the faculty of philosophy and followed courses in the natural sciences and mathematics. Mathematics fascinated her particularly; she felt she had a natural gift for it, and always claimed that her contribution to economics was only an extension of her proficiency in higher mathematics.¹ In the natural sciences botany and zoology were her main interests, and though not to be her life's work, these subjects always retained a strong and almost professional fascination for her. Later, especially in prison, she would periodically go back to the detailed cataloguing of a collector, and bombard her merely nature-loving friends with technical explanations and comments on plant life. Out of this knowledge grew a genuine feeling for the beauty and unreason of plant and animal life; she was not just the deep-breathing romantic nature-lover portrayed by some of her biographers.² Somewhat self-consciously she would react to moments of extreme political frustration by lamenting that it would have been better if she had stuck to botany altogether; at least plants responded more directly than human beings to their environmental and natural laws instead of denying and resisting them.

In 1892 she changed over to the faculty of law and for the next five years studied public law under Professor Julius Wolf, Professor Vogt, Professor Treichler, and Professor Fleiner.³ Little is

¹ Mathematics was Rosa Luxemburg's *violon d'Ingres*; see below, p. 828.

² Especially in *Gedenkbuch*, and by Henriette Roland-Holst.

³ Staatsarchiv, Zürich, U 105b.

known about her activities at the University. The law faculty in the University of Zürich, then as now—and in common with the academic practice on the Continent—included social studies, which were of particular interest to Rosa Luxemburg. Among her teachers, Professor Julius Wolf was the most distinguished and prolific. For many years she would quote his statements and writings as an outstanding example of what, in Marxist terminology, was known as vulgar economics; her comments became increasingly unfavourable as she developed her own distinct theory of Marxist economics, and in the end his name rather unjustly became shorthand for empty academic fuddy-duddyness.¹ But his courses had left their mark on her—the very strength of her reaction shows it. Wolf, too, was influenced by his thrusting intelligent student. He later paid generous tribute to what he himself admitted was his outstanding pupil:

I was entirely absorbed in the world of my lectures, [but] managed to give an academic foundation to the ablest of my pupils during my time at Zürich [*hielt Ihr die akademischen Steigbügel*], Rosa Luxemburg, even though she came to me from Poland already as a thorough Marxist. She got her doctorate in political sciences [*Staatswissenschaft*] under me with a first class dissertation about the industrial development of Poland. . . .²

He was fortunate—or unfortunate—enough to have in his class several budding Marxists from Poland and Russia, already impatient with the fashionably liberal theories of the time and probably irritated by the constant academic emphasis on the need to be objective. Some of these youngsters combined to make the Professor's life difficult; they asked loaded questions and Rosa Luxemburg was the one who was usually chosen to expose the Professor's 'old-fashionedness' with her own quick repartee and love of arguing.³

Rosa's life was of course not confined to the University. As a member of *Proletariat*, one of the constituent groups of the future PPS, she came armed with introductions and with the right, as

¹ Vulgar economics is the study of entrepreneurial behaviour based on the individual entrepreneur, without any *a priori* concept of a dialectical nature, or any attempt to make the findings universal. References to Julius Wolf are scattered through Rosa Luxemburg's economic writings and her early letters until 1900.

² Julius Wolf, *Selbstbiographie*, in Felix Meiner (ed.), *Die Volkswirtschaftslehre der Gegenwart in Selbstdarstellungen*, Leipzig 1924, p. 12.

³ Frölich, p. 25, apparently based on a story of Marchlewski's.

well as the desire, to participate in the work of émigré Socialism. Switzerland was at the time the most important centre of Russian revolutionary Marxism, and Rosa Luxemburg soon became absorbed in this acrid but stimulating atmosphere. The politics of these groups were heavily tinged with problems of personal relations; in this respect the structure of nascent Russian and Polish Socialism resembled the loose coteries of eighteenth-century parties, though inevitably personal conflicts were still further sharpened by the uncompromising confrontation of doctrinal debate. This atmosphere, highly charged with the energy of strong personalities and compressed by the narrowness of personal circumstances, played a vital role in shaping Rosa Luxemburg's political manners and outlook. Some of the friendships she made in these early years in Switzerland remained for ever, a few dissolved slowly under the impact of events; but she was always more constant in her enmities than her friendships and the feuds of this period made her some important, lifelong enemies.

At the head of the hierarchy of Russian Marxism was the enormous figure of Georgii Plekhanov. His Group for the Liberation of Labour (*Gruppa osvobozhdenie truda*) included distinguished revolutionaries like Pavel Akselrod and Vera Zasulich. Years before, in 1883, Plekhanov had finally become disillusioned with the Populists; since embracing Marxism he had used his great analytical and philosophical faculties to break entirely new ground. To the younger generation of Marxists in Russia as well as abroad he was the giant of his day. The task of bringing Marxism to Russia had fallen on his shoulders, or, better, had been placed there by no less an authority than Engels himself. Plekhanov was the authorized interpreter into Russian of all past and present wisdom from London. But he was also an extremely touchy, prejudiced person who never hesitated to use the full hammer of his authority on his opponents, even when the issue was trifling. For young enthusiastic admirers from afar, the first meeting with him was a stimulating and at the same time disillusioning experience, to which Lenin, Martov, and Jogiches all testified independently. It was actually through Jogiches that Rosa Luxemburg first found herself in head-on conflict with the sage of Geneva, an experience that was to make them enemies for life.

Leo Jogiches was the most dominant figure in Rosa Luxemburg's life. In his own right, too, he deserves better than the scanty

published material on him and the even smaller use historians have made of it. His life's work was conspiracy and subterranean organization. Though he left his imprint on the literature of Socialism as editor of the Polish review, *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, in its heyday, he wrote hardly anything himself. Deliberately he chose always to remain a mysterious and shadowy figure in the background behind public events, and hid his identity behind a monstrous regiment of pseudonyms.¹

Jogiches arrived in Zürich in 1890 and met Rosa a few months later. He too had escaped to avoid arrest, though his crossing of the Russian border was less comfortable than Rosa's: instead of straw he travelled under clay.² But he was preceded—or perhaps accompanied—by an established reputation; he had been among the first to organize the Jewish workers in Vilna, then the focus of Socialist activity in the Russian empire from which the rest of the country was to be fertilized. He was even supposed to have had contacts with army officers, and an additional and pressing reason for his departure was the disagreeable threat of military service, possibly in a penal battalion where his agitational talents would have been wasted. Escaping from military service was a traditionally powerful propellant of Jewish emigration from Russia; in Jogiches' case desertion was to form one of the main counts in the indictment against him when he was captured during the revolution in 1906. Born in Vilna in 1867, Leo Jogiches came from a prosperous Jewish family which, like the Luxemburgs, had been largely assimilated into their surroundings, though his family was far better off than Rosa's. Leo himself also spoke no Hebrew and little Yiddish. As early as 1885, at the age of eighteen, he had founded a revolutionary circle in Vilna and several of the Jewish Socialist leaders who were later to form the Jewish *Bund* acknowledged him as one of the earliest and most active Socialists in the town.³ He had already been arrested and imprisoned twice and

¹ He was born Lev Jogiches in 1867. In Russian and Polish circles he most commonly used Jan Tyszkó or Tyshka, under which name he is known to historians of the Bolshevik party. In Switzerland he was known as Ignatiev and Grozowski (Bertram D. Wolfe wrongly implies that this was his real name—*Three who made a Revolution*, New York 1948, cf. index). Later in Germany he used the name Krysztalowicz between 1907 and 1914. In the *Spartakusbund* during the war he took the pseudonyms of Kraft and Krumbügel. Only Rosa's circle of close friends knew him by his right name—though even this upset him. I shall refer to him as Leo Jogiches throughout.

² Frölich, p. 27.

³ The *Algemener Yiddisher Arbeter Bund*, which was founded in 1897 and was the first Social-Democratic mass organization in the Russian empire.

had each time got away before escaping finally to Switzerland. His considerable reputation in Vilna survived for many years; a visiting Jewish Socialist was told in 1898 of 'a mysterious, almost legendary person, surrounded with the halo of unusual dedication to the workers' cause, of steadfast Socialist activity, called Liofka. His proper name was Jogiches, the son of rich parents who had owned a fine house in a wide street. . . . But he was much less appreciated in emigration than he had been in Vilna.'¹ That was indeed Jogiches' tragedy: he was only an intellectual *faute de mieux* and, cut off from his agitational activities, he always felt like a fish out of water. A natural tendency to arrogance and obstinacy increased through frustration, particularly when he found that to the ruling group of Russian Marxists in Switzerland he was an unimportant new boy.

He had brought with him a considerable sum of money, partly his own and partly funds he had collected for the printing and distribution of Marxist literature. The classics—mostly translations from Marx, Engels, Bebel, and Liebknecht into Russian, and the works of Plekhanov—were essential primary fuel to the spread of Socialism. These were to be smuggled into Poland and Lithuania through the channels which his and other Jewish groups were laboriously opening up. Jogiches went straight to Plekhanov and proposed collaboration: his money and technique, Plekhanov's prestige and copyrights. When Plekhanov frigidly asked what basis he had in mind, the young man coolly proposed fifty-fifty and was promptly shown the door. Their icy differences were confirmed by letter.² Jogiches was unabashed. He decided to pirate some of the Marxist classics for translation and distribution in Russia, and created his own publishing venture for this purpose, *Sotsialdemokraticheskaya Biblioteka*.³ At this Plekhanov declared open war. His instant dislike of Jogiches turned into noisy and public hatred.

¹ *Historishe Shriftn*, Vilna 1939, Vol. I, part 3, p. 371 (Rabinovics), translated from Yiddish.

² See *Gruppa 'osvobozhdenie truda' iz arkhivov G. V. Plekhanova, Zaslucha i Deicha*, Moscow/Leningrad 1928, Vol. II, p. 310 (Plekhanov to Jogiches), p. 312 (Jogiches to Plekhanov). A hostile account of these first contacts, and an equally hostile character sketch of Jogiches, can be found in a manuscript draft of Akselrod's memoirs for this period in the Akselrod papers at IISH, Amsterdam.

³ It lasted from 1892 to 1895. Its editions consisted of Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (translated by Krichevskii) and a few other works of Marx, as well as Kautsky's *Das Erfurter Programm* and two popular works on English and Belgian working-class struggles. See *Z Pola Walki*, 1930, Nos. 9/10, p. 146, note 25.

Like Trotsky, Jogiches suffered from two unforgivable defects in Plekhanov's eyes: self-assurance aggravated by youth, and being Jewish. To Engels he described Jogiches contemptuously as 'une miniature Ausgabe de Nechaieff', a miniature version of Bakunin's wildest and most reckless anarchist disciple.¹

Rosa fell in love with Leo Jogiches very soon after they met, and she was at once transported into the thick of the fight. Their relationship was far too close for any possibility of her remaining neutral. At first she tried to exercise a moderating influence on Jogiches; for her, Plekhanov was first and foremost the great man and Jogiches obstinate and perhaps unreasonable, not willing to appreciate the stature of his opponent. But to no avail; no one ever changed Jogiches' mind by persuasion, and by 1894 she too was ready to cock a snook at the 'old man' whenever there was an opportunity.²

This quarrel with Plekhanov had important consequences. It isolated Jogiches in the Russian Socialist movement abroad to such an extent that effective participation became impossible, at least to a man of his driving temperament. For four years Jogiches obstinately went on trying to maintain an independent foothold in the publication of Russian material, aided by the fact that his distribution outlets in Vilna were superior to anything available to Plekhanov and Akselrod. In 1892 he snatched a collection of speeches made at May Day rallies in Vilna and Warsaw from under Plekhanov's nose, and published them in Polish with an introduction by Rosa Luxemburg—her first known publication.³ Plekhanov then retaliated by putting the obnoxious couple in Zürich under interdict—'it is important not only what you take, but from whom you take it', he lectured the Jewish leader John Mill during one of Mill's visits in search of material to distribute, after interrogating the astonished Mill closely as to his intentions. 'If you take from him you definitely will not get from me.'⁴ As proof of his contemptuous disregard for the usual émigré courtesies, Plekhanov

¹ Quoted by Leonard Schapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, London 1960, p. 170. The Russian translation of the letter, dated 16 May 1894, is in *Gruppa 'osvobozhdenie truda'*, p. 318.

² John Mill, *Pionirn un Boier* (Pioneers and Builders), New York 1946, Vol. I, p. 102. See also Seidel letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1959, No. 1(5), p. 71.

³ *Historische Shriftn*, p. 376. See R. Kruszyńska, *Święto Pierwszego Maja* (First of May Celebration), Paris 1892.

⁴ *Pionirn un Boier*, Vol. I, p. 99. See also *Gruppa 'osvobozhdenie truda'*, Vol. II, p. 320.

refused even to use the pseudonym Grozowski, and simply referred to the other man as Jogiches. An alias was as honoured as an officer's title and a studied refusal to use it was the Socialist equivalent of a gauntlet thrown down. The upshot was that Jogiches' publishing venture failed, in spite of the large funds at his disposal.¹

Already in 1892, after his first dispute with Plekhanov, Jogiches had turned his interests and funds increasingly towards Polish affairs. Most people believed that this was due to Rosa's deliberate influence—and so it probably was, though Plekhanov, who if anything preferred the young woman to the man, still thought that she was trying to keep him on Russian paths.² From 1893 onwards he was active behind the scenes at Rosa's side in the breakaway Polish movement and became its chief organizer and convener, though his name hardly figures in the documents before 1900. For the implacable Plekhanov he was the moving spirit of the breakaway Polish party, just as he was the evil spirit behind the Russian opposition to Plekhanov's *gruppā*. By driving Jogiches out of any effective participation in the Russian movement, Plekhanov unwittingly rendered Polish Social Democracy a great service. But these extreme postures adopted on both sides also helped to set the pattern of political relations between Poles and Russians for many years.

While Jogiches was struggling with the intransigent elders, Rosa Luxemburg and a small group of friends were fighting an equally bitter but more rigorously ideological struggle against the leading lights of Polish émigré Socialism. When the united Polish Socialist Party (PPS) had been founded at the end of 1892 all the émigré groups adhered to it. The creation of a united party and the adoption of a programme acceptable to all the various groups was a considerable achievement, of which the participants were justly proud.³ The programme of the PPS met not only the vociferous demands of the representatives abroad, but also covered the aspirations of the groups inside Poland, though these were obviously not in a position to make their views heard as forcefully as the émigrés. Of necessity it was a compromise programme,

¹ *Historishe Shriftn*, pp. 371-2, and footnote. Plekhanov put the sum at 15,000 roubles, nearly £1,500, loc. cit., p. 319.

² John Mill in 'Vilna', *Historishe Shriftn*, pp. 74 ff. For Plekhanov see below, pp. 75, 95-96.

³ See above, Chapter I, p. 61.

neither rigorously Marxist nor particularly nationalist. Like those of most western Socialist parties, it offered a declaration of the full Marxist faith as its maximum programme as well as directives for more immediate tactics—the so-called minimum programme. But where the bigger Socialist parties in the West made organization their main field of operations and kept the party programme for flag days and parades, like a sacred symbol, the programme of the Polish party was its holy of holies, the only cohesive factor. Within a few months of its adoption it became the subject of an acute controversy. And there was no organizational structure to enforce discipline.

In July 1893 there appeared in Paris the first issue of *Sprawa Robotnicza* (The Workers' Cause). It introduced itself with a leading article setting out the purpose of the paper and the line that it would follow—strict adherence to the cause of the working classes in their struggle against the class enemy. The accent was on the struggle against capitalism, solidarity with the Russian working classes in their struggle against Tsarist absolutism, and on the international character of all working-class movements including the Polish.¹

Sprawa Robotnicza was the creation of a small group of young Polish enthusiasts, mostly students abroad. Right from the start Rosa Luxemburg was one of its leading lights and in 1894 formally took over the editorship, under the pseudonym of R. Kruszyńska.² The finance was provided by Jogiches, and *Sprawa Robotnicza* took over many of the ideas and methods, with a particularly Polish accent, which Jogiches had hoped to fulfil in association with Plekhanov. But the paper received no support from the leaders of the PPS. The very first number announced the paper's independent and unusual line, particularly on the question of co-operation with the Russian working classes—a flavour which ran directly counter to the attempt of the PPS leadership to liberate itself from Russian tutelage. Moreover, there was not a word in the first issue about Polish independence. On the contrary, Socialist progress in Poland was presented as a mere part of the general development in Russia.

The timing of the first issue of *Sprawa Robotnicza* was no

¹ 'Od redakcji', *Sprawa Robotnicza*, No. 1, July 1893, reprinted in *SDKPiL: Materiały i dokumenty*, Warsaw 1957, Vol. I, Part 1 (1893–1897), pp. 1–3.

² *Sprawa Robotnicza*, No. 7, January 1894; *SDKPiL: Materiały i dokumenty*, Vol. I, Part 1, p. 128.

accident. The Third Congress of the Socialist International was due to take place in Zürich from 6 to 12 August 1893. The group associated with *Sprawa Robotnicza* now staked a claim for representation at the congress as part of the Polish delegation. Although the Polish Socialists, unlike the Russians, had succeeded in forming a united party, representation at the congress was still based on individual groups and newspapers without any of the discipline and block votes of such western parties as the German or Austrian. There was always some confusion over the mandates of those loosely associated groups which generally had to be adjudicated by the congress.¹ If the *Sprawa Robotnicza* group could show that it ran a viable newspaper, its *prima facie* right to be represented at the congress would be established. In order to make doubly sure, Rosa Luxemburg wrote a Polish minority report on behalf of the *Sprawa Robotnicza* group on the development of Social Democracy in Russian Poland between 1889 and 1893, the period since the last International congress in Paris.² Such reports to the International of domestic activity were normally provided by each party affiliated to the International. But the document of the *Sprawa Robotnicza* group was an unofficial venture; the PPS leadership presented its own report and so there were before the congress two separate and very different documents both claiming to represent the Socialist movement of Russian or (as it was sometimes called) Congress Poland. The *Sprawa Robotnicza* report contained the ominous phrase that 'the socio-economic history of the three parts of the former Kingdom of Poland has led to their organic integration into three partitioning powers and has created in each of the three parts [of Poland] separate aims [*dążenia*] and political interests'.³ This was a veiled negation of the whole case for any re-establishment of historic Poland; by emphasizing and relying on modern developments it indicated that any policy of Polish

¹ The proceedings of mandate commissions of the International Congresses, established after 1896, always provided a good example of the cohesiveness of the parties. The delegations of the well-organized parties of the Second International made little trouble, and most of the mandate commission's work was concerned with sorting out the disputes of loose groups like the Poles and the Russians, and 'split' movements like the Americans and French. As European Socialism became more organized, mandate disputes decreased in number and intensity. The reports of the mandate commissions were made to the plenary congress, and published in the proceedings.

² This document was written in German but no copies of the original report remain in existence. A Polish translation was included in the collection, *Kwestia polska a ruch socjalistyczny*, Cracow 1905, pp. 173-7.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

independence was nothing more than a clutching at the archaic straws of history. The activities of *Sprawa Robotnicza* were emerging as clearly separatist and potentially oppositional to the main Polish party.

We do not know whether any efforts were made before the congress either to suppress or come to terms with the group of young independents.¹ In the event, the International congress unexpectedly witnessed a public display of dissension in the ranks of the recently formed Polish Socialist Party. It was all very unfortunate and incomprehensible as well. Meetings of the International were in part ceremonial occasions when achievements were passed in review and prospects evaluated; open signs of dissension were like painful spasms of the ague which could only give joy to the eager enemy in the capitalist camp. Every effort was made to avoid them or at least play them down—except when the debate ranged over great and noble issues. This particular congress assembled in the holiday heat of hospitable but uninterested middle-class Zürich, first and foremost to welcome to legality the important German Social-Democratic Party. In addition, an official reckoning with the disruptive anarchists had to be made. The Association of Polish Socialists Abroad, which continued to function as the foreign liaison group of the PPS, sent a powerful delegation of ten members, including Jankowska-Mendelson and Feliks Perl—all former members of *Proletariat* who accepted the new compromise platform—and Ignacy Daszyński from Galicia (Austrian Poland), already emerging as the most distinguished Polish Socialist with the backing and friendship of the senior leaders of the International.

This delegation reported to the Chairman of the Congress Bureau, the Belgian Socialist leader Vandervelde, that it was opposing one of the Polish mandates—that of Kruszyńska. The delegation considered that the self-conscious and deliberate inflation of an obscure newspaper—one moreover with oppositional tendencies—could not justify membership of the Polish delegation and certainly would do nothing to advance the cause of Polish unity. The Bureau at first tried to preserve peace; in its report to the congress, it recommended acceptance of the mandate and Kruszyńska's (Rosa Luxemburg's) appearance as a member of the Polish delegation. Daszyński thereupon took the matter before the

¹ See *SDKPiL: Materiały i dokumenty*, Vol. I, Part 1, p. 30 (henceforth quoted as *SDKPiL dokumenty*).

congress itself. He asked for the mandate to be quashed on the grounds that 'only one issue of the paper [*Sprawa Robotnicza*] has appeared, the mandate has no signature, no one even knows the editor who sent this delegate'.¹

Rosa Luxemburg was the last person to refuse a public challenge. She jumped up at once. 'These facts are due to the peculiar situation in Russian Poland. The paper is a Social-Democratic literary venture and expresses the view of the Polish Socialist proletariat.'² Willingly or not, the congress had to listen to the conflicting arguments. Daszyński emphasized the unimportance of his opponents, while Rosa Luxemburg argued her case on basic differences of policy.

Emil Vandervelde, the Belgian Socialist leader, left a description of the scene:

Rosa, 23 years old at the time, was quite unknown outside one or two Socialist groups in Germany and Poland . . . but her opponents had their hands full to hold their ground against her. . . . She rose from among the delegates at the back and stood on a chair to make herself better heard. Small and looking very frail in a summer dress, which managed very effectively to conceal her physical defects, she advocated her cause with such magnetism and such appealing words that she won the majority of the Congress at once and they raised their hands in favour of the acceptance of her mandate.³

Memory and chivalry—the Second International was not ungallant—may have deceived Vandervelde. After further tumult, during which Marchlewski and Warszawski spoke in her support, the congress in fact voted for the rejection of the mandate. Plekhanov threw his voice and votes behind the PPS; he had already pledged his support to his Polish friends in advance and saw here a splendid opportunity for getting his own back on the infuriating couple in Zürich.⁴ The Bureau, however, queried the congress vote, which had taken place amid some confusion; the Polish delegation demanded a vote by national delegations, and these voted 7 for and 9 against the young girl's mandate, with 3

¹ *Protokoll, Internationaler Sozialistischer Arbeiterkongress in Zürich (Organisationskommittee Zürich, 1894)*, p. 14.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 15.

³ Quoted by Frölich, pp. 51-52. I have been unable to find the original description in Vandervelde's numerous works. It is not in his *Souvenirs d'un militant Socialiste*, Paris 1939.

⁴ For Plekhanov's manoeuvres before and at the congress see *Perepiska G. V. Plekhanova i P. B. Akselroda*, Moscow 1925, Vol. I, pp. 74 ff., 143.

abstentions. Rosa left, with a red face, under protest. Her friend Marchlewski, however, remained, since no one had challenged his mandate.¹

Though Rosa Luxemburg failed to maintain her position against the powerful opposition of Daszyński and the other Polish delegates, she personally achieved something of a moral victory. Daszyński, anxious to play down the importance of his opponents, argued *ad hominem*—or rather *ad feminam*; Rosa Luxemburg had tried to discuss principles. Then and later she gave the appearance of someone reluctantly forced to display personal dissensions in public; by hinting that the dispute was one of principle and that both sides represented different versions of Socialism, she gave the appearance that it was Daszyński and the PPS who were trying to suppress an inconvenient opposition with whose policy they disagreed. The Second International subscribed to the majesty of principles and most of its leaders hated personal polemics in public. After the congress Rosa Luxemburg and her group emphasized their role as doughty champions of principles—and their eagerness to debate these at any time against opponents who preferred scurrilous attacks or, still better, silence. By the time the next International congress met in London in 1896 their right to be heard as representatives of a genuine if small section of Polish Socialism was already established beyond challenge. This time Daszyński shouted at her that ‘we cannot tolerate our movement being dragged through the mud by scribblers and crooks like Rosa Luxemburg. . . . We must and will clear the ranks of our international army of this group of journalistic brigands who are trying to disrupt our fight for unity.’² But the congress upheld her mandate on that occasion and continued to do so until, after 1900, the PPS leadership gave up attempting to challenge it.

Now that war had been openly declared between the *Sprawa Robotnicza* group and the leadership of the PPS, there was little

¹ *Protokoll, Internationaler . . . Kongress*, p. 15. In view of the unequivocal facts given in the official congress proceedings, published under the auspices of the organizing committee only a few months later, I cannot account for the wildly varying versions given in most modern accounts. Thus Frölich (p. 51) states that Marchlewski’s mandate was rejected as well. Dziewanowski (*The Communist Party of Poland*, p. 23) claims that ‘all those favouring secession were eventually excluded from the congress’. James Joll (*The Second International*, London 1955) correctly states that only Rosa Luxemburg was in fact evicted with the anarchists (p. 72).

² *Verhandlungen und Beschlüsse, Internationaler Sozialistischer Arbeiter- und Gewerkschaftskongress zu London*, 1896, p. 18; also Frölich, p. 52.

point in the opposition remaining within the PPS organization. Originally they had considered the formation of an oppositional group within the party, probably hoping to influence and persuade an increasing number of PPS members to adopt their own point of view.¹ But the attitude of the leadership at the Zürich congress and subsequent attacks in the PPS press against the splitters doomed any such hopes. It was decided to form a new party altogether called *Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego* ('The Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland—SDKP). The choice of name was Rosa Luxemburg's, and in itself defined the attitude of the new party; by deliberately adopting the geographical limitations of the Kingdom of Poland, even the suggestion of *Polonia rediviva* was carefully avoided. The policy organ of the new party was *Sprawa Robotnicza*, its only newspaper. The programme of the new party was based on the statement of editorial policy which had appeared in the first number of the paper in July 1893. This, together with the group's report to the Zürich congress, was formally adopted as a programme at the party's first congress in March 1894.²

In spite of all the public enthusiasm over founding a new party, there was a somewhat indefinable and well disguised element of sour grapes. Rosa Luxemburg was never keen on sects—and the little band of individuals had all the makings of a minute sect at the time. Having recognized the impossibility of remaining in the PPS, Rosa made a somewhat half-hearted attempt to join the Russians—only to be scornfully rejected by Plekhanov, who gleefully reported the Polish disarray to Engels and characterized Rosa as Jogiches' female appanage.³ Thus the SDKP was the product of as much disillusion as enthusiasm. From time to time Rosa would still sigh briefly for a united Polish party—based on her policy and attitudes, *bien entendu*.⁴

The SDKP saw itself as the direct successor to *Proletariat*—and turned sharply away from the compromise programme of unity

¹ See declaration in *Sprawa Robotnicza*, No. 2, September 1893.

² See leading article by Rosa Luxemburg, 'Nowy etap' (The New Stage), *Sprawa Robotnicza*, No. 9, March 1894.

³ *Gruppa 'osvobozhdenie truda'*, Vol. II, p. 320. Plekhanov called the *Sprawa Robotnicza* report to the Zürich congress a 'lying Jesuitical document'.

⁴ 'I am sure these blows would be far less painful [the loss of a transport of illegal material] if only we were one united party.' Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1930, Nos. 9/10, p. 149, dated 10 April 1895. For this collection of letters see Bibliography below, p. 865, No. 22.

around which the PPS had been formed. The immediate aim—the *minimum* programme which every Socialist party predicated in contrast to the *maximum* eventual aim of social revolution—was a liberal constitution for the entire Russian empire with territorial autonomy for Poland—that curious, half-federal solution which Rosa Luxemburg and her friends were to defend staunchly in the Russian party for many years and which was to be the subject of so much acrimonious debate. The SDKP stressed the need for close co-operation with Russian Socialists, though there was no mention of any pre-eminence for the latter as there had been in the *Narodnaya Volya-Proletariat* agreement. Polish independence was now specifically rejected; in Rosa Luxemburg's phrase—'a utopian mirage, a delusion of the workers to detract them from their class struggle'.¹

The tactical consequence of this position was that the Polish Socialists in each of the occupied areas would have to join—or at least federate with—the Socialist parties of the partitioning powers, German, Austrian, and Russian. It was hoped that a united Russian party would soon come into being to enable such co-operation to become effective. From the moment of its foundation, the SDKP piously called on the Russians to form the necessary united party. For the rest, the SDKP programme was modelled on the German Socialist Party's 1891 Erfurt programme, with its careful synthesis of immediate tasks and final revolutionary aim. But it recognized that conditions in Poland were one very important step behind Germany. Since no possibilities of open agitation and electoral propaganda existed in Russia as they did in Germany, a liberal constitution for Russia must be the immediate aim of all Socialists in the empire.²

Finally, the SDKP's accent was international. The party pledged itself specifically to supporting the international working-class movement as constituted in the Second International; this was to distinguish it from the allegedly national position of the PPS. The implication was that the latter adhered to the International under false pretences.

The whole programme was above all a reaction to the PPS position and organization. Its possibilities of positive achievement

¹ O. B. Szmidt, *Dokumenty*, Vol. I, pp. 55–60. The entire Protocol of the First Congress was reprinted in *Sprawa Robotnicza*, No. 10, April 1894 and also *SDKPiL dokumenty*, Vol. I, Part 1, pp. 174–91.

² O. B. Szmidt, loc. cit. See also Dziewanowski, *Communist Party*, pp. 24–25.

at the time were small. There was no Russian Socialist party to join, no prospect of contributing significantly to any constitutional reform in Russia, little chance of carrying away a substantial part of the PPS membership or of influencing events at home. Though the first congress took place illegally in Warsaw—a matter of great pride to the new leadership, even though they were unable to participate in it—the party was visibly the product of an émigré split, and a typical result of eastern obduracy over principles.¹ The whole effort must therefore be seen as a self-conscious assertion of a generation of young revolutionaries opposing the more practical and compromising leadership of the PPS. None the less, the division was not purely personal. There were profound differences of policy which crystallized more and more round the question of Polish independence. For the next few years the SDKP leadership, and particularly Rosa Luxemburg, embarked on a theoretical underpinning of their position on this question, until the negation of Polish independence became a doctrine in itself. At the same time, the sharp polemics on this subject with the PPS periodically forced the latter also to re-examine its own position, and the original vague commitment to re-establishing Polish independence became much more specific and unequivocal. The Polish Socialist movement remained sharply divided on this issue. In spite of periodic shifts of opinion, these two opposing views remained distinct and dominated Polish Socialism up to the First World War, forcing the two parties into polarization on almost every other issue as well.

The creation of an independent Social Democracy of Poland with a small though viable organization at home was a remarkable achievement, even though it broke up the brief existence of a united Polish Socialist movement. The new movement could easily have remained a small émigré sect without followers or significance, as so many Russian and Polish dissidents were to be in the future.² That it flourished in spite of all setbacks and

¹ The émigré breakaway, and the establishment of a separate organization in Poland, took place independently. The participants of the Warsaw congress only later united with the émigré SDKP.

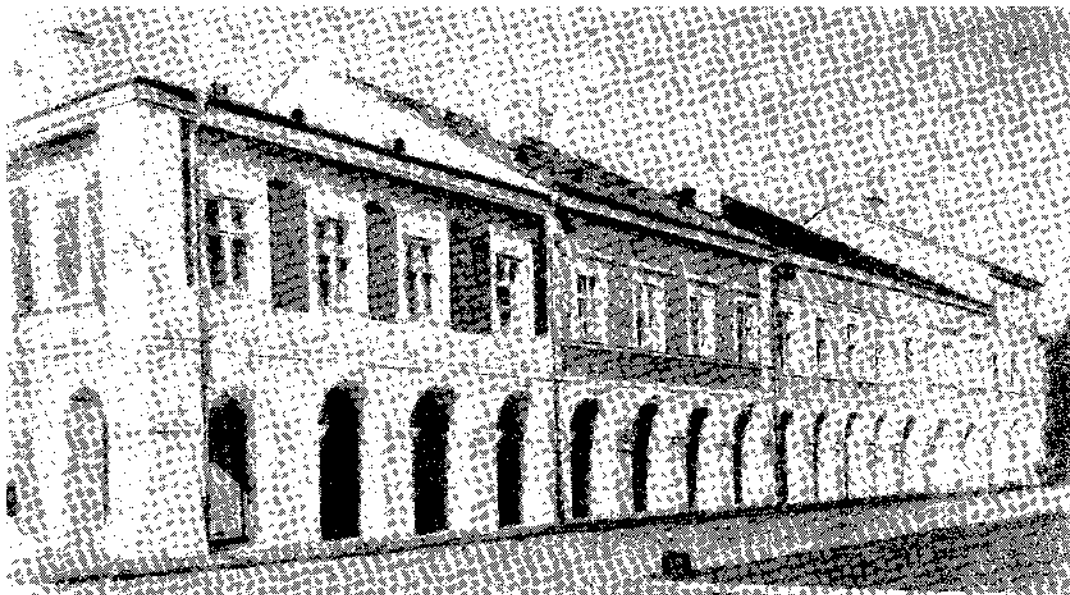
² There was, for instance, a third Polish *Proletariat* for a short period. Some evidence of the attempts of such groups to gain a respectable foothold for themselves can be found in the Kautsky Archives at IISH—begging letters for money, for literature, even for just an expression of approval from any important Socialist.

grew into a powerful nucleus which eventually swallowed the major part of the PPS to form the Communist Party of Poland, is largely due to the outstanding quality of its leadership. Still more remarkable is the fact that it was, for most of the time, an émigré leadership. In spite of inevitable police penetration of the membership in Poland, and the repeated defection of the most important party workers, the émigré leadership always managed to rebuild local organizations and never lost contact entirely with the clandestine movement at home.¹ Most of what is known of the SDKP is based on its policy record, expressed in publications and documents; no study of its sociology has ever been attempted. Yet this is important in a context far wider than the history of Polish Socialism, for many of the leaders abroad played an important part in other Socialist parties and some of them eventually made their name in the Bolshevik party after the October Revolution in Russia.

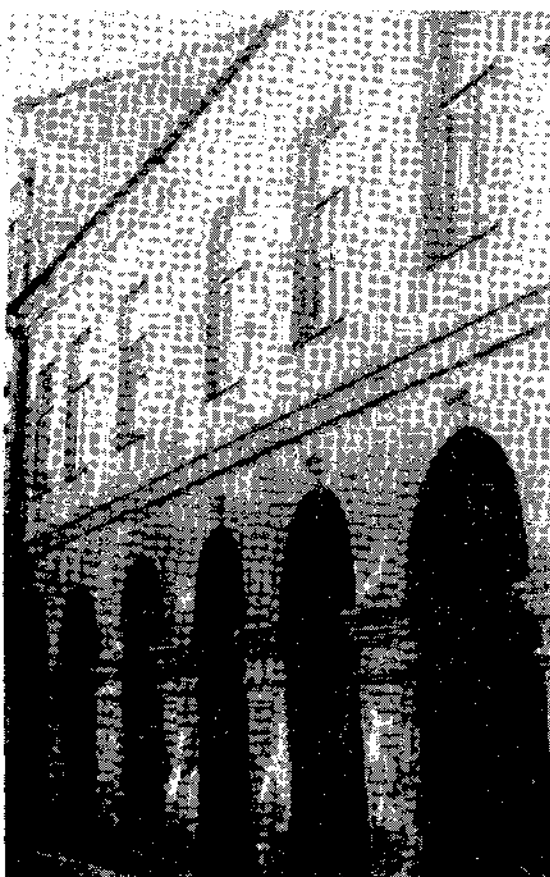
The nucleus of the leadership was formed between 1890 and 1893 in Switzerland. Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches had been installed in Zürich since 1890. In 1892 Julian Marchlewski arrived, after a year of imprisonment in Warsaw followed by expulsion.² Marchlewski was a somewhat patrician figure in this circle. His family lived in Włocławek, half way between Poznań and Warsaw. He was not Jewish—his father was Polish and his mother German—and there was no tradition at home of political dissent or under-privileged minority status; he had come to Marxism entirely by conviction. Though by nature an intellectual, interested in philosophical questions and expressing his thoughts in a heavy and somewhat indigestible style, he had deliberately ‘gone to the people’ in the best populist tradition, and had tried to absorb working-class ideology by seeking employment in factories as a weaver or dyer. There was always something self-conscious and sacrificial about Marchlewski’s Socialism. He found personal relations difficult and, like Mehring, was extremely sensitive to personal slights; his happiest moments were devoted to writing his

¹ None of those present at the first party congress, with the exception of Bronisław Wesółowski, played a role of any significance in the SDKP. They either joined the PPS, were caught by the police, or went into exile where they played a secondary role. For a list of participants, see *SDKPiL dokumenty*, Vol. I, Part 1, p. 174.

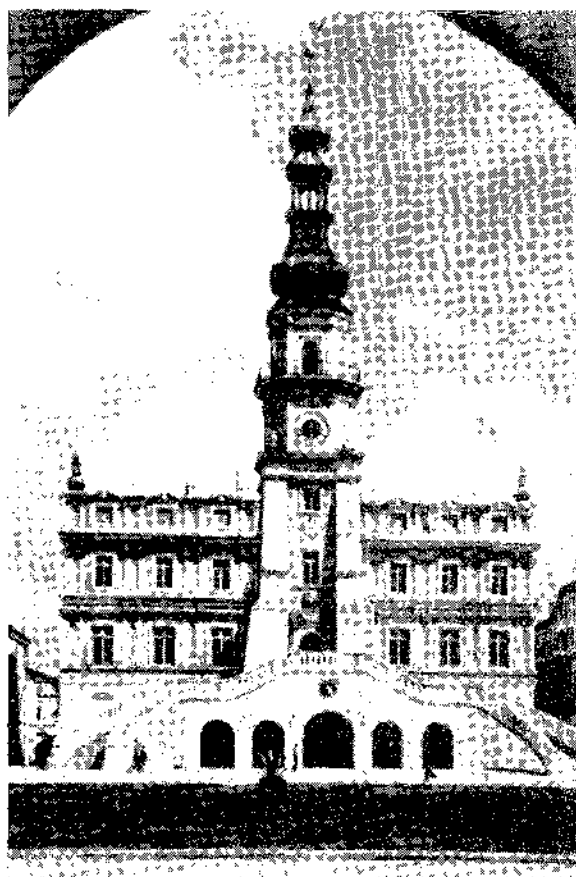
² Marchlewski later used the party pseudonym of Karski on most occasions. In Germany during the war he was known as Johannes Kämpfer. In the official service of the Soviet Union after 1919 he reverted to his own name. He died in Italy in 1925 as a senior Soviet official.



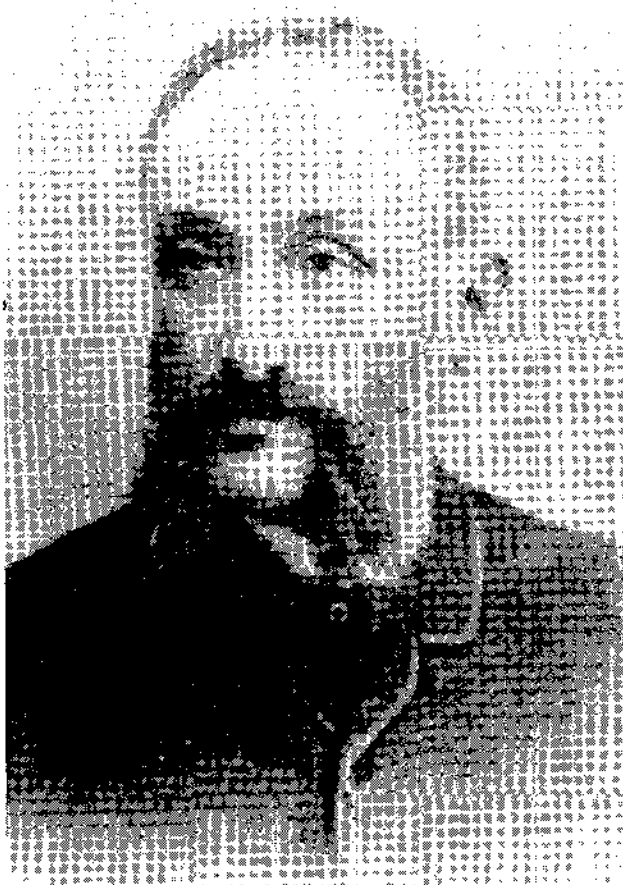
(a) Arcade in the main square of Zamość, Rosa Luxemburg's birthplace



(b) The house where Rosa Luxemburg was born



(c) The town hall, Zamość, facing the main square



(a) Eliasz Luxemburg



(b) Line Luxemburg,
née Löwenstein

Rosa Luxemburg's parents

complicated analyses of social conditions. He deliberately submitted himself to the harsh discipline of the SDKP, particularly under Jogiches, and accepted the most difficult party assignments as an exercise in deliberate self-subordination. Though by no means fully in agreement with all of Rosa Luxemburg's ideas, adherence to the SDKP and complete acceptance of its programme was part of his self-denial—though his personal relations with Rosa Luxemburg were often edgy. Frequently he was the spokesman of the party on matters with which in his heart he did not fully agree. Rosa Luxemburg did not really like him for many years: he was important rather than desirable; neither she nor Jogiches trusted him completely, and when Rosa moved to Germany in 1898 she steered clear of him for a while, unjustifiably as it turned out.

Another co-founder of the SDKP was Adolf Warszawski.¹ He, too, had been prominent in the Union of Polish Workers. Warszawski was a Jew, an excellent agitator and speaker who could transform the complications of Marxism into easily comprehensible slogans and ideas for the masses. He had not the intellectual equipment of Rosa Luxemburg or Julian Marchlewski but was much more the type of revolutionary whose entire life was devoted to the complicated and unrewarding routine of small-scale persuasion. He was a grey person, without obvious inspiration but hard-working and completely absorbed by his task; as such he found the atmosphere of the later Bolshevik group in the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party (RSDRP) more congenial than some of the other Polish Socialists. But his commitment was particularly to the Polish movement. He was the only one of the SDKP leadership who played no part outside the Polish movement, whose entire life was to be absorbed by it and who remained faithful to it until his death.

These four people—Rosa Luxemburg, Leo Jogiches, Julian Marchlewski, and Adolf Warszawski—were the nucleus of the SDKP from the day of its inception. They were more or less of the same age, and all found in the movement a fulfilment of their personalities and talents impossible elsewhere. Yet they were very different people and by no means thought alike on every question.

¹ He, too, adopted a party pseudonym, Adolf Warski, and retained it consistently for the rest of his life, most of which was spent after 1918 either in Moscow or illegally in Poland. He was finally a victim of Stalin's almost total purge of the Polish Communist Party in 1937.

Their co-operation was based on a shared long-term objective and on a common revolutionary temperament; none of them sought immediate recognition in terms of power and status within the Second International—indeed, there was a certain personal impatience with the self-indulgence of an International rolling endlessly onwards. All of them were dissenters by personal conviction, outsiders rather than organized conspirators. They had boundless self-confidence, both in the development of a Socialist future as well as in the rightness of their particular analysis and tactic. Most important, their collaboration was based on an indefinable web of personal attitudes generating a sort of spontaneous and flexible consensus which had nothing to do with any discipline of organization or with doctrine or even charisma. Instead of being created or prescribed, consensus emerged. Though the party statutes called for a tight and conspiratorial centralism—Lenin, had he bothered, would have found in them a perfect model for democratic centralism—the actual procedures of the leadership during these early years were informal and personal rather than tight and official. Consultations on matters of policy were of a purely personal kind, generally by private letter between individuals, and none of the formalities which were typical of the German and Austrian parties were observed. Yet collaboration was such that no party congress was found necessary for six years; the second party congress took place only in 1900, to register the important constitutional changes caused by the adhesion of the Lithuanian group.¹ Precisely this lack of formality makes the historian's task difficult, for comments on events and people were usually made in a mental shorthand which is impossible for the uninitiated to decipher.

Round the nucleus of these four personalities there grew a larger constellation of brilliant activists, drawn in by the aims and methods of the SDKP. In the course of its history such names as Dzierżyński, Hanecki, Unszlicht, and Leder became associated with it. Some, like Dzierżyński, remained intimately connected with the movement until the great Russian Revolution swept them into its orbit; others died before the First World War (Cezaryna Wojnarowska); a few dissented early, like Trusiewicz; finally, an important group—Hanecki, Leder, Radek, and Unszlicht—

¹ See below, p. 105. Furthermore the party was in dire straits in Poland between 1896 and 1900.

revolted against the émigré leadership and broke out to form a dissident movement in 1911. But it is striking that the SDKP at various times contained such a galaxy of revolutionary personalities, whose enormous energy overflowed into the German and Russian Social-Democratic parties without prising them loose from the Polish party. None the less, it was only our four figures who really saw the movement through from its inception in 1893 to the formation of the Polish Communist Party in 1918, and they particularly set the tone and provided the continuity of its policy. Without being unjust to the many other interesting personalities who will appear in these pages, the SDKP, which later became the SDKPiL, was the particular creation of Rosa Luxemburg, Leo Jogiches, Julian Marchlewski, and Adolf Warszawski.

The SDKP leadership was unique in the Second International. It differed both from the strictly hierarchical western European parties and from the tight conspiratorial group with its craggy absolutes as criteria of unity which the Bolsheviks were to develop. It was essentially a collaboration of equals, formulating a joint policy yet preserving the individual right to differ. The leading members thus preserved their personal status yet at the same time were subservient parts of a closer association for particular purposes, without there being any obvious conflict between the two roles. In any context this was an unusual form of group association. Something of its spirit was retained by all the participants and carried by them into the various associations and parties which they were to join in the future. At all events, the SDKP provided a source of strength and self-reliance which distinguished these Polish leaders in everything they did.¹

Rosa Luxemburg was the fountain-head of policy ideas. *Sprawa Robotnicza* was primarily her inspiration; she had written the dissident report to the International congress and the articles which were to form the basis of the SDKP programme. It was through her that the dissatisfaction with the PPS leadership was articulated and hers was the decision to bring the split into the open. Right from the start, therefore, she played a prominent role

¹ This analysis is based on the contrast between the official aspect of the party as reflected by its public documents, and the quite different impression created by private correspondence. The latter is reproduced in part in *SDKPiL dokumenty*, particularly Vol. I, Part 2 (1899-1901) and Vol. II (1902-1903); also Szmidt, *Dokumenty*, Vol. I, and in the published and unpublished collections of letters in the ZHP Archives, Warsaw. For a more detailed analysis of the sociology of the SDKPiL, see below, Chapter VII, pp. 257-69.

in the SDKP—a role which was to diminish relatively as the years went by and a self-generating and broader leadership became established. *Sprawa Robotnicza* was published in Paris, and between 1893 and 1898 she went there frequently both in connection with party work and to pursue her studies in the Polish libraries. Indeed, her second visit to Paris in 1894 was something of a rescue operation for *Sprawa Robotnicza* from the uninspired hands of Adolf Warszawski; for several months Rosa not only wrote (or rewrote) most of the contributions but spent hours arguing with Reiff, the printer, over priorities and costs.

Similarly, 77 Universitätsstrasse was the intellectual centre of the SDKP. But because Rosa Luxemburg was always the public half of the partnership while Jogiches remained in the background, his role has been too much played down. Rosa thought and formulated, but the dominating trend was laid down by him, and many of the concepts she developed were originally his. Certainly everything she wrote was discussed with him, and could go no further without his approval. Above all, their personal relations with other Poles and Russians were laid down by him, and the question whether a junior colleague was a fool, a knave, an innocent dupe, or a cunning deceiver, was debated seriously back and forth.¹ Plekhanov for one considered Rosa merely as Jogiches' mouthpiece—though this was obviously one of Plekhanov's personal oversimplifications. Most of their contemporaries, however, were more clearly aware of the man's important role than later historians, and he had a substantial share in her triumphs as well as her vicissitudes.

As Rosa's international reputation grew, more visitors called and the second-floor flat became one of the points on the international Socialist circuit. John Mill, Jewish Socialist leader from Vilna and international gossip, visited her several times during his journeys from Russia to the West in search of support for the foundation of the *Bund*. Though he found both Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches resistant to his early appeals to them as Jews, and firmly opposed to any obligation to a specifically Jewish Socialist movement, he none the less saw them with an eye that at that time was politically and personally neutral, if not benevolent. His description of their lives and works in this period tells us more than that of close friends or committed enemies. He described his first meeting with Rosa:

¹ Jogiches letters. See for instance *Z Pola Walki*, 1930, Nos. 9/10, pp. 129 ff.

She was of low build, with a disproportionately large head; a typical Jewish face with a thick nose . . . a heavy, occasionally uneven, walk, with a limp; her first appearance did not make an agreeable impression but you had only to spend a bit of time with her to see how much life and energy was in the woman, how clever and sharp she was, and at what a high level of intellectual stimulation and development she lived.¹

Like other young Socialists, Mill wanted to combine work for his group abroad with a chance to study—and Zürich was beginning to have snob appeal for this purpose. Leo Jogiches proved little help and was not interested in academic pursuits. It was Rosa Luxemburg who found Mill a room and discussed possible study courses. The room, she explained, was haunted and she hoped that he was not superstitious. A Polish Jew, also a member of the SDKP, had recently committed suicide in it after a violent quarrel with a group of PPS students near by.²

When it came to discussing political co-operation, however, John Mill found himself up against an outburst of intellectual disapproval. 'One cannot work with crazy political kids who only want to play at soldiers', was Rosa's reply when he tentatively touched on the question of arms. Nevertheless the Jewish leaders appreciated Rosa's lively pen and Jogiches' conspiratorial abilities; between 1895 and 1897 a certain amount of SDKP material was distributed through *Bund* channels. Whatever differences there were between the SDKP and the emerging *Bund* leadership, the latter preferred to collaborate with Jogiches and Luxemburg rather than with the PPS. Jogiches' terms were stiff: he insisted on handling his own distribution and in the end the committee in Vilna reluctantly agreed to act more or less as his agents. This situation continued until 1897 when the formal creation of the *Bund* closed this convenient distribution channel to Leo Jogiches.³

In these early years from 1893 to 1895, Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches were almost entirely isolated. The PPS leadership had put a *cordon sanitaire* around them and even sympathizers kept away for fear of reprisal. Rosa's exuberant personality and her predilection for expressing herself in print exposed her far more than Jogiches, who always kept out of the limelight. By 1894 she had become the bogey-woman of Polish Socialism. 'She had been

¹ John Mill, *Pionirn un Boier*, Vol. I, p. 167.

² *Ibid.*, p. 168.

³ *Historische Shriftn*, pp. 388-90.

so blackened by the PPS that she was considered unclean [*tref*].¹ Even the parents of Julian Marchlewski, a close political collaborator of Rosa's, were preoccupied by their son's association with the outcast in Zürich.¹

Apart from her group in the SDKP, Rosa had a motley circle of friends: Gutman and his wife, Krichevskii, Kurnatowski, Teplov, and Petersohn, of whom only Teplov was to achieve any particular distinction in the future. But she was learning German fast; though she spoke and wrote it with a strong Polish cast, by 1895 she was making friends among the German circles in Zürich, particularly with Robert and Mathilde Seidel.² Naturally her Russian friends were all enemies of Plekhanov. As with the Poles, a group of young émigrés was organizing itself against the established avuncular leadership, and found cohesion in the cavalier treatment handed out indiscriminately by Plekhanov and Akselrod. Her Joan of Arc role at the 1893 Zürich congress earned Rosa Luxemburg the friendship of Christian Rakovskii, at that time the sole representative of the Bulgarian Socialists at the congress and one of the most attractive figures of the Second International and later of the Bolshevik hierarchy in Russia. Like Trotsky, he was a man of great charm and warm-heartedness; unlike Trotsky, an aristocrat who combined the progressive development of his estates with Socialist illegality and conspiracy. Although his friendship with Rosa Luxemburg cannot be documented, they met regularly and with pleasure at every International congress until 1905 when Rakovski returned to the Dobrudja to look after his property. Yet curiously this man, who was 'perhaps the only lasting and intimate friend in Trotsky's life', never succeeded in bringing Rosa close to Trotsky; these two in many ways similar figures of left-wing Socialism in the Second International never failed to grate on each other personally and intellectually.³

During this time Rosa was particularly associated with the group of Russians round Krichevskii and Akimov who had formed the Union of Social Democrats Abroad and were competing with Plekhanov and his Group for the Liberation of Labour for control of the emergent Russian movement. From 1892 onwards she corresponded regularly with Krichevskii, and the SDKP's assess-

¹ *Historishe Shriftn*, p. 391 (translated from Yiddish).

² See below, pp. 107 ff.

³ Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, London 1954, p. 207.

ment of developments in Russia was very similar to that of the Union of Social Democrats. Apart from their close contact in Zürich, they met regularly at International congresses and probably collaborated in the presentation of views on Russian affairs.¹ When Krichevskii and Teplov founded their own paper in 1899 they called it *Rabochee Delo*, probably after Rosa Luxemburg's *Sprawa Robotnicza* of which it is a precise Russian translation. The friendship did not, however, survive the test of time and political developments. A further group of émigrés at the end of the century under the leadership of Lenin and Martov adhered initially to Plekhanov and his group; together they drove Krichevskii and Akimov out of their influential position in the Russian party by identifying them—the first use of this technique by Lenin and Plekhanov—with the 'economist' movement, which subordinated political activity to the trade-union struggle. In 1898 Rosa was already sorry for Krichevskii—'I answered at once and in as friendly a fashion as possible', she reported to Jogiches in September—and certainly by 1903 the political friendship between them was at an end. Krichevskii was no longer able to get a mandate to the second RSDRP congress that year, while Akimov led a tenuous existence on the fringe as an observer until the 1906 Stockholm congress. Consistent lack of success and the resulting personal humiliation were not marketable commodities in Rosa Luxemburg's polity; looking back in 1910 she recalled:

Poor Krichevskii in Paris [after 1900]—a wreck perpetually complaining about his debts, his children, his ailments. . . . He failed to keep up with me mentally and when I saw him again it was like being visited by a provincial cousin whom one had known ten years ago as a brisk young man and found now nothing but a worried provincial hick and *pater familias*.²

There is little material to illustrate the daily routine of these young Socialists in Zürich. They were all poor, though both Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches received intermittent help from

¹ The letters to Krichevskii are no longer in existence, unless immured in the archives of IML (M). They must have been available to Frölich who quotes extensively from one letter (p. 35). Krichevskii led the Russian delegation to the 1896 International congress in London—a role which later party history denied him, wrongly assigning the leadership of the Russian group, in retrospect, to Plekhanov. Plekhanov considered Jogiches to be the 'evil genius' of Krichevskii's group.

² Letter to a friend in ZHP, Warsaw.

their families. Most of whatever money Jogiches could lay his hands on went into the movement. He was always more careful with money than Rosa, who fought hard for her minimum standard of living and liked her own flat, at least, to be well furnished—a retreat from the turmoil of Socialist activity which necessarily involved other and not always attractive people. These émigré circles were riddled with personal feuds and Rosa Luxemburg made a deliberate effort to avoid the usual meeting places. Self-pity, aided by alcohol, was despicable in her eyes and the resultant wildness of some of the political speculations repelled her.¹ Polemical, exposed, and unmistakably Jewish, she attracted—then as always—the anti-Semitic outbursts which were never far below the surface of Polish and Russian life, and which many genuine revolutionaries unconsciously shared with their enemies. The SDKP leadership, containing a higher proportion of Jews than almost any other Socialist group at the time, had consistently to ward off attacks tinged more or less obviously with anti-Semitic bias.² In the circumstances at the time, Rosa Luxemburg, who in the eyes of many *was* the SDKP, became the target for most of the abuse. She was ‘the direct cause of the first wild outbreak of anti-Semitic fury on the part of the former radical and free-thinking “black hundreds”’.³

But the loose, comradely, yet stimulating association between the SDKP leaders provided its own ideological defence. Rosa Luxemburg always found attacks of this kind particularly stimulating. They gave her an excellent chance to show up her opponents without, in fact, touching her on any especially sensitive spot. Anti-nationalism was a source of pride, not a shortcoming.

But by far the most important relationship was with Leo Jogiches. Its pattern was set early: strategic control in his hands, with the right on Rosa’s part to make tactical alterations where

¹ John Mill, *Pionirn un Boier*, Vol. I, p. 168.

² For a particularly striking instance, see below, p. 586.

³ John Mill, *Pionirn un Boier*, Vol. II, p. 182. One of the leaders of these ‘black hundreds’, Andrzej Niemojewski, identified Rosa Luxemburg particularly with the reprehensible Jewish efforts to seduce Polish workers: ‘The Jews agitate among our workers to cause them to consider Socialism as the equivalent of hating one’s fatherland. . . . What Rosa Luxemburg and her supporters feed the workers is nothing but the intoxication of scribbling. . . . The devilish work of destruction carried on by the Jewish excrement under the guise of defending the working class, turns out to be nothing less than the murder of Poland; as all Jews hate non-Jews, so Luxemburg’s Social Democrats have a passionate hatred for Poland.’ (Andrzej Niemojewski in *Myśl Niepodległa* (Independent Thought), November 1910, No. 153, p. 1599.

she thought fit—particularly in literary matters, where his influence was one of heavy, pedantic restraint. He criticized everything in his nagging, often abusive, way; she soon became resigned to the fact that ‘every one of my actions calls forth abuse’. Moreover, his arrangements were devious and often over-complicated; having chivvied the printer for breakneck speed, he would then let the finished material lie about for weeks, which made the next inducement to hurry obviously pointless.¹ But since it was his money, Rosa Luxemburg put up with it all: ‘if you don’t agree, cable; otherwise I will go ahead’. She fought like a tigress over costs, though not at the expense of good paper and a decent layout; her curious lifelong attitude over money—both spendthrift and mean—was already much in evidence. Above all, she accepted from him the imposition of work-loads which, unless they were self-imposed, she would never have accepted from anyone else.

For all intents and purposes Rosa Luxemburg *was* Polish Social Democracy during these years. Her writings were the ones that caused comment and reaction. The others only helped—or, according to her, hindered: Adolf and Jadwiga Warszawski with their need to earn a pittance on which to live, Marchlewski with his soupy style of writing which had always to be stirred by someone else, even Jogiches with his fuss and bother. Then there was a whole group of people who helped occasionally—or had to be helped—Ratyński, Olszewski, Heinrich. Rosa Luxemburg was frequently exhausted and disillusioned during 1894 and 1895, when she felt she was doing everything and yet, according to Jogiches, never enough—but their relationship, personal as well as political, was never for one moment in doubt. It was her great source of strength.

Rosa’s isolation within the Second International was, of course, the direct result of her uncompromising polemics against the PPS and her stand on the broader question of Polish independence. The SDKP was very small. For seven years, from 1893 to 1900, it was practically a head without a body. Though *Sprawa Robotnicza* bravely boasted of its substantial readership in Poland, visitors to Poland found that the SDKP organization was largely non-existent.² After his first visit to Zürich, John Mill was asked to take back an important letter from Rosa Luxemburg to an SDKP

¹ Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1930, Nos. 9/10, pp. 144-5.

² ‘The Pioneer Epoch in the Jewish Labour Movement’, *Historische Shriftn*, p. 388.

organizer in Warsaw called Ratyński, the son of a shopkeeper; he turned out to be the only self-confessed Social Democrat in the entire city. And even he soon found the strain excessive; he was arrested in 1902 and joined the PPS in exile in Siberia.¹ As to *Sprawa Robotnicza* and its readership, it could not be found anywhere in Poland. 'You could search everywhere with candles and fail to throw any light on it.'² The correspondence printed in the paper from time to time was often fictitious and turned out to have been written by the editors themselves in Switzerland. Visitors who told them the latest news from home were astonished to find that their stories appeared as readers' letters in the next issue. *Sprawa Robotnicza* itself eked out an increasingly precarious existence from the spring of 1895 onwards, when Rosa Luxemburg left Paris for Zürich. The intervals between issues became longer and in July 1896 it ceased publication altogether.³

Of course, this situation was not due to any internal weakness in the SDKP nor even peculiar to it. The PPS, too, suffered from the inroads of the police into its organization in Poland, and both Socialist movements were reduced to token forces in 1896. The pattern was always cyclical; a resurgence of interest and growing organizations followed by a reaction during which the police were able to clean up most of the revolutionary nests, until new ones could be formed once more. These tendencies were general throughout Russia and applied in all regions. It was not until the last three years of the century that there was a revival; during the period which saw the formation of both the *Bund* and the RSDRP, the Polish Socialist movement, too, benefited from a sudden and rapid accession of strength.

The Polish émigré leadership, and particularly the SDKP, were not directly affected by the decline of the organizations at home. The work of strengthening the position of the party in the

¹ Ibid. See also *SDKPiL dokumenty*, Vol. I, Part 2, pp. 410-12 for a reprint of Ratyński's 'obituary' published originally in *Czerwony Sztandar*.

² *Historishe Shriftn*, p. 389. The particular phrase loses its savour in translation from Yiddish.

³ The reason is not entirely clear. The last number to appear was No. 24 of June 1896, before the International congress. The organization in Poland had admittedly ceased to exist owing to police depredations. But material for further numbers was already in the hands of the printer. Politically, the congress itself was at least a partial success for the SDKP (the PPS failed to get its resolution adopted). I suspect, from only indirect evidence, that Rosa and Jogiches may have quarrelled at about this time and he may have refused to provide further funds. The years 1896-7 are ill-documented anyway.

Second International was always as important as the conspiratorial efforts at home. This was particularly Rosa Luxemburg's work; while Jogiches found the ebb of the revolutionary period in Russia very frustrating, she concentrated more than ever on the defence of the SDKP programme in the West. Here she was confronted by an established and well-reputed PPS leadership. In offering to engage a man like Daszyński in public debate on the question of Polish independence, in projecting the image of the SDKP as a group of serious intellectuals within the western context, Rosa Luxemburg actually benefited from the slump in revolutionary activities at home and emerged, for contemporaries and historians, as the pre-eminent spokesman of the SDKP point of view.

Sprawa Robotnicza was in some ways a literary nursery both for those who wrote in it and for those who read it. A regular part of it was always reserved for polemics against the PPS and its nationalist position. The paper emphasized the all-Russian aspect of its Polish Socialism—which has been discussed—but right from the start a steady parade of international Socialist affairs marched across its columns. The attempt to link developing Socialism in Poland with the experiences of other countries was a distinctive feature of Rosa Luxemburg's approach. The technique of easy cross-references from one country to another, the creation of a truly international Socialist polity with interchangeable parts, was something she later took with her into the German movement, where it was to cause considerable annoyance. The editors of *Sprawa Robotnicza* knew they were catering for a proletariat in an embryonic state of class consciousness. Particular attention was paid to the developing trade-union activities, which were recognized as the midwife of developing Socialism. There were articles on the May Day celebrations (which actually originated in Australia), probably the most important event in the early Socialist calendar in Poland. And whenever there was an industrial strike *Sprawa Robotnicza* noted these examples of muscle-flexing class solidarity with pleasure and spelled them out as an example to be followed.¹ The policy of the paper was always to indicate the need

¹ See *Sprawa Robotnicza*, November and December 1893, for a lengthy analysis of the English strike of that year. No doubt the fact that Rosa's earliest publications had been concerned with the May Day celebrations gave them a special sentimental standing in her later life in Germany. She would return to the subject continually, though May Day had never been a strong feature in German working-class tradition.

for a separate and self-conscious proletarian mentality relying on itself and no longer on the middle classes, which was contrary to the conventional Russian wisdom as expounded by Plekhanov at the time. The proletariat, though not yet ready to achieve its aims, must act *on* the middle classes and not collaborate with them.

But the ideas themselves were already revolutionary. The prevailing ideology still saw Socialism as an appendage to middle-class liberalism, at least in those countries like Russia which were still in a state of autocracy corresponding, in the Socialist calendar, to western feudalism. *Sprawa Robotnicza* did not have the circulation necessary to obtrude itself on to the consciousness of prominent western theorists; no one outside the Polish movement could read the language and consequently these traces of a new doctrine passed unnoticed. However, they sketched the outline for an analysis which was to prove critically important in the 1905 revolution, linking the ideas of the SDKPiL with those of the Bolsheviks—against the more orthodox formulation of PPS and Mensheviks.

Apart from the PPS, the chief opponents at this time were the anarchists; they received the sympathetic but slightly contemptuous compliments reserved for have-beens whom history has left behind. 'Brave, even heroic, revolutionaries, but unproductive in the end because their policy is and remains irrational.'¹ Like Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg always retained a soft spot for genuine revolutionary sentiment however mistaken in theory, but Rosa, even more than Lenin, had a sharp eye for mere mouthers of revolutionary phraseology.

With the end of *Sprawa Robotnicza* the SDKP was left without an organ. In view of the doldrums at home it seemed more important to project a sophisticated party image at the Second International than to translate international Socialism for the benefit of a rapidly declining Polish readership. In 1895 under the auspices of *Sprawa Robotnicza* Rosa's first pamphlet had appeared, under the pseudonym of Maciej Rożga.² It was her first cohesive statement on the national question. The theoretical implications were

¹ *Sprawa Robotnicza*, February 1895.

² *Niepodległa Polska i sprawa robotnicza* (Independent Poland and the Workers' Cause), Paris 1895. This seems to be the original title, though sometimes referred to as '*Niepodległość Polski a sprawa robotnicza*' (*SDKPiL dokumenty*, Vol. I, Part 2, p. 137, note 3).

assumed; the main plank of the argument was immediate and political. Any emphasis on Polish nationalism must divert the working classes from the intensity and purity of their Socialism. She felt as strongly as she reasoned convincingly that the two were incompatible; instead of going together, as the PPS claimed, they would necessarily struggle with each other for supremacy; one must supplant the other. Although she maintained that the socialist factor was as progressive as the nationalist factor was backward-looking, she must have felt a definite fear of contamination; in a struggle between nationalist and socialist tendencies within a fairly unsophisticated working class, Socialism would probably be the loser. Nothing but fear added to conviction will explain her intensity, her willingness to fall out at one time or another with almost every Socialist of importance, from Liebknecht to Lenin, over this question. Rosa Luxemburg justified her anti-nationalist programme in political terms by showing that nationalism was the refuge of the middle class, but that this same middle class had ceased to be a revolutionary factor in Poland. Consequently, any nationalist aspirations on the part of Socialists would merely chain them hopelessly to a *bourgeoisie* itself politically impotent. In any case, nationalism was something which the middle classes would always be able to propagate more successfully than Socialists. Most important, however, was the fact that if the middle classes had finally to choose between getting Socialist support in order to gather momentum for a campaign for the independence of Poland, or abandoning this demand in order to co-operate with the autocracy against the spectre of social revolution, they would always plump for the latter.

At times the pamphlet's argument seems ingenuous, even naïve. Rosa overstated her case in trying to have the best of both worlds. Thus she argued that the working class, theoretically powerful enough to bring about the collapse of the Tsarist government, or even to overthrow the order of society, was actually *unable* to achieve national independence. 'History shows that the workers by their own hands and against the class opposition of the *bourgeoisie*, have never achieved national independence but . . . have [for instance] wrung out a constitution, first with the help of the *bourgeoisie* and then alone.'¹ The *bourgeoisie* thus had to play a double, even contradictory, role to satisfy Rosa, supporting

¹ Op. cit., p. 53.

nationalism in order to mislead and vitiate Socialism, but opposing it if the workers hoped to achieve Socialism through a programme of self-determination. The latter proposition already foreshadowed the later economic theory which postulated that Polish capitalists were better off within the Russian empire and knew it. Straight national aspirations were arbitrarily reduced to being only the desire of one small class, the confused *petite bourgeoisie*! This class was to serve Rosa as a convenient dialectical rubbish bin for many inconvenient or abstract absurdities in the future.

Though the first and by no means the best of her many writings on the national question, it put forward a point of view which, during long years of struggle and debate, was never substantially altered except for minor tactical concessions in the heat of debate. It is easy to shrug off her negation of Polish independence as a product of her social and religious background. This identification—partially true—has the additional advantage of applying to many of her colleagues in Polish Social Democracy: Radek, Warszawski, Jogiches, and Leder. But as a sole explanation it will not suffice. Nor will the negative stimulus of opposition to the PPS leadership. Undoubtedly the bitter polemics drove both conceptions to extremes, so that the PPS became a near-nationalist party and the SDKP a total and doctrinaire opponent of all national aspirations.¹ But both these points of view assume a modicum of deception, partly unconscious and partly deliberate. Rosa Luxemburg's case against Polish independence was far too much of a scientific totality for such explanations. She argued on all levels—political, economic (her doctoral thesis 'The Economic Development of Poland' was to provide the economic rationale), and in terms of Marxist dialectics—even though she had to turn Marx's own words upside down. The antipathy to Polish independence was so deeply felt that Rosa Luxemburg preferred to polemicize with Lenin for years on this subject and refused to let the SDKPiL join the Russian party in 1903 because he would not subscribe to the fullness of her views. In the last resort Rosa Luxemburg and her friends believed this particular conception of Polish independence was not only a misguided illusion, but a cancer which could not fail to eat into the Socialist movement and destroy it—and she was always able to find evidence within the PPS to lend some justification to her point of view.

¹ See below, pp. 269 ff, 280.

Whether one accepts it or not, the case against the resuscitation of Poland deserves careful consideration. In order to make her point, Rosa Luxemburg did not confine the argument either to Poland or the arena of debate to Polish Socialists. Part of the policy of combating the PPS, on the international plane, was to contrast its exclusively 'national' orientation with the virtuously international policy of her own party. The 'national-international' antithesis was a weapon of variable efficacy—but it was more than just a tactical trick; the same argument was to be raised against the leadership of the German SPD during the First World War.

This problem, with all the pent-up emotions behind it, burst like a bomb at the next International Socialist congress, due to meet in London on 17 July 1896 for its usual purpose of reviewing and discussing international progress. The PPS prepared a resolution well in advance asking the congress to set the stamp of its approval on Polish independence as a 'necessary political demand for the Polish and indeed the entire international proletariat'.¹ The proposed resolution was given the widest publicity in the PPS press. The Polish committee in London worked hard in public and behind the scenes to ensure that the nefarious activities of the Zürich group would now be crushed once and for all. It could not afford to leave Rosa Luxemburg's *Niepodległa Polska i sprawa robotnicza* unanswered; yet at the same time it was important for the PPS to appear as the injured party—badly done by rather than doing. Simultaneously with the secret assault on the SDKP inside the boundaries of Polish Socialism, the PPS leaders used their connections in the Second International to present an innocent and purely defensive face. They succeeded admirably. 'I am afraid that the unnecessary but *certainly harmless* Polish [PPS] resolution for London will certainly be blown up into quite an affair by her [RL].'² Victor Adler's view was shared by most of the International's 'establishment'; Plekhanov and his group, particularly, were pledged to unequivocal support of the PPS.³

The offensive was not confined to political polemics. Warsz-

¹ Reprinted in *NZ*, 1895/96, Vol. II, p. 461. Cf. S. Häcker, 'Der Sozialismus in Polen', *NZ*, *ibid.*, p. 327.

² Victor Adler to Karl Kautsky, 13 May 1896, in Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel mit August Bebel und Karl Kautsky*, Vienna 1954, p. 207 (my italics).

³ *Perepiska G. V. Plekhanova i P. B. Akselroda*, Moscow 1925, Vol. I, p. 156. See also the attempt to embroil the distinguished Antonio Labriola and through him the Spaniards and others: 'Correspondence B. A. Jędrzejowski-A. Labriola 1895-1897', in *Annali dell' Istituto G. Feltrinelli*, 1960, pp. 226-63.

awski was singled out for personal indictment—as a secret agent of the Russian police; and conveniently Marcin Kasprzak, who had recently escaped from Poland, was also available to be smeared as an individual of dubious reputation and honesty. Such accusations against individuals recurred with miserable regularity in the Russian and Polish movements; out of the vast armoury available to these hardened champions of personal abuse, the accusation of working for the Okhrana was the nastiest and most destructive.¹ The PPS leadership could be well satisfied with its preparations for a final reckoning with its opponents at the congress.

But Rosa Luxemburg reacted with speed and precision. Shaped now for a more sophisticated and international readership, the arguments of her Polish pamphlet were repeated in a series of articles in *Neue Zeit* and *Critica Sociale*, the chief theoretical organs of the German and Italian Socialist parties.² The International as a whole and the German and Austrian parties in particular were now put on notice that the alleged objectionable nationalistic tendencies of the PPS were not confined to an incomprehensible squabble in the bosom of distant Russia, but were affecting and destroying the precious unity of theory and organization of the two great parties. For Polish nationalism was not an alternative Socialist policy at all, but the negation of one; chameleon-like, the PPS, according to Rosa, wore Socialist colours merely as a disguise in order to undermine the authority of the German leadership over the gullible unsophisticated Polish masses.

¹ For further accusations against Kasprzak, see below, p. 177. The meaningless buzz of this particular type of accusation effectively deafened everyone to the occasional reality. Exposures like Azev's in 1908 caused considerable shock (see Rosa Luxemburg's article in *Vorwärts*, 27 January 1909). Lenin indeed seemed remarkably impervious. He belittled the accusations against his friend Zhitomirskii in 1912 and took no notice when Malinovskii, one of his most trusted lieutenants, was similarly accused by his Menshevik opponents in 1914—though in both cases the accusation happened to be only too true. Suspicious as Lenin normally was, this apparently was too common a slander for him to take seriously every time.

² 'Neue Strömungen in der polnischen sozialistischen Bewegung in Deutschland und Österreich' (New tendencies in the Polish Socialist Movement in Germany and Austria), *NZ*, 1895/1896, Vol. II, pp. 176 ff., 206 ff.; 'Der Sozialpatriotismus in Polen' (Social patriotism in Poland), *NZ*, 1895/1896, Vol. II, pp. 459 ff. The Italian one is 'La questione polacca al congresso internazionale di Londra', *Critica Sociale*, No. 14, 16 July 1896. The Italians, like all other outsiders, confessed to ignorance about Polish matters. But Turati, the editor of *Critica Sociale*, 'was impressed by Rosa Luxemburg's weighty arguments'; besides, 'we attach weight to Rosa Luxemburg's letters, in view of the fact that these appeared in *NZ*, i.e. the mouthpiece of scientific Socialism, which represents the official opinion of German Social Democracy.' Labriola notwithstanding, the Italians had been won for Rosa! *Annali*, op. cit., pp. 248, 244.

West

Das zehnjährige Kind des Herrnhuter II. Frauen-
gymnasiums, laut des 39 alljährlich bestimmten vom 5/12/
Juni 18. Sebastian Kugelmanns für Frauen-gymnasien
in Preussengymnasien im Könige. Polen, Halber den 18. 1887
am des genannten Gymnasiums, Rosa Luxemburg, 1887
es alt, vom russischen Konfession, dort 1887 aus, 1887
in der 1. Klasse des Gymnasiums eingeschrieben, bis zu
vollständigen Beendigung der Schulzeit (7. Klasse) in
zwei bis zum 14. Juni 1887 davon. Die für die ausge-
zeichneten Leistungen aus der letzten Klasse folgende

Materi		Befallten	
Religion	5	Geographie. Rußland	5
Russische Sp.	4	Naturwissenschaften	5
Pädagogik	5	Allg. Geschichte	5
Polnische Sp.	5	Russische	4
Deutsche	4	Physik	5
Französische	4	Kosmographie	5
Arithmetik	5	Kalligraphie	5
Algebra	5	Zeichnen	5
Geometrie	5	W. H. Arbeiten	5
Allg. Geographie	4	(5 = sehr gut, 4 = fast gut)	

Die Rosa Luxemburg mit sehr guten Leistungen in
den verschiedenen Fächern der Schulzeit abgelehnt hat, so hat die
zehnjährige Kind bestimmt, so hat die nicht, für die Leistungen
in der letzten Klasse. Die Leistungen in der letzten Klasse

Die Leistungen in der letzten Klasse in der letzten Klasse
behalten das Original 1887 339.
Rosa Luxemburg

German copy of Rosa Luxemburg's last school report (1887)

Although the report is in German, the system of marking is Russian, the highest mark being 5

Beide die Wannengraben am ten April um einmahl achthundert
acht und sechzig sind vor dem emmerrothenen Fluss und beim ersten erschienen.

1. Robert Graham - for incorporation of his

Plant. Monocladum 11-167, 69g.

District _____ No. _____ in _____
 County _____ State of _____

Frankfurt, am 1. August 1894.

Second Government Printing, & Publishing, Albany, N.Y.

Therid. affigularis (Hymen.) - common & abundant

Friedrich, ———— Tochter des Leinwandm. Meibels, Huf-
mannen - Knecht, der 2 Linien geb. Leinwandm.

The Volkswagen hat stattdessen in *Walden-Park* eine Garage
für ein *Modell-Pan* neuzeitiger Autos, ein *Wagen*

Die Herren Fabianus und Julius (F. Fabianus nicht mit!)
 — die Lieferung des neuen Inventars für die
 2. Nachprüfung der von den Verleihen nach Vorschrift des Gesetzes eingeworbenen

Ergebnisse und Methoden in diesen Bereichen wurden, obwohl sich die Errechnung und die Ableitung schwierig gestaltet, mit der am weitesten entwickelten Methode zur

Abgegebene Patienten: _____ Unterschriften der Elterngatten: _____

Lauter Hild

[illegible]

1885, 1886, 1887, 1888, 1889, 1890, 1891, 1892, 1893, 1894, 1895, 1896, 1897, 1898, 1899, 1900, 1901, 1902, 1903, 1904, 1905, 1906, 1907, 1908, 1909, 1910, 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914, 1915, 1916, 1917, 1918, 1919, 1920, 1921, 1922, 1923, 1924, 1925, 1926, 1927, 1928, 1929, 1930, 1931, 1932, 1933, 1934, 1935, 1936, 1937, 1938, 1939, 1940, 1941, 1942, 1943, 1944, 1945, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1949, 1950, 1951, 1952, 1953, 1954, 1955, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025, 2026, 2027, 2028, 2029, 2030, 2031, 2032, 2033, 2034, 2035, 2036, 2037, 2038, 2039, 2040, 2041, 2042, 2043, 2044, 2045, 2046, 2047, 2048, 2049, 2050, 2051, 2052, 2053, 2054, 2055, 2056, 2057, 2058, 2059, 2060, 2061, 2062, 2063, 2064, 2065, 2066, 2067, 2068, 2069, 2070, 2071, 2072, 2073, 2074, 2075, 2076, 2077, 2078, 2079, 2080, 2081, 2082, 2083, 2084, 2085, 2086, 2087, 2088, 2089, 2090, 2091, 2092, 2093, 2094, 2095, 2096, 2097, 2098, 2099, 2100, 2101, 2102, 2103, 2104, 2105, 2106, 2107, 2108, 2109, 2110, 2111, 2112, 2113, 2114, 2115, 2116, 2117, 2118, 2119, 2120, 2121, 2122, 2123, 2124, 2125, 2126, 2127, 2128, 2129, 2130, 2131, 2132, 2133, 2134, 2135, 2136, 2137, 2138, 2139, 2140, 2141, 2142, 2143, 2144, 2145, 2146, 2147, 2148, 2149, 2150, 2151, 2152, 2153, 2154, 2155, 2156, 2157, 2158, 2159, 2160, 2161, 2162, 2163, 2164, 2165, 2166, 2167, 2168, 2169, 2170, 2171, 2172, 2173, 2174, 2175, 2176, 2177, 2178, 2179, 2180, 2181, 2182, 2183, 2184, 2185, 2186, 2187, 2188, 2189, 2190, 2191, 2192, 2193, 2194, 2195, 2196, 2197, 2198, 2199, 2200, 2201, 2202, 2203, 2204, 2205, 2206, 2207, 2208, 2209, 2210, 2211, 2212, 2213, 2214, 2215, 2216, 2217, 2218, 2219, 2220, 2221, 2222, 2223, 2224, 2225, 2226, 2227, 2228, 2229, 2230, 2231, 2232, 2233, 2234, 2235, 2236, 2237, 2238, 2239, 2240, 2241, 2242, 2243, 2244, 2245, 2246, 2247, 2248, 2249, 2250, 2251, 2252, 2253, 2254, 2255, 2256, 2257, 2258, 2259, 2260, 2261, 2262, 2263, 2264, 2265, 2266, 2267, 2268, 2269, 2270, 2271, 2272, 2273, 2274, 2275, 2276, 2277, 2278, 2279, 2280, 2281, 2282, 2283, 2284, 2285, 2286, 2287, 2288, 2289, 2290, 2291, 2292, 2293, 2294, 2295, 2296, 2297, 2298, 2299, 2300, 2301, 2302, 2303, 2304, 2305, 2306, 2307, 2308, 2309, 2310, 2311, 2312, 2313, 2314, 2315, 2316, 2317, 2318, 2319, 2320, 2321, 2322, 2323, 2324, 2325, 2326, 2327, 2328, 2329, 2330, 2331, 2332, 2333, 2334, 2335, 2336, 2337, 2338, 2339, 2340, 2341, 2342, 2343, 2344, 2345, 2346, 2347, 2348, 2349, 2350, 2351, 2352, 2353, 2354, 2355, 2356, 2357, 2358, 2359, 2360, 2361, 2362, 2363, 2364, 2365, 2366, 2367, 2368, 2369, 2370, 2371, 2372, 2373, 2374, 2375, 2376, 2377, 2378, 2379, 2380, 2381, 2382, 2383, 2384, 2385, 2386, 2387, 2388, 2389, 2390, 2391, 2392, 2393, 2394, 2395, 2396, 2397, 2398, 2399, 2400, 2401, 2402, 2403, 2404, 2405, 2406, 2407, 2408, 2409, 2410, 2411, 2412, 2413, 2414, 2415, 2416, 2417, 2418, 2419, 2420, 2421, 2422, 2423, 2424, 2425, 2426, 2427, 2428, 2429, 2430, 2431, 2432, 2433, 2434, 2435, 2436, 2437, 2438, 2439, 2440, 2441, 2442, 2443, 2444, 2445, 2446, 2447, 2448, 2449, 2450, 2451, 2452, 2453, 2454, 2455, 2456, 2457, 2458, 2459, 2460, 2461, 2462, 2463, 2464, 2465, 2466, 2467, 2468, 2469, 2470, 2471, 2472, 2473, 2474, 2475, 2476, 2477, 2478, 2479, 2480, 2481, 2482, 2483, 2484, 2485, 2486, 2487, 2488, 2489, 2490, 2491, 2492, 2493, 2494, 2495, 2496, 2497, 2498, 2499, 2500, 2501, 2502, 2503, 2504, 2505, 2506, 2507, 2508, 2509, 2510, 2511, 2512, 2513, 2514, 2515, 2516, 2517, 2518, 2519, 2520, 2521, 2522, 2523, 2524, 2525, 2526, 2527, 2528, 2529, 2530, 2531, 2532, 2533, 2534, 2535, 2536, 2537, 2538, 2539, 2540, 2541, 2542, 2543, 2544, 2545, 2546, 2547, 2548, 2549, 2550, 2551, 2552, 2553, 2554, 2555, 2556, 2557, 2558, 2559, 2560, 2561, 2562, 2563, 2564, 2565, 2566, 25

Robertson & Co. Glasgow

100

Photocopy of certificate of Rosa Luxemburg's marriage to Gustav Lübeck
in Basle, dated 19 April 1898

At the same time the SDKP leadership had to refute the personal accusations against Warszawski and Kasprzak. The accusation against the former was handed over to a committee of investigation, under the chairmanship of the impeccable and ancient Russian revolutionary Peter Lavrov, which after a few sessions cleared him completely—with Rosa personally importuning the old man.¹ The case of Kasprzak was more difficult since so little was really known about him. He was an old-fashioned type of revolutionary conspirator, a practical man with pistol and printing press, without any great intellectual claims—but a leader none the less. He had been Rosa's guide and mentor in the early Warsaw days, and though they were never personal friends she described him as 'a most intimate party colleague' and later worked closely with him in Germany. In order to avoid imprisonment or exile, he had feigned madness and been confined in a Warsaw lunatic asylum from which he managed to escape. On arrival in Germany he had been promptly arrested by the German police who then negotiated with the Russian authorities with a view to his extradition. The SDKP leadership appealed to prominent German Social Democrats on his behalf, while the PPS attempted to scotch such intervention with the accusation that Kasprzak was an Okhrana spy. Rosa Luxemburg was active in Switzerland and appealed among others to Seidel to use his many German friendships and connections.² It was through this correspondence that an intimate friendship blossomed in the next few years.

On 12 July, *en route* for the congress five days later, Rosa descended on Paris like a hurricane—to finish off the next two numbers of *Sprawa Robotnicza*; to whip up local Poles like Warszawski and her friend Cezaryna Wojnarowska; above all, to get support for her own SDKP congress resolution and pledges against that of the PPS. She was very cheered by her reception. Allemane and Vaillant more or less promised support—and, more important, hoped to get that of Jaurès; Bernstein was reputed to be sympathetic; even Plekhanov was suspected of using his colleague Gurvich (Dan) to send an offer of reconciliation and co-operation

¹ Frölich, p. 52. For Rosa's own interview with Lavrov, who got real pleasure out of current disputes among the Russian émigrés, see *Z Pola Walki*, 1930, Nos. 9/10, pp. 145-6.

² See Seidel letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1959, No. 1(5), pp. 66-67, dated 21 October 1895. Kasprzak's personality and exploits resemble those of Kamo (Ter-Petrosian), the Bolshevik Robin Hood. They even looked alike.

with the Russian congress delegation.¹ This suggestion was contemptuously refused. Co-operation with Parvus and John Mill was also flourishing. Altogether Rosa felt much more self-confident than during the last Paris visit—and immediately behaved much more arrogantly: Wojnarowska was ‘mad’ because she queried Rosa’s distribution of mandates; Krichevskii an ugly rag (*triapka*) who would come to a bad end (*shvartzem sof*) because he was too sick and too unconcerned either to fight or to write; even Jogiches was for once roundly abused: ‘You dealt superbly with [our delegation’s] report! You had a whole week and only now you begin to scratch about for material. . . . You should be ashamed of yourself; at least this one thing you could have arranged without me.’²

Rosa Luxemburg’s activities and articles in *Neue Zeit* caused a storm. Plekhanov took it upon himself to reply personally on behalf of the PPS.³ Karl Kautsky, the editor of *Neue Zeit*, who had agreed to publish the articles in view of their high standard and closely reasoned argument, disagreed with the conclusions and invested the debate with his own very considerable prestige by answering Rosa Luxemburg at length.⁴ He asserted the revolutionary, anti-Tsarist potential of the fight for Polish independence, and threw in for good measure all the authority of Marx’s and Engels’s own views, which he had at his finger tips. He solemnly warned that opposition to this view could only give active assistance to the Poles’ present oppressors, the Russian autocracy.

The most violent reactions, however, came from the members of the PPS. *Naprzód* (Forward) reviewed her first article with contemptuous regret that ‘any serious German paper should be taken in by Miss Rosa . . . who has even managed to bluff the good Swiss into believing that she represents somebody or something in Poland’.⁵ Berfus, one of the leaders of the PPS organization in Germany, was offered space in the official German party paper to reply.⁶ The debate went on right up to the eve of the International congress, with Rosa Luxemburg insisting on the right to

¹ Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1930, Nos. 9/10, pp. 153 ff. Rosa’s suspicion that Dan’s letter (reproduced in *Z Pola Walki*) was inspired by Plekhanov may have been unjustified. Plekhanov had earlier reported to Engels that it was Rosa who wanted to get closer to the Russians. And immediately after the congress he attacked her again in print.

² *Z Pola Walki*, *ibid.*, p. 160.

³ *Vorwärts*, 23 July 1896.

⁴ ‘Finis Poloniae’, *NZ*, 1895/1896, Vol. II, pp. 484, 513 ff.

⁵ *Naprzód*, No. 20, 14 May 1896.

⁶ *Vorwärts*, 15, 17 July 1896.

reply both in *Vorwärts* and in *Neue Zeit*.¹ From Kautsky she had reluctantly to accept the cuts on which the editor now insisted—the problem of length was also to contribute to the still distant ending of their friendship—and with somewhat better grace agreed to the alteration of any mistakes in her German. But she would not be held responsible for the tone of the polemics. ‘You are doing me an injustice when you lay all these results at my door. . . . My argument has nothing personal in it, but is directed exclusively at political points of view. . . . In criticizing a certain position I must above all show due regard for the line of argument . . . however ill-informed [this argument may be].’²

At the congress itself she led the SDKP delegation, confronted by a powerful PPS group under the leadership of its emergent ‘strong man’, Józef Piłsudski. To make doubly sure that there would be no unpleasant surprises about mandates, she came fortified with two additional German mandates which were beyond anyone’s challenge.³ These had been obtained from under the noses of the German leadership; the provincial SPD leadership in Silesia was becoming acutely conscious of the activities of the local PPS organizations and appreciated the incidental services of Rosa Luxemburg’s policy in keeping the Poles faithful to the SPD organization. But to most of the leaders of the Second International she was merely a quarrelsome young woman who insisted on pitting her considerable wits against wiser and better heads. Victor Adler, who led the Austrian delegation, viewed her existence and activities with unmasked hostility, from which he was never to deviate one iota. He considered her articles ill-timed and tactless:

She is trying to do our thinking for us [*Sie zerbricht sich unseren Kopf*]. . . . Above all I am scared of the effect on our Daszynski. *He* himself is *very* sensible, but has to deal with his—as we with our—lunatics. . . . I implore you to send me whatever more you get in before setting it in print—not for my comments, but to enable me to calm things down, and make up for all the damage this doctrinaire goose has caused us. To hell with all these refugees. . . .⁴

¹ *Vorwärts*, 25 July 1896, Supplement No. 2.

² *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, New York 1923, pp. 44, 50.

³ *Volksmacht*, Breslau, 1 June and 21 July 1896; *Vorwärts*, 19 July 1896. See also *Z Pola Walki*, 1930, Nos. 9/10, p. 159.

⁴ Victor Adler to Karl Kautsky, 13 May 1896, in Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel mit August Bebel und Karl Kautsky*, Vienna 1954, p. 207.

Wilhelm Liebknecht, the august co-chairman of the German party, had already expressed his disapproval in a strongly worded private letter, and entered the public debate shortly after the congress with a polemical article against her in *Vorwärts*.¹ Daszyński was incensed by the report on Socialist activities in Poland with which the SDKP had again insisted on belabouring the congress, and characterized Rosa as 'a pedantic and quarrelsome person with a mechanistic interpretation of Marxism'.²

With so much personal opposition, it looked as though Rosa would have a rough passage at the congress. Even some of her immediate party friends were reluctant to follow her into a head-on conflict with all recognized authority, and partially dissociated themselves from her intransigent attitudes—at least in private. Marchlewski, who was himself breaking into the hallowed pages of *Neue Zeit*, told Kautsky that his material should not be confused with the polemical shafts of Rosa Luxemburg:

My work is not concerned with striking attitudes on the 'Polish question'. This will have to be solved by our Polish workers in Warsaw and Łódź on their own behalf, and one can only hope that, to the dismay of the émigrés, this will happen soon. . . . I can imagine that the contribution of at least one of my Polish colleagues has made you wonder exactly what you let yourself in for when you agreed to tackle the Polish question in your paper.³

Yet, surprisingly, honours were remarkably even between the two Polish parties—or rather between Rosa Luxemburg and the PPS. She unexpectedly whipped out a motion opposing that of the PPS, in which the aim of national independence was specifically denied as valid for any Socialist programme. With the help of a furious personal onslaught on Rosa Luxemburg the PPS delegation succeeded in persuading the congress to reject it. To overcome stalemate, George Lansbury, on behalf of the congress commission charged with this intractable dispute, asked the congress to declare that

it supports the right to complete self-determination of all nations and

¹ For his letter, see Frölich, p. 53 and below, p. 100; for the polemic, see *Vorwärts*, 11 November 1896.

² Frölich, p. 53. For the report, see *Bericht an den Internationalen Sozialistischen Arbeiter-und Gewerkschaftskongress in London über die Sozialdemokratische Bewegung in Russisch-Polen 1893-1896*, submitted by . . . *Sprawa Robotnicza* . . . and its delegates . . . Zürich (?) 1896.

³ Julian Marchlewski to Karl Kautsky, 12 December 1896. IISH Archives, D XVI, 390.

sympathizes with the workers of all countries presently suffering under the yoke of military, national or other despotism. It invites the workers of all these countries to enter the ranks of class-conscious workers of the whole world, in order to fight with them for the overthrow of international capitalism and the attainment of the aims of international Social Democracy.

The congress gladly adopted this compromise which expressed the right of all nations to self-determination but made no particular mention of Poland either as an example or as a specially deserving case.¹ Naturally Rosa Luxemburg's right to appear, and the whole question of the SDKP's existence as a separate member of the International, was also duly challenged, but upheld by the congress. Right or wrong about nationalism, Rosa was established as a noteworthy contributor to the mainstream of Socialist ideas. Her party had earned its spurs—though as far as the International was concerned, it is probable that it found more recognition and acceptance as the projection of Rosa Luxemburg than as the vehicle which had sent her to the congress.

Naturally the congress decision on self-determination was a blow. Rosa Luxemburg was perfectly genuine in believing in the importance of the International, not merely as a confederate gathering of autonomous parties, but as a supreme law-making body for that growing section of the world which represented Socialism and the future.² This body had now enacted 'legislation' directly contrary to her own beliefs. According to her, self-determination was not merely a wrong theory but a dangerous and misleading tactic as well. There was nothing to do but keep arguing and writing in the hope that a future congress might reverse the decision and adopt what Rosa Luxemburg believed to be the proper Socialist view. This hope never materialized; in the end, she tacitly accepted that it was hopeless to expect any declaration against self-determination. She tried at various times, but without much conviction, to deflect and reinterpret the purpose of the congress resolution; she claimed that what the London congress meant was not so much agitation for self-determination under existing conditions of capitalism, but the hope of its achievement after

¹ *Verhandlungen und Beschlüsse, Internationaler Sozialistischer . . . Kongress zu London*, 27 July-1 August 1896, p. 18.

² The International as the government of her proletarian fatherland was the necessary corollary of her anti-nationalism. For a detailed examination of this view, see below, Appendix 2.

the world-wide social revolution had taken place.¹ This, of course, was no more than a piece of cynical sophistry to which even Rosa Luxemburg was liable at times; for she herself frequently pointed out that under Socialist conditions self-determination was unnecessary.

The argument did not, of course, end with the 1896 congress; no argument about Socialism was ever ended by any congress until Stalin turned the secret police into party congress bailiffs for ideas as much as for men. Rosa Luxemburg had already transformed the arguments about self-determination from a purely Polish context into an organizational question for the German and Austrian Social-Democratic parties. Now she broadened the argument still further. Having tried to show that Russia was no longer the hopeless bastion of reaction, to be weakened in every possible way, Rosa Luxemburg completed the argument by showing that one of the bastions of defence against aggressive Russia—a viable Turkish state—was nothing but an illusion. Far from being artificially maintained, it and not Russia should be pressed to disintegration. The dead weight of Turkish rule was even incapable of *generating* capitalism—and thus, ultimately, Socialism; the sooner it was destroyed and split up into its constituent national parts the better—and then this backward area might catch up with the normal processes of historical dialectic.² Turkey, then, was the exception that proved the rule. Nationalism, far from being a progressive modern factor, was merely the last resort for lonely fossilized pockets of resistance which history had passed by.

Responsible public opinion in the Second International took offence once more. Further polemics rained down on the daring author. Old Liebknecht again took up his pen, and so did the PPS—a whole team of PPS publicists worked in relays to deal with every one of Rosa Luxemburg's unpredictable appearances in print.³ Rosa eagerly seized the chance to reply offered by the

¹ Explanatory references to the congress resolution are scattered throughout her Polish writing. The most comprehensive reinterpretation of the resolution into a 'particular method of by-passing the whole question' is in 'The question of nationality and autonomy', *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, No. 6, August 1908. See also below, Appendix 2. The PPS, too, maintained that the whole resolution was the product of an unexpected change of agenda in an unrepresentative committee! *Annali*, op. cit., p. 255.

² 'Die nationalen Kämpfe in der Türkei und die Sozialdemokratie', *SAZ*, 8, 9, 10 October 1896.

³ For Liebknecht, see *Vorwärts*, 11 November 1896; the PPS reply was given by Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz in a pamphlet in French entitled *Internationalistes!* a manuscript copy of which is in ZHP, Warsaw.

editors of *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung*, the Dresden Socialist paper. She now had the distinction of being involved in public polemics not only with Kautsky but with Liebknecht as well.¹ She became known to a wider section of party workers in Germany than she realized; when she moved to Germany in 1898 she found that Rosa Luxemburg from Zürich was a familiar name to many officials in Saxony who had followed her argument with Liebknecht with sly sympathy, and ruefully agreed with her condemnation of separatist PPS tactics.

Though Rosa enjoyed these polemics, her friends were becoming anxious about the exposure to which this constant solo performance was leading. Leo Jogiches expressed his own doubts and those of party friends.² As we shall see, this unremitting opposition to self-determination, on which the SDKP increasingly relied to the exclusion of all else, was not by any means to the taste of all the members. One of them, Stanisław Trusiewicz, was the centre of a small group in Poland which began to dissent from the extreme attitudes of the leadership in exile.³ Other voices were to be raised later. Though many of the underlying assumptions were shared by the SDKP leaders, and particularly the need to struggle vigilantly against the PPS, the more general ventures into neo-Marxist generalization were peculiarly Rosa Luxemburg's. Already the limited opportunities of a Polish émigré movement were proving irksome to her. She longed for the chance to enter the main international field, or at least a movement with more scope than the SDKP. These articles in *Neue Zeit* and the continuing polemic in *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* and elsewhere, provided a launching platform for Rosa Luxemburg. The fact that she was at loggerheads with accepted opinion was secondary; her views had been worth a detailed refutation by some of the most distinguished Socialists of the time.

In the unanimous chorus of disapproval there were in fact two distinct groups. One was the orthodox Marxists, to whom the interpretation of the classics was a sacred trust as well as an intellectual dividend in perpetuity, and who entered the field every time the basic beliefs of Marxism seemed in question. The majestic display of orthodoxy was their exclusive preserve; for the

¹ *SAZ*, 25 November, 1 December 1896.

² Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1930, Nos. 9/10, p. 136.

³ O. B. Szmidt, *Dokumenty*, Vol. I, pp. 177, 195, 230. For Trusiewicz's later dissents, see below, p. 577, note 1.

rest, they used their intellectual tools according to taste: to project Marxism into hitherto fallow fields or, like Kautsky, to simplify it for ever broader and more popular consumption. Kautsky and Plekhanov, whose characters were very different but whose self-interest in Marxism was identical, personified this group. Both men, and others like Liebknecht, particularly objected to Rosa Luxemburg's intrusion because of her deliberate revision of traditional (their own) Marxist analysis. A substantial accretion of authority had by now identified Russia as the reactionary centre of gravity in the world, and there were solid contemporary grounds for maintaining this assumption. What right had a youngster to make a fleeting bow to the great masters of Socialism by admitting their analysis to have been correct in their time, and then to turn everything Marx had said on the subject upside down by presenting a whole new set of conditions? To agree with Rosa Luxemburg meant nothing less than admitting that both Kautsky and Plekhanov had failed to notice these changes—they who spent their whole time sharpening the tools of Marxist analysis on the world around them! And what of Liebknecht, who had personally sat at the feet of the master, and had made him politically acceptable in Germany?

The other group was much less interested in theory but took exception to Rosa Luxemburg's splitting tactics against the consensus in the leadership of the International and the cohesion of its constituent parties. Victor Adler saw the possibilities of endless friction with his Poles in the Austrian movement, which in turn would upset the rest of his multi-national contingent—Czechs, Hungarians, Slovenes, as well as Germans—all of whom were organized in the Austrian Social-Democratic Party. Besides, he admired Daszyński; many of the PPS leaders were his personal friends, who had struggled with him for so long against non-recognition and contempt. August Bebel in Germany was if anything even less sentimental. He had little interest in the Polish leaders personally and knew nothing of Polish problems, but he too saw that the heat generated in this debate could not but affect the cohesion of his party, especially in those areas where there was an important Polish minority. Except for matters in which the executive of the German party had a direct interest, Bebel disliked and avoided disputes. He saw no point in intellectual quarrels, particularly foreign ones—like Napoleon and his contempt for the

idéologues. As far as he was concerned the raising of the Polish question at the London congress had been unnecessary and should if possible be avoided in the future. On 29 September 1898 he wrote to Victor Adler, with a sigh: 'I suppose we shall have yet again to face a Polish debate with Rosa Luxemburg unless this time she unexpectedly proves herself more sensible.'¹

Polish debates—*Polendebatten* as they were contemptuously called—became a synonym for disagreeable wrangles over marginal matters which proved as insoluble as they were obscure. It was not until Bebel, with his colleagues, realized that the Polish problem was biting into his organization like acid and prising loose whole chunks of potential membership from German control, that he took an interest. But even then he was a late-comer to the group of German sympathizers with Rosa Luxemburg's policies.² It was not entirely a coincidence that the German executive's support for her policy of Polish integration into the German party after 1900 rapidly silenced the groans and complaints about *Polendebatten*. Imperceptibly, the traditional Polish role of purveying pointless polemics was, in German eyes, taken over by the Russians.³

The identification of these two distinct groups is interesting because they provide an early projection of the line-up in revisionist controversy and foreshadow the subsequent and still more impor-

¹ August Bebel to Victor Adler, 29 September 1898, in Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel*, p. 252.

² See below, pp. 173-84.

³ In modern German history the Poles certainly play the role of an indigestible and awkward foreign element, meriting cultural (if not ethnic) contempt, and stimulating a policy of uneasy compromise between linguistic and ethnical suppression on the one hand, and cultural absorption on the other—not unlike the French attitude to the Flemish population of the north, or that of the Spanish monarchy vis-à-vis the Basques. During the German empire the policy of national hostility towards resident Poles is well documented in a number of full-length studies. In addition, the more distinctive figure of the revolutionary émigré had in German cultural circles occasionally evoked amused contempt instead of the normal, rather naïve, romantic admiration accorded to him in western Europe (see for instance Heinrich Heine, 'Romanzero', *Gedichtsammlung* 1851, Book I; reprinted in Heinrich Heine's *Sämtliche Werke*, Leipzig/Vienna, no date, Vol. I, pp. 353-5. For Rosa's unconscious reference to this poem, see below, page 689).

The subsequent discussion here of the German Socialist attitude towards the Poles, and its characterization by Rosa as well as by her opponents, should therefore be evaluated in the light of an established tradition. The SPD's benevolent and sensitive approach to Polish matters, however much it may have become eroded by incomprehension, irritation, and organizational pressures, was still a deliberate, self-conscious antithesis to the recognized brutality of official Prussian policy—or at least was intended to be.

tant separation of the Marxist centre from the main body of the party. As during the Polish debates, the majority forces during the revisionist controversy consisted of an unspoken but real enough alliance between Orthodoxy and Organization. Yet this alliance was neither permanent nor automatic. Over the Polish question, the executive lost interest in supporting the orthodox case for Polish independence as soon as the party had to protect its structural cohesion, just as the executive only entered the revisionist controversy in order to protect the party against a split in its own monolithic authority.

Rosa Luxemburg's position was peculiar both in regard to the Polish question and in the revisionist controversy. For it was she alone who aggregated these two separate interests—by refusing to acknowledge their separateness. For her, the German party's battle for cohesion against Polish dissidence was merely a by-product of the fight against the PPS. The special category of 'patriots' was merging into the general category of opportunists—the same aggregation that happened to Lenin. In the revisionist controversy, as we shall see, she was on the side of the majority—but again failed to acknowledge any distinction between the two groups, at least until much later. The commitment to totality does not make for sophisticated or practical politics; insistence on black and white blinds to the various shades of grey. The Polish question of 1896 thus assumes a significance far beyond that of the internal and rather personal squabble between the two Polish Socialist factions—an importance which Rosa Luxemburg unconsciously acknowledged by escalating it into a question of first principles in the pages of *Neue Zeit* and *Critica Sociale*.

From 1897 onwards a revival of Socialist fortunes took place throughout Russia. The Jewish organizations, the most developed and class-conscious section of the Russian proletariat, were united in the *Bund* in 1897, and a year later the Russians, shamed and galvanized by this event, created a united party of their own, the RSDRP.¹ Both Polish parties benefited from this resurgence. The SDKP, particularly, received an important reinforcement through the adherence of the Lithuanian Social Democrats under

¹ For the effects of the formation of the *Bund* on the creation of the RSDRP and their early relationship, see H. Shukman, *The Relations between the Jewish Bund and the RSDRP 1897-1903*, Oxford doctoral thesis (1960) soon due for publication.

the leadership of Feliks Dzierżyński. This not only increased the membership substantially but provided the movement with one of its most powerful and active personalities. In 1898 Dzierżyński escaped from Siberian exile and returned home to Lithuania. The scene there mirrored that in Poland: two parties, one with Polish nationalist tendencies led by Koczan-Morawski, the other Trusiewicz's anti-nationalist Social-Democratic party. Both men desired fusion with the SDKP and brought it about in December 1899. Trusiewicz had already exerted some influence within the SDKP.¹ The new party now took the name of the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania, SDKPiL for short.

Immediately after the fusion, Dzierżyński moved to Warsaw where he began to rebuild the almost defunct SDKP organization. Although he was soon arrested again, his organizational efforts continued to prosper. By 1900 the SDKPiL had spread to most major industrial cities of Poland and to the Dąbrowa coal-mining area, though its membership was still predominantly artisan rather than industrial.² Now that a Russian party had finally come into being, the SDKPiL emphasized the need for close collaboration with it and began to discuss the possibility of fusion. This, as much as any question of Polish independence, set it apart from the PPS at this time; the latter had by the turn of the century become increasingly anti-Russian in a Socialist as well as a national context. We shall see how the aspirations of the SDKPiL were translated into concrete efforts at unity with the Russian party.³

This growth of the SDKPiL added height to Rosa Luxemburg's stature. Since her public debate on the question of Polish independence, most foreign observers, and especially those within the Russian movement, considered her the undisputed theoretical leader of her party. Though she still spoke only for a small minority, she had battled through to respectability, and was no longer the isolated and remote figure of two years ago.⁴ Contributions from her pen could safely be solicited. The *Bund* asked her for articles and in 1899 reprinted her article in *Neue Zeit*.⁵

In the spring of 1897 she presented her thesis to the University

¹ See above, p. 80. He used the pseudonym Zalewski, under which he was more generally known. 'Lithuanian' at that period carried geographical rather than ethnical connotations.

² Dziewanowski, *Communist Party*, p. 27.

³ See below, pp. 271-82.

⁴ John Mill, *Pionirn un Boier*, Vol. II, p. 250.

⁵ 'Der sozialism en Peulen', *Der Yiddishe Arbeter*, No. 8, December 1899. See also 'Diskussie vegen unabhengikeit fun Peulen', *ibid.*, No. 13, 1902.

of Zürich for the advanced degree of Doctor of Law. Its title was *The Industrial Development of Poland*.¹ Using hitherto unknown sources, she analysed the growth of Polish industry in the nineteenth century. It was indeed the first serious economic analysis on this subject.² She showed that, economically speaking, Russian Poland had become an integral part of the Russian empire, that the economic growth of Poland could not have taken place without the substantial Russian market, and that the economy of Poland made no sense in any other context. The argument was Marxist only by implication; its aim, to prove in economic terms what she had already argued politically and dialectically, namely, that any attempt to prise Russian Poland loose from the Russian empire and join it to the other occupied areas of Poland to form a Polish national or linguistic state was a negation of all development and progress for the last fifty years. The thesis served her and others as an important reservoir of evidence against the political demands of Polish nationalism. At that time it was an unusual distinction for a thesis on a subject other than the natural sciences to be published, and research students today can still obtain the benefit of an original piece of economic history, the value of which has not dated or deteriorated. It was the first of Rosa Luxemburg's major economic works, and already showed her particular gift for enlivening accurate economic history with striking illustrations—a combination of statistics and social imagery which was peculiarly hers.³ She hoped to use the work as a basis for a general history of Poland, on which she worked intermittently throughout her life but which she never completed and of which no traces remain.⁴

¹ Her official degree was Doctor Juris Publici et Rerum Cameralium. The thesis was published (Leipzig 1898) under the title *Die industrielle Entwicklung Polens*. Information from state archives of the Canton of Zürich, reference U 105 b. 4.

² According to Adolf Warszawski, it was Rosa's researches in the Czartoryski Library in Paris and the Bibliothèque Nationale during the years 1894–5 that revealed an eighteenth-century Polish echo of the writing of the physiocrats in France. Marchlewski accepted her suggestion of this as a suitable subject for his own doctorate, qualifying with the thesis *Physiokratismus im alten Polen*, Zürich 1896.

³ For a discussion of the economics of *The Industrial Development of Poland*, as well as contemporary comments and criticisms, see below, p. 173, n. 2 and Appendix 1.

⁴ Frölich (p. 37) suggests that it was actually finished in prison during the First World War. There is no other evidence of its existence beyond the fact that she referred to her work on the manuscript at various times during her life. A skeleton of it was said to have been in existence in 1918, though it may have been destroyed by the soldiers who ransacked her apartment at the time of her final arrest in January 1919, together with most of her private papers. Frölich

At about this time the desire to capitalize on her growing reputation in a movement with more scope than the émigré leadership of the SDKPiL was finally transformed into a definite decision to move to Germany.¹ Some of the contacts made through her articles had been carefully nurtured—apart from *Neue Zeit* and the Dresden paper, she had also written an article for *Sozialistische Monatshefte*. Kautsky looked to her as a regular correspondent on Polish affairs—preferably on less delicate problems than Polish independence.² The friendship with Robert and Mathilde Seidel introduced her personally to a wider German circle. Robert Seidel had emigrated to Zürich to escape a charge of sedition and had remained after the end of the anti-Socialist legislation partly because the indictment had never been withdrawn and also because of his growing absorption into the Swiss Socialist movement. He had become editor of the important Zürich Socialist paper, *Arbeiterstimme*, to which Rosa then became a contributor on Polish questions; in return, she helped him with his literary work—Seidel had artistic pretensions—and was a frequent and welcome visitor at the Seidel house.³ He considered her very much his protégée and for a time she consulted him on political questions; probably she submitted her early articles to him for approval.⁴ As with so many of Rosa Luxemburg's friendships, the emphasis subtly

also claims that Franz Mehring, at the time a close and intimate friend of Rosa's, used her manuscript, apparently without acknowledgement, for the explanatory notes to his edition of the literary fragments of Marx and Engels published under the title *Aus dem literarischen Nachlass von Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels und Ferdinand Lassalle*, Vol. III, Stuttgart 1902. Rosa Luxemburg herself refers in passing to her work on the history of Poland and Mehring's misuse of it in a letter of 1 May 1909 (*Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 141). In any case, Rosa admitted having written some notes for Mehring to use in this connection. See *Z Pola Walki*, 1965, No. 1, p. 91 (13 March 1902).

¹ Unfortunately there is no record of the exact time when this decision was taken, nor do we know the immediate circumstances which caused it. That prime source of information, the letters from Rosa Luxemburg to Leo Jogiches, naturally did not operate when they were both together, first in Zürich (as now) or later in Berlin.

² See her article on the middle classes in Poland in *NZ*, 1897/1898, Vol. I, p. 164.

³ For Seidel, see *Z Pola Walki*, 1959, No. 1(5), pp. 65-66 (Introduction). Seidel was a figure of some importance in the Swiss party and had extensive contacts in Italy, Rumania, Croatia, and Hungary. Probably because of these articles, Frölich claimed that Rosa Luxemburg 'was active in the Swiss working-class movement', of which there is, however, no evidence at all (p. 54). The Swiss government would not have permitted it, and Rosa herself repeatedly expressed ignorance of Swiss Socialist affairs in later years.

⁴ Copies of Seidel's letters to Rosa Luxemburg are preserved among his papers at the Central Library, Zürich.

changed as time went by, and the original mentor in course of time became the client. However, it was no doubt partly Seidel's influence which decided her to go to Germany.

Marchlewski had travelled the same road in 1896 and for much the same reason; he was now co-editor of *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* and might prove of considerable assistance to his young Polish colleague, though Rosa was undecided whether to approach him. The other editor was Alexander Helphand—known by his pseudonym of Parvus, on which he settled after discarding various other aliases—a brilliant and turbulent Russian émigré who had studied in Basle and had been in Germany since 1892. He had maintained close connections with Russian circles in Switzerland and had met Rosa Luxemburg there; indeed, he and Krichevskii were among the first Russians to be asked for contributions to *Sprawa Robotnicza*. He was to be a close political collaborator with and admirer of Rosa Luxemburg for ten years. Their characters were similar in some ways but very different in others, and in the end their paths diverged and led them into open conflict. Parvus provided a point of contact for her, but one to be used with caution.

Her German had much improved by this time. She spoke fluently, though some of her early public appearances in Zürich had not been too successful since she tended to get excited and nervous.¹ Gradually she overcame this, but for some years remained more convincing in print than at a political rally and always preferred to write German rather than to speak it. Though not as a rule a diffident person, doubts about the correctness of her German continued to beset her for the rest of her life, in spite of the reassurance of friends and critics.²

Nevertheless, a move to Germany was a big step and Jogiches for one could not bring himself to advise her to go. She would necessarily become absorbed in German affairs and Polish Socialism would lose its best brain.³ Besides, he was frankly jealous. He was not able to write himself into a state of euphoria, in fact he was hardly able to write at all, and even proof-reading for Rosa caused him hours of agony—and produced 'linguistic boa-constrictors'. He was an unhappy and intermittent student, who never

¹ John Mill, *Pionirn un Boier*, Vol. I, p. 175.

² *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, Introduction, p. 18. One suspects that some of this diffidence was a form of false modesty.

³ Frölich, p. 56.

took his degree. But all technical considerations apart, he feared to lose Rosa on his own account as well as that of the Polish movement. Her reports of the attention of men like Parvus, Bruhns (party secretary in Breslau), and Schönlanck caused him agony. We do not know if he really tried to prevent her from going, but we do know that he disliked it. There were actually telling party reasons for her departure, on which she played hard: the rescue of the Poles in Silesia and Poznań from the clutches of the PPS, and the need to gain German sympathy for their cause. But these two were too close for effective pretence. The ambition which he feared was also her main propellant. She knew she could make a career in Germany—she knew it and would prove it, to the grey heads of the International, to the PPS, and to him. There was no need to prove it to herself.

Meantime, there was the difficulty of obtaining a residential permit. This was a crucial problem for Socialists. To most of the German provincial authorities Socialists were little better than criminals, and active foreign ones were not entitled to the courtesies customary in those days for resident foreigners. The only solution—again on advice from the Seidels—was marriage to a German national, and so Rosa hatched a plot with one of her friends, the Polish wife of Karl Lübeck, another German expatriate. Old Lübeck had fallen on evil days, a cripple who had to trade on old comradeships to place his writing in the German party press. Rosa helped him in this and probably wrote a number of his pieces. Her particular friendship was with Olympia Lübeck who was the exact opposite of her husband: young, thoroughly Bohemian—especially in matters of money.¹ Serious Germans had never been able to bring themselves to approve of Olympia Lübeck's antics. While still émigrés both Kautsky and Bernstein had several times lent their own scarce money to a starving family, only to find Olympia fraudulently converting these starvation loans to artistic purposes—a visit to a theatre, for instance, with a whole group of friends. The two women had been friends since 1890. Olympia helped to solve Rosa's problem by providing a suitable young man—her own son, Gustav. He was serious, undistinguished, and did not approve of the idea. He had already, in 1895, acted as a post office for communications between Rosa in

¹ For the Lübecks see Karl Kautsky, *Erinnerungen und Erörterungen, Materials for an Autobiography*, Amsterdam 1960, p. 447.

Paris and Leo Jogiches in the East—and been roundly abused for his pains. He knew all about their relationship, and considered his intended role as fictional husband undignified and unlikely to be peaceful. But the whole family felt under an obligation to Rosa for the long hours she had put in with old Lübeck; in any case, his mother decided that a career as Rosa's husband was better than anything he was likely to achieve on his own account.¹ No objections could prevail against her breezy insistence, and the marriage took place in the spring of 1897 in Basle, shortly after the completion of Rosa's thesis.² The young couple parted company at once on the doorstep of the registry office—it was never intended to be more than a sham marriage. But it took Rosa another five years to obtain a divorce. She always felt a certain amount of good-natured contempt for her husband, though in the end she was very relieved to be rid of him. 'Typical Lübeck' became a synonym for carelessness and unreliability. Even to complete the divorce, the Seidels had to be brought in to supervise and agitate, since Gustav proved incapable of dealing with any formalities on his own.³ None the less, Rosa always got a certain amount of amusement from her married name and gleefully signed hotel registers and postcards with a flourish as 'Frau Gustav Lübeck'.

After the formalities were complete, Rosa paid a last long visit to Paris in May 1897—probably with Leo Jogiches. She renewed contact there with her Russian friends who were urgently engaged on the preparations for the forthcoming congress of the Russian party. More important for the future, however, was her contact with prominent French Socialists. The Paris she had originally disliked, consisting as it did of noise, smoke, and distance—and far too many Poles—now offered its traditional seduction for the first time.⁴ Rosa Luxemburg now got to know Jaurès, Jules Guesde, and Édouard Vaillant better. Jaurès she admired, Jules Guesde was an object of somewhat cold esteem and impersonal approval; it was Édouard Vaillant with whom she became particularly friendly.⁵

¹ Karl Kautsky, *ibid.*, p. 445.

² Copy of the marriage certificate is in ZHP, Warsaw. See facsimile opposite p. 95.

³ See below, p. 200.

⁴ Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1930, Nos. 9/10, pp. 111, 116. The early comments on Paris resemble the later ones on Berlin—the comments of a Swiss country lass!—but the judgement on people differed: Paris was full of beautiful women, Berlin of stiff-backed Prussians (see below, p. 131). But we know few details about her stay in Paris.

⁵ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 176, dated 27 December 1915, just after Vaillant's death.

Rosa felt she had now become qualified to expound with authority on French Socialism, a subject on which she was to write prolifically in the coming years. It was also during this visit that she suffered her first family loss, for her mother died while Rosa was in Paris—an unexpected personal tragedy which cast its shadow across the bright prospect of her career.

On 20 May 1898 she moved to Berlin—strange, friendless city with straight streets and stiff-backed people. She disliked the place from the moment she arrived; it suddenly made Zürich seem curiously comfortable and attractive. But these sentimental glances back into the past were unimportant compared with the vistas which now opened before her—serious Socialism in a cold climate. With her departure from Zürich, a new chapter opened in Rosa Luxemburg's career, and it was with German Socialism that she was to be primarily associated for the next twenty years. As luck would have it, the moment of her arrival in Germany coincided with a major thunderstorm in the German party, which shook the very foundations of its accepted ideology. Rosa participated actively in these events, the more so since the issues presented themselves in a way with which she was particularly well equipped to deal—a combination of theory and practice which she had already mastered in the arguments over the Polish question. Later she herself looked back on her Zürich period as her final education in Socialism; her political adolescence came to an end in May 1898.

IV

FIRST BATTLES IN A NEW ARENA

1898-1899

THE Germany Rosa Luxemburg entered in 1898 was two different things: to a resident it was a new society; to a Socialist an old battlefield. Every Socialist had this bifocal vision of his own society—and attempted, to the best of his ability, to reduce the double vision to a single, consistent view. Before examining Rosa Luxemburg's particular effort, however, we must look at these two aspects objectively and in turn.

To the rest of the world, and especially to most of its own citizens, the German Reich at the turn of the century was the economic and political bastion of continental Europe. Bismarck had created, in the eyes of his contemporaries, a strong, rich, and growing empire out of a collection of German-speaking princely states. As little as forty years earlier, these had been pawns on the political chess-board of a Europe dominated for two centuries by the notion of a balance of power. The disciplined and ambitious Prussia of Frederick the Great had given way to a weak and vacillating monarchy, a mere appendage of Hapsburg conservatism. To its everlasting indignity—an indignity that both Conservatives and Socialists were unwilling and unable to forget and from which they drew their respective inspiration—Prussia, in 1849, had to be rescued by the Russian Tsar from its own abortive revolution, the belated attempt to establish democracy. Pregnant with revolution, Prussia's back had been stiffened with the rusty iron of Nicholas I's autocracy; by supporting the Prussian king, he had succeeded in stifling the revolution throughout Germany. Among other things, the events of 1848-9 had stimulated Karl Marx into taking up his dominant attitude of political disdain for German liberalism. Within fifteen years, however, Bismarck had changed all this. Austria had been evicted from the German concert and had to turn south and east to the Balkans for a substitute sphere of influence. French hegemony over western Germany and the revived

pretensions of a Napoleon on the French imperial throne were decisively defeated in 1871. More important still, the impetus for German unity, which had originally come from the Liberals and had in 1848 found expression in the hope of a democratic, equal, and spontaneous fusion of all the various states of Germany, had been contemptuously vitiated and trounced by Bismarck. He had made an almost reluctant King of Prussia into the Emperor of Germany; with the support of all but the extreme and lunatic fringe of Prussian Conservatives, Bismarck had created German unity without the support of the Liberals and on his own terms—permanent Prussian hegemony in the new empire. The Liberals could either accept the situation and join the band-wagon of triumphant German unity, or they could go into permanent and ineffectual opposition against the illiberal domination of Prussia and Prussian ideas. They could in turn be either Nationalists or Liberals—in the event the party name, National Liberals, became the embodiment of a myth—but they could not be both. They plumped for Nationalism and Bismarck. Over the years, they tried spasmodically to push the Reich government in the direction of traditional Liberalism—free trade and more government support for the interests of the growing industrial and commercial community against the landed gentry, the Junkers. But it was hesitant and hopeless. It meant using the Reich government against that of Prussia, a patent impossibility. In this respect the Social Democrats saw clearly; whatever the trimmings, the Reich government could never act against the interests of Prussia, its backbone and most powerful constituent.

Apart from Conservatives and National Liberals, the bourgeois political spectrum of the German empire included a large Catholic (Centre) party, the historic counterweight of the new Reich's west and south against the Protestants of the north and east. Farther left was a group of small progressive parties which, as a result of the schizophrenia of the National Liberals, pre-empted the whole oppositional tendencies of the small man in a modern industrial society still encased in the structure of semi-feudal Prussia. Socially speaking, the Progressives were not merely *petit-bourgeois*, but radical in the French and English sense: the expression of essentially political and economic rather than social aspirations.

But the power of all these parties, as distinct from the number of their seats in the *Reichstag*, was limited. The legislature was only

slightly more necessary for the conduct of government business than the Elizabethan House of Commons. The only legislative control was exercised through the budget, and then merely in the raising, not the spending, of revenue. From 1870 right through to 1914 Conservatives repeatedly pointed out that the Emperor could, at any time, send along an officer and ten men to disperse this rabble of self-important legislators, and that the best way of demonstrating his rights and powers was to do it. The *Reichstag* was there to facilitate government business, not to criticize or obstruct it.

In any case, the Reich government found it fairly simple to manipulate party differences in such a way that a grouping could always be found to support whatever policy the government was then putting forward: either by combining Conservatives with National Liberals and Progressives against the Centre, or through a Conservative-Centre block against the others. It would be quite wrong to equate German parliamentary life with that of contemporary England, even though the *Reichstag* was elected by universal suffrage and the British House of Commons was not. The Upper House of the German parliament, the federal *Bundesrat*, was at all times a conservative factor. Its federal structure ensured, as with the Senate in America, disproportionate representation of the smallest and most conservative areas against the populous urban centres. Moreover, many aspects of sovereignty remained in the hands of the provincial governments. The system of election to most provincial legislatures was much less democratic than for the *Reichstag*, with the result that the provincial legislatures were much more conservative than the *Reichstag* itself. Members of the Reich *Bundesrat* were not appointed by the provincial legislatures but by the provincial governments whose voice they represented at the centre, and who, if anything, were more conservative still. Probably, with its universally elected *Reichstag*, Germany looked much more democratic than it really was; subsequent history has shown, as it often does, that the realities of power worked against the constitution and the apparent structure of institutions created by it.

By 1900 the course of imperial German history was becoming established in a new pattern. The immediate boom after the Franco-Prussian War had been followed by a crisis, as a result of which the anti-Socialist laws had been passed. But the economy

soon recovered; in spite of Bismarck's departure and the end of the special legislation against Social Democracy, Germany prospered politically and economically. It was a time of gradual but continuous boom throughout the world, and there was a general atmosphere of stability and confidence. Germany had been a late-comer into the colonial field, and had not obtained what was considered to be her proper share. Bismarck had not been interested in a forward-looking colonial policy; indeed, towards the end of his career, he had tried to call a halt to the extension of German colonial interests and the expansion of Germany's international commitments, which he considered a rival to her primary European concerns. Such restraint, however, did not suit William II, heir to a vigorous, muscle-flexing empire. After Bismarck had gone, the German government under the particular inspiration of the Emperor clearly announced its intention of obtaining its proper share in all fields of international activity, colonial possessions, naval as well as military power, and a share in the minding of international business as befitted a great European power, irrespective of whether its direct interests were concerned or not.

Underneath all this political activity and economic progress, there had grown, like an enormous mushroom bed in the damp of a neglected cellar, the organized proliferation of Social Democracy. After 1890, when its activities were legal once more, the Social-Democratic Party increased by leaps and bounds, both as a directly political organization and through the development of its industrial branch, the Free Trade Unions.¹ Unlike England, where trade unionism preceded political Socialism by many years (without taking into account the much neglected false start of political agitation between 1820 and 1840) and deliberately created the Labour Party at the end of the century, German trade unionism was the creature of the political party and was never allowed to forget it.

The SPD had been a fusion of two trends in German working-

¹ We shall refer to the German Social-Democratic Party hereafter as SPD (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*). The Social-Democratic trade unions were known as the *Freier Gewerkschaftsbund*. The word 'free' was to distinguish them from two other competing organizations, the Christian Trade Unions which had some affiliation with the Centre party, and the so-called Hirsch-Duncker or 'yellow' Unions which were a Liberal organization founded in the 1850s, middle-class inspired—a kind of 'strength through self-help' organization without political affiliation or interests, and as such soundly hated by the Social Democrats.

class organization. One was that of Lassalle, which had purely political aims and had already appeared as a marginal force on the political horizon in the early 1860s. From this side came the tradition of political activity *within* the framework of the middle-class state; the need for representation and influence within the organs of state power. The other trend was Marxist and had been nurtured by Marx and Engels from the days of the First International and through the period following its collapse. The fusion between the two wings had taken place at a congress at Gotha in 1875 when the programme adopted had been largely Marxist, though not entirely to Marx's liking. The progress of the new party had been followed closely by the great man in London, and after his death Engels kept in regular touch with the leaders until he died in 1895. Marx had mistrusted the revolutionary understanding and intentions of the German leaders, and often criticized them savagely in private (a fact that was to remain a closely guarded state secret among a few top SPD leaders until after the war).

The first party congress after the end of the anti-Socialist laws took place in Erfurt in 1891 and adopted an up-to-date programme of principles and tactics which was to serve the party until the outbreak of the First World War; it was reprinted with German solemnity as a foreword to the report of every annual SPD congress. The programme pledged support for the Marxist view of the inevitable collapse of capitalist society. It foresaw the establishment, within a distant but foreseeable future, of a Socialist society in its stead. It spoke of collapse, but out of deference to the laws and their eager agents of enforcement there was no mention of revolution. At the same time, however, the party accepted the need to protect working-class interests in the present, and laid down certain minimal aims for which the party must strive all the time. The programme thus divided into the final maximum and the more immediate minimum objectives: two separate aspects of one whole. The Erfurt programme was a synthesis of aims which were not necessarily the same and which might come into conflict at times, thus necessitating a choice.¹

The theoretical part of the Erfurt programme was the work

¹ See Carl E. Schorske, *German Social Democracy 1905-1917: The development of the Great Schism*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1955. This is the best modern history of the immediate pre-war period. For recent work on the foundation of the SPD, see Roger Morgan, *The German Social Democrats and the First International 1864-1872*, Cambridge 1965.

of Karl Kautsky, then the best-known Marxist theoretician in Germany and a familiar of the 'old man' himself. He provided the theoretical link between Marx and his own close friend Engels on the one hand and the SPD leadership of Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel on the other. But though Engels approved of Kautsky and his work, he misunderstood its nature, and the gap between himself and it, between genuine revolutionary feelings and popularized revolutionary postulates in the abstract. The spread of Marxist dialectics was Kautsky's life's work, and though his friends Victor Adler and Eduard Bernstein for many years pointed out to him in private and even in public that this dialectic could not in practice be accommodated within the party's tactics, he himself never faced up to the 'empty juxtaposition' of final aim and present tactic which he had himself created in the Erfurt programme.¹ Nor did anyone else, at the time; there was much heated debate at Erfurt about the party's tactics, none about the adoption of Kautsky's draft of first principles, the chute down which all tactics had to roll.²

On the face of it, however, this two-legged stance was necessary, even inevitable, for political Social Democracy. Any political party representing a group interest in a society made up of various groups or classes had to look after immediate interests. This was especially true in a society like imperial Germany where political parties could have no expectation of power and were no more than interest-groups, nudging the permanent power structure of imperial government in their direction. At the same time, however, the SPD was a party which maintained that this same society in which it operated was inevitably doomed in the long run; its aim was precisely to help bring about this doom and inherit all power. That was the maximum programme once more. In this respect the SPD was something quite new, just as Marxism as a political

¹ See Erich Matthias, 'Kautsky und der Kautskyanismus' in *Marxismusstudien* Second Series, Tübingen 1957, p. 160. This is the best short analysis of Kautsky and his ideas.

² A few of the great men of the Second International passed into long-lived oblivion with Kautsky after the First World War, especially those who, like him, remained faithful to a purely theoretical necessity of revolution—neither abandoning the concept nor attempting to turn it into practice. For this small group—and only for them—Kautsky kept his reputation. Thus Daszyński wrote to him on 28 October 1924: 'In my eyes you belong to the paladins of the new era of proletarian liberation. . . .' (Kautsky Archives, IISH, D VII, 336.) Two of Rosa Luxemburg's great opponents thus clasped hands in their twilight of political oblivion.

philosophy was new. There had previously been many groups and associations aiming to overthrow a régime, offering future blessings in place of present evils. But such parties had always arisen from an act of will by a group of people, large or small; they had claimed virtue, power, even the word of God; but none of them had ever been able to claim historical inevitability, or produce an all-embracing philosophy which made their activities objectively necessary, as well as subjectively desirable.

Nevertheless, a combination of day-to-day activity with the aim of total destruction of the very framework within which this activity took place was never an easy, straightforward policy in practice—especially not for a mass party observing the forms of democracy. Every step of the leadership was public property, freely discussed at any time and voted upon at least once a year. The novelty, the uniqueness, of the party was accepted, indeed it was a matter of pride and faith; but there was much less understanding of the secondary, often ill-defined, problems that went with it. The SPD was a confident party; history was on its side, and with the irresistible force of history went a clarity of vision vouchsafed only to the party of the rising proletariat. But this clarity was blinding as well as illuminating. It lit up the gulf between *bourgeoisie* and Socialists, between organized society and organized Social Democracy, between ‘them’ and ‘us’, so that no confusion was possible; but it obscured the political and personal consequences of such a black and white image of life. Looking out at the harsh bourgeois world from their tower of shining isolation, as remote and virtuous as the Holy Grail, Socialists began to think of themselves as generically different from other men, immune from their political failings and social diseases. The deliberate earthiness of Marx the politician—as opposed to the philosopher—became a kind of device to keep reality at bay; the direct, open tone of Socialist speech seemed to complement pure and idealistic processes of thought. Things were held to be valid and true because they were continually repeated. Confidence, and the possession of the historical dialectic, thus proved an obstacle to clear political thinking. The problems imposed by an unusual political situation on what were after all fairly ordinary political people were not perceived; even the possibility that such problems might exist was anathema. When they began to manifest themselves,

the SPD was ill-equipped to deal with them.

The isolation of the party was at the same time self-imposed, on principle, and forced on it by society. The attempt up to 1890 to legislate the SPD off the political map was not repeated, though the idea and certainly the wish spasmodically occurred to the imperial government and its conservative supporters. But the Emperor, who boasted of his personal ability to deal with the Socialist menace, always preserved a particular dislike for its political manifestation, the SPD. In the eyes of the comfortable and respectable citizen of the German empire, loyal to the imperial promise of a German place in the sun, the SPD was the pariah party, an outcast from the fatherland. Among the Liberals and the Progressives there were some, especially a few professors, who understood the social urge for recognition among the working classes and tried, as it were, to build a direct bridge between them and the imperial throne, on Lassalleian and Napoleonic foundations, spanning the Marxist chasm. But their attempt was doomed, both by William II's complete reliance on the political forces of conservatism and by the SPD's blank refusal to compromise its policy of formal abstention. At home it wore its isolation proudly—the consequence of its materialist dialectic philosophy; for foreign consumption all the talk of abstinence and revolution was sometimes replaced by the lament that the government refused to treat Social Democracy fairly.¹ The stronger the SPD became, the more the leadership reiterated the fierce old words of hatred for bourgeois society, root and branch; and the more difficult it became in practice to enforce such a policy on a mass party.

Isolated, then, deliberately or inevitably, not at one end of the political spectrum but right outside it, the SPD became more and more self-absorbed. Concern with internal affairs increased as its influence on society was reduced to insignificance. Elections were mere musters of support, attempts to bring the ever-growing, increasingly discontented and impoverished proletariat, spawned by capitalism, into the orbit of organized Social Democracy. Any increase in SPD votes was seen primarily as a negation of, and protest against, the existing system as a whole. There was little point in analysing the precise differences between Liberal and Conservative parties, in manœuvring between them, profiting

¹ E.g. Theodor Barth, 'Kaiser Wilhelm II und die Sozialdemokratie', *Cosmopolis*, Vol. I (1896), No. 3, p. 873.

from any of their disputes—which were temporary and unreal anyhow, dissolving in fright as soon as Social Democracy took a hand. In short the SPD was creating a world of its own. The main preoccupation was to enlarge this world as much as possible, so that ambitious Socialists would not have to look to bourgeois society to achieve any of their political or private satisfactions. The extension of Socialist activity obviously did not take place all at once, but grew gradually; however, the need was clear and ever present. It served the double purpose of keeping the members loyal to the party by absorbing their interests in as many party activities as possible, at the same time keeping them away from the contamination of bourgeois life. All this was consciously intended to prepare the party for its eventual take-over. The phrase that the present system was ‘pregnant with revolution’, which later came to be used so much more incisively by Rosa Luxemburg, simply meant that present society was dying with the foetus of its successor in its womb, that it must die in giving birth to its successor, without benefit of abortion—a curiously Catholic concept.¹

From the start the SPD leadership was absorbed with problems of administration and organizational growth, more so than any of the other parties in Germany who were merely associations or social-interest groups advocating their particular policies. Since political power in the Reich was never in their grasp, party life, other than that within the SPD itself, never took on structural form. Only the SPD, however, tried to be both highly organized and severely democratic at the same time. The party congresses always began with a report on the organizational state of the party, the budget, the growth and circulation of the party press, the number of registered members, and a report on the activities of the executive, the provincial branches, and the *Reichstag* delegation. This was partly a reflection of the personality of August Bebel, who from 1875 onwards dominated the policy and spirit of the SPD. The organizational imprint of the party was largely due to him. What was not so well appreciated was his extreme astuteness as a politician and his eye for short-range party tactics—a somewhat bourgeois virtue of which he himself was possibly not even aware. In the eyes of his contemporaries he was, by 1891, the

¹ See J. P. Nettl, ‘The German Social-Democratic Party 1890–1914 as a political model’, *Past and Present*, No. 30, April 1965, for a further discussion of the sociology of isolation.

grand old man of the working class whose many uncompromising statements always culminated in total defiance: 'I am and always will be the mortal enemy of existing society', and 'Not a man nor a farthing for this system'.¹

Phrases like these made him the keeper of the party's revolutionary conscience. He had been 'the guest of the German government' on several occasions—as he was fond of pointing out. He and Wilhelm Liebknecht had been the only ones to vote against war credits during the Franco-Prussian War and had proudly accepted the long spell of national obloquy which this gesture entailed. Although he also made far less uncompromising statements and, as will be seen, came to doubt and even fear the revolutionary potential of the German proletariat which he had for so long helped to nourish, his uncompromising image remained intact until his death, and even beyond.² In his last years he was often ill, absent much of the time in Switzerland with his daughter; most members of the SPD, among them Rosa Luxemburg, preferred to remember the active, fire-eating Bebel they had known for so long. Though she took issue with him on several heated occasions, and he sometimes attacked her savagely, she always maintained political respect for him in public. By 1913, when he was dying, and had turned the leadership of the party uncompromisingly against the left wing, the most she would say was that 'Comrade Bebel, who said so many splendid things, sometimes, like any human being, also said some less splendid things. . .'.³

When Rosa Luxemburg joined the German party, the other dominant personality was Wilhelm Liebknecht, who had been a close colleague of Marx and Engels for many years, and had,

¹ The first phrase was used at the party congress in Dresden: see *Protokoll des Parteitage der SPD*, 1903, p. 313. I have not been able to discover the origin of the second phrase, which may not even have been Bebel's—by 1900 it had become a party slogan, regularly quoted by all those who upheld the 'old principles'.

² Bebel has been very gently treated by Communist historians, partly because he died before the great 'betrayal' of 1914, partly because German party history prefers the legend of sudden defection brought about by overt or unconscious treachery to the reality of a gradual hardening of the arteries of the revolutionary tradition. The turning-point is still 1914 rather than 1910, when Rosa Luxemburg first made her public diagnosis of the disease—and by implication included Bebel as a major victim. See below, p. 825.

³ Speech at a party meeting in Leipzig, May 1913, reported in *LV*, 29 May 1913, Supplement 3; see Paul Frölich (ed.), *Redner der Revolution*, Vol. XI, pp. 80-89.

indeed, been responsible for uniting Bebel and the SPD to the two London exiles. It had been Bebel's decision, as president of the *Verband der Deutschen Arbeitervereine*, to dissolve his organization and get its membership to join Liebknecht's Social-Democratic Party *en masse*, that had made possible the foundation of the modern SPD in Germany.¹ Liebknecht and Bebel had been largely responsible for organizing the joint committee for fusion with the Lassalle organization, the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein*, which came to fruition in a constituent congress at Gotha in May 1875 (Bebel was at this time in jail).²

Liebknecht had been Bebel's teacher and inspirer, and had brought him within the orbit of Marxist ideas; he more than anyone had given the German working-class movement its international orientation and its pre-eminent status within the International. Liebknecht was a much warmer person than Bebel, something of a romantic and a moralist, with all the advantages and disadvantages of a visionary approach to politics. He liked and disliked instantly, with full commitment. At the same time he was less consistent, more changeable, and perhaps in some ways less reliable than Bebel. His approach to politics was through people rather than through ideas; unlike Bebel, who could overcome personal antipathies for the purpose of political combinations, or at least keep them hidden, Liebknecht found it almost impossible to work with those he disliked. By the time Rosa Luxemburg came to Germany, the efficient civil servants of the SPD hierarchy were finding the old man's unpredictable sorties a trial, and his love of adulation a regrettable though useful farce. Auer, the SPD party secretary, somewhat indiscreetly told Rosa Luxemburg: 'When he comes to London or Paris, they produce an ovation—three men of whom two are police spies—and then he thinks he knows the mood of the country. Well, he's an old man. . . . Discussion with him is useless—as you learnt yourself. But he's not a serious obstacle . . . he can be got around.'³

¹ This took place in August 1869 when both the Social-Democratic Party and the *Verband* met simultaneously—presumably by arrangement—in Eisenach. This fused section of the later SPD was generally referred to as the *Eisenacher*, as opposed to the *Lassalleaner*.

² At this congress, the united party adopted the name of *Sozialistische Partei Deutschlands*, which only became *Sozialdemokratische Partei* in 1891 at the Erfurt congress, the first after the repeal of the special anti-Socialist laws, where the party programme was adopted. See above, p. 116.

³ Jogiches letters, 25 May 1898, *Z Pola Walki*, 1961, No. 3(15), p. 147.

These two men held the SPD on its apparent Marxist course, with Kautsky producing and putting into popular form a systematic analysis under the critically approving eye of Engels. The ideas of Lassalle and his immediate successors in the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein*—emphasis on political activity as opposed to economic, flirtations with German nationalism, the absence of any rigid philosophy to permit a more cheerful fishing in the troubled waters of politics—all this had been gradually eliminated. No doubt the restriction on Social-Democratic activity during the time of the anti-Socialist laws between the years 1878 and 1890 helped to solidify the uncompromising oppositional philosophy of Marxism.¹ It is interesting that, while ideas and tendencies similar to those of Lassalle were to reappear constantly in the SPD in one form or another, they were seen more as a deviation from 'correct' Marxism and not as a recrudescence of the politics of Lassalle. By 1900 the real Lassalle, who had had interviews with Bismarck and the *entrée* to a number of aristocratic drawing-rooms and bedrooms—he had died in a duel over a woman—was forgotten, replaced by the image of an apostolic ancestor-figure of Social Democracy. Rosa Luxemburg herself used to conjure him up against purveyors of euphemisms and revolution-scented phrases as a revolutionary realist who believed in doing rather than talking.

The special legislation against Socialism—the *Ausnahmegesetz*—had of course not destroyed the SPD or even made its existence entirely illegal. But its activities were limited, especially propaganda and recruitment; the only permitted efforts were those directly concerned with *Reichstag* elections. This gave electoral affairs a quietly special place in party mythology, never to be eradicated even when the party returned to full legality. Most of the illegal propaganda was carried out from abroad, especially from England and Switzerland, though the SPD never attempted to turn itself into an illegal conspiracy of Russian type. Rosa Luxemburg made her first personal contact with German Social Democrats during her first years in Zürich. In the early 1890s, apart from Lübeck and his circle, she had contact with the first of the left-wing opposition groups within the SPD, the *Opposition der Jungen*, known as the *Jungen* or Youths for short.² The importance of this *Jungen* group

¹ A. J. Berlau, *The German Social Democratic Party, 1914-1921*, New York 1949, p. 35.

² J. Mill, *Pionirn un Boier*, Vol. II, p. 174.

coincided with the return of the SPD to full legality. Its members took issue with what they considered to be the party's tendency to grow soft in legal sunshine, ceasing to be a revolutionary party and becoming purely a parliamentary one. It fought for the adoption of a more revolutionary programme. Its activities caused considerable embarrassment to the party leadership, just preparing to settle back into the creaking armchair of legality. The executive succeeded in having the noisiest ones expelled in 1891; once outside the party, some of them turned to anarchism and a few reverted to orthodoxy. But no doubt their vociferousness was partly responsible for the adoption of the comparatively fierce Erfurt programme.

On the basis of this new programme, the SPD went from strength to strength, undisturbed by any major controversies for eight years. To the rest of society it was a cancerous growth and a major preoccupation. The repeal of Bismarck's special legislation did not mean the end of official harrying of Socialist activities. Indeed, the normal processes of law were used to the utmost; everything that could reasonably or unreasonably be interpreted as a transgression of the existing—and stiff, by French or English standards—laws concerning *lèse-majesté*, sedition, libel, and agitation among the army, immediately became the subject of a prosecution.¹ There were fines and injunctions against party papers, continual arrests and regular sentences of imprisonment, all of which, duly reported to the party at the annual congresses, were totted up into an impressive total. Bismarck, who was nothing if not practical, had tried to combine legislation against Socialism with a programme of social legislation, to warn and wean workers away from the SPD. William II and his later chancellors had no consistent policy other than an intense dislike of Socialism and the vague patriarchal feeling that the workers were being 'misled'. Faced with the constant irritation of the procurators and the endless inconvenience which a determined imperial bureaucracy could provide, the SPD leadership took an increasingly gloomy view of the morals of bourgeois society. From this developed a whole global morality: apart from any Marxist interpretation, a system which was perpetually persecuting those who did their duty for the less privileged section of society could not be anything but rotten.

¹ See G. B. Shaw, 'Socialism at the International Congress', *Cosmopolis*, Vol. 1 (1896), No. 3, p. 662.

Necessarily, therefore, the working classes and their political organization had to be all the more virtuous. This moral aspect was particularly noticeable among those men whose experience of bourgeois morality was greatest: those, like Hugo Haase, who spent much of their time defending Socialists in court; or Clara Zetkin, who organized Socialist women and struggled for some semblance of equality between the sexes in everyday life. The aura of morality which pervaded the SPD was both attractive and repellent to Rosa Luxemburg. And out of it was to grow, as we shall see, a special philosophy constructed on the antithesis between capitalist immorality and proletarian virtue. The 'gnarled hand' of labour figured prominently, in contrast to the fat and venal capitalist. It was easy and natural to take moral antithesis for granted in a country like Russia, where even relatively unpolitical novelists could write themselves hoarse in disgust at the grim and unfeeling barbarity of the ruling classes, where whips did the work of the black-coated judges. German society, however, was proud of its enlightenment and social responsibility; and it was therefore doubly important for revolutionary opponents to insist on its ultimate moral corruption.

Within the party there were no thorny issues in the last decade of the nineteenth century, at least not until 1898. The only controversy of importance (after the *Jungen* had been quietened or expelled) concerned agrarian reform. From the beginning—and even today—the problem of the land was difficult for Socialists. It might be possible to produce sweeping agrarian changes in theory, but it was impossible to obtain much support or enthusiasm for them among peasants and small farmers—or, indeed, to bring the ideas of Socialism into the world of farming at all. Merely to consign the whole of the agrarian population into the shameful limbo of backwardness was obviously not enough for a mass party that would eventually need electoral support in rural constituencies also. From the start, the party programme called for the progressive elimination of smallholdings and for the creation of large landed estates in private hands which would, when the time came, fall like ripe plums into the lap of Socialist agriculture by the simple act of confiscation. This was one of the most obvious examples of historicist helplessness: the attainment of Socialism by helping capitalism rather than combating it—a particularly inflexible transposition of industrial Socialism into agricultural

terms. But some members of the SPD were unwilling to leave agricultural labour and smallholders to the inexorable fate of historical materialism. In 1894 Georg von Vollmar, a south German, raised the problem in a practical form. In his speech to the party congress at Frankfurt that year, he called for a special SPD programme for agriculture. He did not accept the need for the peasant to become totally 'proletarianized' through the growth of large estates. Historical inevitability was no policy for a party that was interested in the welfare of human beings; immediate and thorough reforms were needed instead.¹

As a result of this proposal, a commission was set up to examine the problem, and at the next party congress in 1895 a sweeping programme of reform was put forward as an executive resolution. However, the resolution was rejected. The party programme, with its emphasis on Socialism as a final aim, could not simultaneously contain reforms that might shore up or even improve the condition of capitalist society. By a considerable majority the congress upheld principles against expediency.²

The argument over agricultural policy was not itself of great importance. But for the first time two distinct groups had emerged in the party. The supporters of the agricultural programme were not, as might have been supposed, deputies from Prussia and the Junker areas where conditions were most backward, but from the south of Germany where, if anything, political life was more sophisticated and tolerant. The south German wing of the SPD, which had representation in provincial legislature unmatched by local government in the north and east, now called upon the party for the first time to recognize a special set of problems in the south, and consequently the need for special policies. Their plea was turned down. The party was not to return to agricultural problems

¹ See *Protokoll . . . 1894*, p. 134.

² A. J. Berlau (*German Social Democratic Party*), p. 51, suggests that the resolution was rejected 'not as incompatible with party theories but as incompatible with the established policy of the party. [It was] discussed and judged solely on its relative merits for the purpose of agitation . . . and rejected not because the party opposed it in principle but because other conditions within the party (for example preference for the industrial proletariat) demanded such a rejection.' This is a mistaken view of the decision. The argument was confined to tactics because principles were taken for granted. But what caused the party to turn down the well-argued proposal were not doubts about its tactical efficacy but its entire 'sense of wrongness'. The attachment to the industrial proletariat was attachment to principle. Only the revisionist controversy brought discussion of principles into the open; suddenly neither side could afford to take anything for granted any longer.

as a major issue until after the war. But at the same time as the argument over the land, there arose a parallel problem peculiar to the south which was to dominate party congresses and literature for the next ten years, a chronic source of recrimination. The SPD delegates to the provincial legislatures of Württemberg, Bavaria, and especially Baden, had, as early as 1891, voted the *Land* government budgets in the provincial legislatures—this at a time when party congresses every year solemnly reiterated the doctrine: 'Not a man nor a farthing for this system.' The 'man' part necessarily remained a figure of speech; but the provision of money arose every time a Reich or *Land* budget was presented. The SPD made a solemn ceremonial of each refusal to help the class-state tax the people for the upkeep of its tyranny; its deputies voted solidly against one Reich government budget after another. The government funds were necessarily used in part precisely for combating the SPD, by maintaining the police, the courts, and above all that last anti-Socialist resort, the army. The action of the south Germans was thus not a mild departure from formal party manners, but a blow to the vital principle of isolation, of total opposition.

As early as 1894 a resolution had been submitted to the party congress which baldly forbade SPD delegations in any parliament to vote for any budget. The south Germans fought this resolution; their spokesmen argued that for all practical purposes the importance of the SPD as a political factor in the south would be destroyed if the resolution was passed. Voting on the budget was not only an important means of propaganda but gave the SPD a lever in the government mechanism of the provinces concerned; often the SPD votes were decisive for the provincial government, and so concessions were made to obtain SPD support. Such advantages were not difficult to see and Vollmar obligingly provided a list of them. It was the first but not by any means the last of such lists. This time the orthodox resolution was lost. In 1895, at Breslau, a similar resolution was again lost. Bebel among others was none too happy about south German budget-voting. But as long as the fiction of special circumstances was preserved, and no specific inroad made on party principles, the urgent convenience of a number of distinguished south German comrades could be quietly suited. When old Engels protested from London that Vollmar was hardly a good Social Democrat, and possibly an outright

traitor, Liebknecht had to write half apologetically to pacify him.¹

Finally, we should take a look at the structure and organization of the party which Rosa Luxemburg was entering. On the ground the SPD was organized like a honeycomb, in accordance with the administrative divisions of Germany. The local organization corresponded to the area of a *Kreis*, roughly the extent of a rural or urban district council. Directly above this was the province, and at the summit the central party organization with a proliferation of committees and commissions which were to grow in number and importance as the years went by. The party *Vorstand* (executive) was the repository of executive authority, under the joint chairmanship of Bebel and Liebknecht, but it submitted its activities and indeed itself to party approval or criticism at every annual congress. This was not so much a parliament or Soviet as an annual constituent assembly, the expression of the party's general will—a very Rousseau-like concept. The constitution of the party was very democratic indeed. Everyone accepted, at least tacitly, that the party congress was the highest authority on all matters of administration, policy, and personnel. The activities of the executive, the main events of the year, the action of parliamentary delegations and their individual members were examined at considerable length and often in great detail. Anyone who had something to say could do so with a liberal allowance of time; if this was insufficient, he could reapply to speak on the matter and, under normal circumstances, was permitted to do so. A senior member of the executive or of the party generally introduced any major topic with a platform speech at some length, after which the discussion was thrown open to the floor. Particularly important matters, or those where there was some disagreement, were given two platform speakers.² The status of the party congress was precisely that of an all-powerful last court of appeal which English

¹ Rosa Luxemburg, *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 13 (Introduction by Paul Frölich). See also Friedrich Engels to Wilhelm Liebknecht, 27 November 1894.

² This peculiar German system of the *Referat*, which has no exact parallel in England, was taken over in its most extreme form by the Bolsheviks in the Soviet Union, where it still provides the means for the 'tone setting' speeches, used frequently by Lenin and later by Stalin and Khrushchev. In America it exists formally in the keynote speech at party conventions. The English practice, that movers of a resolution shall have the chance to open the discussion (the procedure of the House of Commons), is not quite the same thing. The *Referat* is speaking to a theme, while the English habit is to elaborate on a resolution.

Labour Party Conferences consistently strive for but never achieve. Until the First World War the SPD, unlike the Labour Party, always effectively controlled its *Reichstag* members.¹

Great value was placed by sponsors, private or executive, upon getting the congress to adopt their resolutions. These then became party 'law' for at least a year, or longer if the party did not alter or revoke them. The history of the SPD was littered with plaintive pleas that party congress resolutions were being ignored or not followed; arguments as to right and wrong usually took the form of differing interpretations of congress resolutions, seldom of outright disagreement with them: hence the rather arid discussion one year as to what the party congress had really intended the year before; hence also the prevalence of lawyers, professional and amateur, to extract the meaning of resolutions from the actual words. Analysis of meaning was an important part of Socialist argument and commentary, since the words themselves were always accepted as being beyond challenge.

Appearance at the party congress was governed by mandates. The bulk of these were from *Reichstag* constituency organizations of the SPD. In addition the members of the party executive, SPD *Reichstag* deputies and representatives of the important party newspapers all sat *ex officio*. As the SPD grew, so did the size of its congress. However, the same nucleus of people appeared year after year and, like all well-versed parliamentarians, were able to benefit from the particular skills of congressmanship, which often made newcomers feel rather uncomfortable. But until the last few years before the war there was practically no 'fixing'; the debates clearly show that the party preferred to air its problems in public and have them reported sardonically in the bourgeois press. The occasional warnings that this public oratory could not improve the party's image were drowned by the moral answer: 'we are not as other parties are'. Rosa Luxemburg was a particularly strong advocate of public frankness: the greater the differences the greater the airing. She had a real horror of secrecy: she considered it both immoral and undesirable, especially in the context of working-class politics, which she saw mainly as a process of continual clarification. For her, the masses were ever-present

¹ Far more so than its delegates to the provincial parliaments, thus producing a curious 'federal' effect in what set out to be a centrally directed party advocating a unitary republic.

spectators at the congress; they, more than anyone else, were the important judges of what was openly displayed before them and this, for Rosa and other radicals, was the main, the only reason for the display.¹

Above and beyond the SPD party congresses, like a vague benevolent presence, was the Socialist International, meeting at intervals of two to four years. This was the incarnation of the world's Socialist presence; not an instrument of precise policies, but an expression of the immense moral authority of free proletarian co-operation in an age of imperialism and war. The Second International had been founded in 1889, to express the reality of which Marx's First International had merely been the pious hope—mass Socialism—and as the base for its irresistible future. These international congresses were a useful place for individuals to meet and exchange ideas; each national party could report on its situation, and from the public proceedings ran the guiding lines for Socialist behaviour everywhere. Whether these resembled the pious public expressions of goodwill of a World Scout Jamboree, with the real exchange of views behind the scenes, or whether the congress resolutions were mandatory acts of international jurisdiction, was neither asked nor answered. Some certainly believed the latter, and among them Rosa Luxemburg.

For the first years of its existence, the International was pre-occupied with cleansing Social Democracy of the anarchists who, formally thrown out of the conference halls in Zürich (1893) and London (1896), kept making Punch and Judy interruptions through windows and balconies. The problems of the International were naturally those of the most important national parties, primarily the Germans and the French—though the size of the delegations was highly flexible and governed in the main by the cost of transportation. International Socialism was poor and needed to conserve its resources—for the Great Day, but also for more immediate rainy days.

As far as the German party was concerned, there was little danger of conflict between the international view and its own. Amid all the euphoria and the slogans of triumph at international congresses, great care was taken not to wound national susceptibilities, at least not until some of the French Socialists and the

¹ See below, p. 236.

SPD met head-on in 1904. When Rosa Luxemburg joined the SPD her status in the International changed perceptibly, even though she always attended more as a Pole than a German; the indignities of 1893 and 1896 could not be repeated on someone who, from 1900 onwards, was a figure of importance in the German party. Whatever the International might feel about squabbling Poles, or even disunited Frenchmen, the SPD was the envy and admiration of Socialists throughout the world. Its preoccupations automatically became the International's agenda. In fact the SPD more or less dominated all the International congresses before the war, and was well aware of the fact.

By the turn of the century, then, the German party was an organized, forward-looking, powerful expression of working-class will, bestraddling tactics and long-term strategy with apparent success, an irresistible force to its enemies, the envy and example of other Socialist parties—the perfect arena, in fact, for a young Socialist bursting with ideas and the will to join the heart of the international class struggle.

Rosa Luxemburg arrived in Berlin on 12 May 1898. Her first official acts were to register with the police—‘no trouble here, the papers were found in order and they gave me my identity card at once’—and with SPD party headquarters.¹ Her mood was compounded of despair and determination, alternating violently as they always did. Berlin was both fabulous and strange; it was far larger than any city she had known, more orderly—and at the same time much more impersonal. The Germans made an instant impression on her: stiff, reserved, untemperamental creatures of routine. ‘Berlin is the most repulsive place; cold, ugly, massive—a real barracks, and the charming Prussians with their arrogance as if each one of them had been made to swallow the very stick with which he had got his daily beating.’² The same sentiment appears in Rosa's letters to Jogiches. They established a derogatory shorthand; Germans became Swabians and intermittently all the troubles of a sorrowful world were cast off by sticking pins into a vignette of a typical German. Within a few days of her arrival she wrote:

¹ Seidel letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1959, No. 1(15), p. 68, 30 May 1898.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

My soul is bruised and it is difficult to explain exactly how I feel. Last night in bed in a strange flat in the middle of a strange city, I completely lost heart and asked myself the frankest question: would I not be happier instead of looking for adventure to live with you somewhere in Switzerland quietly and closely, to take advantage of our youth and to enjoy ourselves. . . . In fact I have a cursed longing for happiness and am ready to haggle for my daily portion of happiness with all the stubbornness of a mule.¹

The first difficulty was to get a flat and this took almost a week's hard searching. They were either too expensive or not good enough. She did not want to move to the outskirts: 'The air may be better, but it is outside Berlin and [these are] really rather proletarian districts.'² Finally she found a flat in Cuxhavenerstrasse: 'Near the centre—as you see, in the most aristocratic part. . . . They have never seen a woman doctor.'³ But it was more expensive than they had planned and Rosa apologized profusely for exceeding the agreed budget.

For once, her change of circumstances was so dramatic that she felt impelled to describe her daily routine in detail—like any pioneer in the jungle:

I wake up before eight, run into the hall, grab the papers and letters and then dive back under the bed clothes and go through the most important things. Then I have a rub down with cold water (regularly every day); I dress, drink a glass of hot milk with bread and butter (they bring me milk and bread every day) sitting on the balcony. Then I dress myself respectably and go for an hour's walk in the Thiergarten [Berlin's Hyde Park], daily and in any weather. Next I return home, change, write my notes or letters. I have lunch at 12.30 in my room—marvellous luncheons and very healthy! After lunch every day bang on the sofa to sleep! Around three I get up, drink tea and sit down to write more notes or letters (depending on how I get on in the morning) or I write books. . . . At five or six I have a cup of cocoa, carry on with my work or more usually go to the Post Office to collect and send letters (this is the high spot of my day). At eight I have dinner—do not be shocked—three soft boiled eggs, bread and butter with cheese and ham and some more hot milk. . . . Around ten I drink another glass of milk (it makes fully a litre daily). I very much like working in the evenings. I have made myself a red lampshade for my lamp and sit at my desk just by the open balcony, the room looks lovely in the pink dimness and

¹ Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1961, No. 3(15), pp. 138–9.

² *Ibid.*, p. 136.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

I get all the fresh air from the garden. Around twelve I wind my alarm clock, whistle something to myself and then undress and dive under the bed clothes. . . .¹

At SPD headquarters Rosa Luxemburg got a cautious but not unfriendly reception. To her surprise, she was known—the intrepid gadfly from Zürich who had buzzed persistently at Kautsky and Wilhelm Liebknecht. As soon as she said that she had German nationality the interest became practical, and turned to fervour when without prompting she offered to perform the mud-diast job of all—agitation for the coming *Reichstag* elections among the Silesian Poles. She listened politely to a lecture on the situation by Auer, the SPD secretary, then replied:

‘You’ve told me nothing I didn’t already know, in fact I know a lot more about it than you do.’

Then we began talking ‘frankly’!

‘In the executive’, said the SPD secretary, ‘we regard the independence of Poland as nonsense . . . we finance *Gazeta Robotnicza* [a Polish paper in Silesia] under the strict condition that there will be no nationalism.’

So far so good. Auer soon became still more frank.

‘We couldn’t do the Polish workers a greater service than to germanize them, only one mustn’t say so . . . I’ll gladly make you a present of all and every Pole including Polish Socialism. . . .’

I retorted sharply and the man became apologetic . . . Marchlewski? They do not even know his name, merely that there is someone about whose name begins with an M.²

And off she went to Silesia. It was on the darkest fringes of party activity. The district secretaries in Breslau and farther south, in the industrial area of Upper Silesia, felt remote, neglected, and resentful—much like Russian pioneers in Siberia. It was difficult enough to work successfully among the German textile workers who were probably the lowest paid and least class-conscious in the Reich, and so the least receptive to Socialism. Among the Poles, who supplied the bulk of the labour in the mines, it was even more hopeless. There was the insurmountable language barrier and the fact that the PPS was hard at work for its own purposes which did

¹ Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1962, No. 1(17), pp. 168-9.

² Ibid., 1961, No. 3(15), pp. 148-50, dated 25 May 1898.

not fit in with those of the SPD, though it was difficult precisely to spell out why. In this stale situation the arrival of a first-class agitator who spoke well and who spoke Polish, who had distinct ideas of her own in fundamental opposition to the separatist tendencies of the PPS, was very welcome. Bruhns in Breslau wanted to retain her in that city, but Rosa travelled on into Upper Silesia, the heart of the Polish area. There at Königshütte (Królewska Huta) sat Dr. August Winter who already had a particular bee in his bonnet about integrating Poles in the German organization and whom the party executive had therefore found invaluable for a job that no one else would undertake. 'Winter is *persona grata* in the SPD. Generally speaking, as far as they are concerned, the Polish movement *means* Winter.'¹ Rosa Luxemburg and he entered into a working alliance right from the start and their co-operation, after many setbacks and difficulties, was to lead five years later to an almost complete victory for the integration policies of the SPD—and the emergence of the SDKPiL as orthodox adviser to the German party on Polish affairs, to the discomfiture of the local PPS leaders.

But the collaboration between Dr. Winter and Rosa Luxemburg was political, and the appearance of friendship suggested by their close political accord is misleading. Rosa Luxemburg had well remembered the derogatory remarks of the chief party secretary, Auer, about Poles. She knew that the Germans made no real distinction between political integration and total assimilation. This she was, of course, determined to resist. Besides, she suspected Winter's motives. German enthusiasms were always suspect; Winter might merely hope to build a party career out of the Poles—which was also partly her intention. Consequently there was always some reserve, at least on her side; she was determined that the credit for success should go to her and not to him. In course of time her doubts weakened and almost disappeared. By 1899 Rosa Luxemburg's position in the German party was so well established that any competition on Winter's part for the role of spokesman on Polish affairs in Germany had become impossible, and Rosa could afford to be more generous.²

It was a deliberate part of her policy to put the SPD leadership under an obligation to her. She always described this and subse-

¹ Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1961, No. 3(15), p. 149.

² See below, p. 173.

quent visits to Upper Silesia as her stint in the desert—at least to acquaintances like the Kautskys.¹ Consciously or unconsciously, this corresponded to conventional wisdom in the party. Rosa Luxemburg may well have come to consider this agitation among the Poles less interesting than her activities nearer the centre of the political stage in the SPD. But at the same time she began, soon after her arrival in Germany, to develop that particular and deliberate schizophrenia about German and Polish affairs which makes so many of her actions appear contradictory at first sight. Though she always remained loyal to the Polish movement, it soon became obvious to her that Polish and German activities could not be integrated into a harmonious whole; that they would have to be kept separate as much as possible. No doubt this decision to live two lives was largely forced on her by circumstances. But it meant that to her German friends Rosa either kept quiet about her Polish activities or prevaricated. The reasons are not far to seek. Only through whole-hearted commitment to the German movement was she able to do something for the Poles—the fact that PPS leaders in Germany like Berfus were openly and entirely committed to an exclusively Polish point of view made the German leaders discount their opinions more and more. As we shall see, her schizophrenia eventually became three-fold as Russian questions, too, obtruded themselves into the range of Rosa Luxemburg's activities. In any case, far from sighing about uphill work, as she did to the Germans, she wrote to Jogiches in the summer of 1898 that the visit to the Polish areas of Upper Silesia was like a breath of fresh air. She even tried to persuade him that it was the ideal place for their next holiday together:

The only strong impression was the one I wrote you—corn fields, Polish surroundings. I pay no attention to people and do not even notice Berlin. I long for Silesia, for a village, and I dream of the time when we can be there together. I insist that that part of the world will influence you as much as it has influenced me. We would both revive simply by walking through corn fields. . . . Does it not attract you, or don't you believe that we shall ever get there?²

¹ Rosa Luxemburg to Luise Kautsky, 30 December 1899, 'Einige Briefe', *Bulletin IISH*, 1952, No. 1, p. 32. See also Adolf Warszawski to Karl Kautsky, 20 May 1903, IISH Archives, D XXIII, 63.

² Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1961, No. 3(15), p. 161; *ibid.*, 1962, No. 1 (17), p. 157.

She made a considerable impression, not only on the people she met but particularly on the party officials. At election time public meetings in the Polish areas were prohibited by the police and the work had to be confined to individual agitation.

You have no idea what a favourable influence my first appearances had on them and on me. . . . Now I am positive that within half a year I shall be one of the best speakers in the party. Voice, temperament, tongue, everything stands the test. And, most important, I mount the platform as if I had been doing it for the last twenty years.¹

Jogiches had been against the whole agitation in Upper Silesia just as he was against almost everything that she undertook without him. But Rosa knew very well that having offered the executive her help in the *Reichstag* election campaign, she had to put up with it or shut up; her success here was bound to lead to greater possibilities at the centre. She had made her position clear from the start. Her sex was irrelevant; she indignantly refuted the official suggestion that, like Clara Zetkin, she might find her natural habitat in the women's movement. During a train journey she met Schönlink, the influential editor of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, who had raised that paper from the very average level of provincial Socialist publications to the highest level of political and literary journalism. A lively correspondence between them started at once. Schönlink wanted her collaboration on his paper and they exchanged several letters a week on questions of philosophy and literature—it was clear that he was paying her court and that the intellectual capsule of their communication was no more than a cover for more human intentions. Rosa Luxemburg was both flattered and amused. She reported it all faithfully to Jogiches—only to receive a burst of jealous resentment which she had much difficulty in calming. Nor was Schönlink the only one. Bruhns in Breslau tried the more orthodox line of the misunderstood exile, immersed in a dull routine of wife and family which quite stifled his evident talents. Altogether Rosa Luxemburg caused a flutter in south-east Germany, compounded of political, intellectual, and personal motives.² The difficulty was to decide which friendships

¹ Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1962, No. 1(17), p. 153.

² Much of the correspondence with Schönlink was an extended commentary on the meaning and importance of Immanuel Kant—probably the sole occasion in history when this angular philosopher's work served as a vehicle for courtship. Rosa Luxemburg's interest in Kant's philosophy was not very positive—as she made clear to the unfortunate Kurt Eisner some years later when she

had to be nurtured and which to be cooled down. Winter was necessary for the SDKP's Polish policy, Schönland essential for her own advancement; but both needed careful handling to ensure their continued support without indelicate personal involvement.

Back in Berlin, Rosa Luxemburg summed up the positive gains of her trip. A basis for engaging the PPS had been established. But she could not see much point in sharpening the open political struggle for the moment, at least until the German party had officially taken notice of the specific problem of PPS separatism.

What am I to do? For instance should I go to Poznań, deliver a speech there, create some sort of organization, let myself be elected as a delegate or something; or should I just go to the meetings there and start a public discussion? The devil knows. . . . What is the fight with the Morawskis [PPS leader in Silesia] for? Agreement? This is out of the question and could in fact prove very awkward. An open quarrel? What is the concrete advantage from it, that is the question? . . . The best thing is to work indirectly through [German connections like] Schönland.¹

As far as her German career was concerned, the results were wholly positive. After the summer she was besieged with requests for articles, not only from the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* but also from *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung*, where Parvus was editor. He, too, corresponded with her fervently: party affairs enlivened by the overtones of his irrepressible personality. The *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* had recently gained unexpected prominence through Parvus's vituperative onslaught on Bernstein.² She had previously written for the paper on the national question, before Parvus became editor. Now she was to be a regular contributor. 'Parvus insists on calling me urgently to Dresden where he is making another one of his revolutions on the newspaper.'³ It was Parvus's discovery of a kindred spirit in her—much more than the wish of her own party colleague Marchlewski—that was primarily respon-

trounced him for his intellectual devotion to that philosopher; a suitable interest for a retired gentleman but not for an active Social Democrat. 'See to it that you are sufficiently informed to lecture about Russia. Otherwise it would be better if you confined yourself to Saint Immanuel and stuck to regurgitating him.' (Letter to Kurt Eisner dated 22 April 1904 in a private collection in Israel.)

¹ Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1962, No. 1(17), p. 154.

² See below, p. 148.

³ Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1962, No. 1(17), p. 158.

sible for her collaboration with *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* which was soon to lead to her appointment as editor.

The most important work of the summer was her own reply to Bernstein in the form of a series of articles for *Leipziger Volkszeitung*. Every spare moment not occupied with Polish immediacies was devoted to them. It was to be her dramatic entrance on to the stage of the current drama in SPD politics; she felt it in her bones. Her contribution to the revisionist controversy had not only to be good but also to be timed correctly; its appearance had to take place shortly before the party congress in September in order to serve as a basis of discussion there.

One must work quickly: (1) because the whole work will be good for nothing if somebody gets in first, and (2) most of the time has to be spent not on writing but on polishing. Generally speaking I have tackled the work very well. Already those pieces written in Zürich are just of the right dough (of course not baked yet). If I only knew what to write, the appropriate form would come by itself, I feel it. I am ready to give half my life for that article, so much am I absorbed in it.¹

This, of course, was the first half of what was to become the pamphlet *Social Reform or Revolution*, Rosa Luxemburg's most important contribution to the revisionist debate and the first of the great works of Marxist analysis on which her reputation rests.²

Great things, however, come from small beginnings. There is in Rosa Luxemburg's letters no trace of the moral indignation against Bernstein which so clearly breathes out of the pamphlet itself; instead, nothing but nicely calculated self-interest. Since her arrival in Germany Rosa had spent whatever money was not needed for food and lodging on subscriptions to the most important party papers. She found that none of these, except Parvus's articles, seemed to deal with Bernstein's articles systematically—in fact the problem was just another intellectual storm in a teacup for most of the papers. Here was an obvious gap to be filled and Rosa felt supremely capable of filling it. She was well aware of the stakes; if successful, this pamphlet would establish her reputation as an 'over-all' Marxist at one stroke, whereas otherwise she might have to spend years piecing it together. Statements of first principles

¹ Ibid., p. 162. For the issues and history of the revisionist controversy, see below, pp. 145 ff. and Chapter VI.

² For a detailed discussion, see below, pp. 206 ff.

were rare in party writing—and then the exclusive preserve of people like Kautsky and Mehring. The Bernstein series was a heaven-sent opportunity. If Rosa Luxemburg cannot get credit for a deep intellectual urge to deal with Bernstein, she at least deserves full praise for seizing and magnificently exploiting her opportunity.

All this illuminates not only the purpose of her coming to Germany but her intentions and activities on arrival. She was out to make a career for herself, and almost everything she said or did was tailored to this end. The fact that she was a revolutionary, that she instinctively rejected Bernstein's thesis, was a secondary consideration. As with her efforts in Silesia, the demands of SDKP policy coincided with her attempts to win the attention of the SPD leadership. She used her success among the Silesian Poles to make the personal acquaintance of as many of the leaders as possible; several times that summer she tried to see Bebel and Liebknecht and got introductions to them from people she had already met.

At the same time, this emphasis on the plain self-interest of her actions does not sully her motives. She was not interested in power for its own sake. A career in the German party was a means of spreading those ideas which she held to be correct and important. The power structure of the SPD, with its hierarchical organization, its tendency to more clearly defined institutional authority, did not attract her at all. She was interested in influence, not power. Essentially a lonely person, she was suspicious of people, particularly Germans—and expected them to be suspicious of her.

Why should they trust a person whose only claim to existence is a few articles, albeit first class? A person moreover who does not belong to the ruling clique [*Sippschaft*], who won't rely on anyone's support but uses nothing but her own elbows, a person feared for the future not only by obvious opponents like Auer and Co. but even by allies (Bebel, Kautsky, Singer), a person best kept at arm's length because she may grow several heads too tall? . . . I take all this with great calm, I always knew it could not be otherwise . . . in a year or two, no intrigue, fears or obstacles will help them and I shall occupy one of the foremost positions in the party.¹

¹ Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1963, Vol. VI, No. 3(23), p. 150, dated 1 May 1899.

Thus she deliberately set out to influence people for particular purposes and expected others to try to do the same to her. However much she talked of masses, persuasion was mainly a private, personal affair. She had no feeling for the organized, structural fellowship of a party like the SPD—the huddle and the artificial glow of comradeship that goes with the common but negative experience of being rejected, deprived by society. She took the formal German camaraderie for granted, and saw it as a hostile rather than a friendly force. As Briand put it some years later: ‘Genossen, Genossen, j’en ai marre de ces genosseries.’ Instead, individuals had to be prised loose from their web of immediate loyalties, by reason and influence, towards the policies which Rosa Luxemburg advocated. This attitude was to remain constant throughout her career in the SPD, even though her policies only crystallized as distinct and oppositional much later. ‘I have no intention of limiting myself to criticism. On the contrary I have every intention and urge to “push” positively, not individuals but the movement as a whole . . . point out new ways, fighting, acting as a gadfly—in a word, a chronic incentive for the whole movement, the work that Parvus began . . . but left sadly unfinished. . . .’¹ She was never ‘in’ the SPD to the extent and in the manner in which she was ‘in’ the SDKPiL. Its people were not her people. In the Polish party she exercised a major influence in the creation of ideas which flowed outwards from the peer group at the top. In the SPD, however, right from the start she was pulling away from the establishment; she was competing in the creation of ideas, and her influence was projected towards the centre rather than outwards from it. Even from 1901 to 1905, when she appeared to speak for the party executive on many issues, she was always an outsider—by choice as well as by necessity. ‘It is always like that with them, when they are embarrassed—to the Jews for help—and when it is over—away with you, Jews.’²

She learned to live with this situation. At the beginning, occasional loneliness assailed her unbearably and at such moments

¹ Ibid. The use of the word ‘push’ was Luxemburg shorthand for Jogiches’ tendency to manoeuvre people behind the scenes rather than persuade or argue openly (see below, pp. 380 ff.). They frequently argued about this; when he made futile proposals about her personal tactics in Germany, she called him an ‘incorrigible diplomat’ (p. 152).

² Ibid., p. 145. ‘Jak bieda to do żyda, po biedzie precz żydzie.’ Rosa Luxemburg used a slightly bitter Polish jingle which had become a common saying in a country with a long tradition of anti-Semitism.

her correspondence with Jogiches in Zürich provided the only link with what she felt to be the one genuine reality of her life.

I cannot write much about my own person. I can only repeat what I have written to you before, but you will again not understand and will be angry. 'I feel cold and calm'; you understand the phrase with regard to your own self, but do not comprehend the fact that I am complaining about my condition which goes on and on. There is a lethal apathy in spite of which I act and think like some kind of automaton, almost as if someone else were doing it all. Explain to me what I can do. You ask me what is wrong. I am lacking some part of life; I feel as if something had died within me, I feel neither fear nor pain, nor loneliness, I am like a corpse . . . I seem to be an entirely different person from what I was in Zürich and I think of myself as having been quite different in those days. . . .¹

Here was the one person who could be told everything, without adornment or rationalization. But this brutal, incoherent frankness brought its own penalties. Jogiches made a point of disagreeing with many of her decisions and increasingly resented the implications of her growing independence. Rosa Luxemburg satisfied him as far as she could by explaining everything at great length and accounting in detail for things like money and arrangements; but she found it impossible to submit to his decision on the intellectual aspects of her work. In these she knew that she was right.

I just received your very evil post card in which you berate me. I draw comfort from the fact that today you must have received my long letter and will recognize that you were quite wrong in telling me off. But your card upset me and I have to lay off the book I was reading in order to write to you again. My golden one, how can you be so vile and write like this? You must really be mad at me, no? It hurts me immensely, but never mind, I shall write to you just the same as I intended to yesterday.

Do you know why I find it so hard to write about my impressions? . . . It is because . . . I attach practically no significance to personal impressions, to the influence of my sociological condition, I abhor describing feelings or even letting myself feel anything instinctively. I now value only real results. However, I think I may be wrong, for you too only appreciate real value and everything else is a waste of time. It may well be that it is this that causes the inner loneliness I was complaining about. Maybe it is nothing but contempt and aversion for all the personal motivations. . . . We have now been living so long in the

¹ Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1962, No. 1(17), p. 156.

expectation and desire of some positive result that this must have some repercussion on me. Apart from this there is one other important thing; I am living here like somebody without air; if you were here, if we were living together, my life would be normal and I would like Berlin and I would find pleasure in walking in the Thiergarten. Now it is dark; not a single pleasant impression. It makes no difference to me whether it rains or whether the sun shines. When I walk about I do not pay the slightest attention to shop windows or people. At home I only think of what I have to do, what letters I have to write and I go to bed with just the same indifference with which I got up. To cut the story short, all this has one basic cause—you are not here. I feel as if the ground was detached from my feet, strange to all and everything. . .¹

But all the time Rosa knew she had to liberate herself from the extremities of subservience. Whether it was a minor matter like buying clothes (which he insisted should not be done without him), or the more important battle of wills as to whether he should come for holidays to Berlin or she to Zürich: 'If my independence is sufficient to expose myself in the political arena, it must be sufficient for purely personal matters too.'² And as for his criticisms and correction of her literary work, this was quite unacceptable.

I read through your amendments and nearly had a fit, but I do not want to speak of it as it will do no good, so I return it as it is with only the style corrected . . . I know we look at things from a different point of view; two weeks of work like mad and only a lot of inaccuracies to show for it. Let us never have such work again. . . . I am not only thinking of the errors in figures but of the thousands of molehills, which under the microscope of your literary pedantry grew up into veritable mountains. I am on the whole not reassured when I look at the results. Now an end—*frisch, froh und frei*. We should work lightly, with pleasure, think things over seriously but briefly, think not of what has been attained but decide quickly and go ahead. I have always acted in this way and have never made one mistake. It was not my fault if everything here did not go quite as I wanted. I was ready, and if need be would have managed splendidly all on my own. But enough of praising myself. I really wanted to write to you personally about a million other things.³

Though Rosa Luxemburg's confident appearance in Germany was based on the established certainties of her Polish activity and

¹ Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1962, No. 1(17), pp. 159–60.

² *Ibid.*, No. 2(18), pp. 77–78.

³ *Ibid.*, No. 1(17), pp. 155–6.

on her durable relationship with Leo Jogiches, success in her new environment inevitably affected the older relationships as well. The break-through in Germany was hers alone; the more Jogiches attempted to force it into the framework of their partnership—in which he clearly predominated—the more Rosa Luxemburg felt the need to assert her independence all along the line. It is symptomatic of their relationship that when Rosa was offered the editorship of *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* and proudly informed Jogiches of the fact, she received a laconic telegram which instructed her to 'decline unconditionally'—and equally symptomatic that she took no notice but went right ahead. Jogiches capitulated. He slipped quietly away from Zürich and joined her in Dresden in her moment of triumph—keeping, as always, in the background so that her fellow editors, with whom she was soon to become embroiled in a struggle, were entirely unaware of his presence.¹

To do justice to their relationship, we must document the moments of euphoria as well as the disputes. Rosa Luxemburg celebrated her twenty-eighth birthday in a good mood: 'things poured on her from a veritable horn of plenty' from German friends and admirers, but the most valued gift was Jogiches'—an edition of the works of Rodbertus, a German economist. Her letter of acknowledgement is one of the most touching personal documents she ever wrote.

I kiss you a thousand times for your dearest letter and present, though I have not yet received it. . . . You simply cannot imagine how pleased I am with your choice. Why, Rodbertus is simply my favourite economist and I can read him a hundred times for sheer intellectual pleasure. . . .² My dear, how you delighted me with your letter. I have read it six times from beginning to end. So, you are really pleased with me. You write that perhaps I only know inside me that somewhere there is a man who belongs to me! Don't you know that everything I do is always done with you in mind; when I write an article my first thought is—this will cause you pleasure—and when I have days when I doubt my own strength and cannot work, my only fear is what effect this will have on you, that it might disappoint you. When I have proof of success, like a letter from Kautsky, this is simply my homage to you. I give

¹ His brief visit to Dresden cannot be documented except from various allusions in Rosa Luxemburg's letters. See, for instance, *Z Pola Walki*, 1963, Nos. 1/2 (21-22), p. 314.

² For a rather different view of Rodbertus, see Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, London 1951, pp. 238 ff.

you my word, as I loved my mother, that I am personally quite indifferent to what Kautsky writes. I was only pleased with it because I wrote it with your eyes and felt how much pleasure it would give you.¹

. . . Only one thing nags at my contentment: the outward arrangements of your life and of our relationship. I feel that I will soon have such an established position here (morally) that we will be able to live together quite calmly, openly, as husband and wife. I am sure you understand this yourself. I am happy that the problem of your citizenship is at last coming to an end and that you are working energetically at your doctorate. I can feel from your recent letters that you are in a very good mood to work. . . .

Do you think that I do not feel your value, that whenever the call to arms is sounded you always stand by me with help and encourage me to work—forgetting all the rows and all my neglect! . . . You have no idea with what joy and desire I wait for every letter from you because each one brings me so much strength and happiness and encourages me to live.

I was happiest of all with that part of your letter where you write that we are both young and can still arrange our personal life. Oh darling, how I long that you may fulfil your promise. . . . Our own little room, our own furniture, a library of our own, quiet and regular work, walks together, an opera from time to time, a small—very small—circle of intimate friends who can sometimes be asked to dinner, every year a summer departure to the country for a month but definitely free from work! . . . And perhaps even a little, a very little, baby? Will this never be permitted? Never? Darling, do you know what accosted me yesterday during a walk in the park—and without any exaggeration? A little child, three or four years old, in a beautiful dress with blond hair; it stared at me and suddenly I felt an overpowering urge to kidnap the child and dash off home with him. Oh darling, will I never have my own baby?

And at home we will never argue again, will we? It must be quiet and peaceful as it is with everyone else. Only you know what worries me, I feel already so old and am not in the least attractive. You will not have an attractive wife when you walk hand in hand with her through the park—we will keep well away from the Germans. . . . Darling, if you will first settle the question of your citizenship, secondly your doctorate and thirdly live with me openly in our own room and work together with me, then we can want for nothing more! No couple on earth has so many facilities for happiness as you and I and if there is only some goodwill on our part we will be, must be, happy.²

¹ For the letter in question, see below, p. 164.

² *Z Pola Walki*, 1963, Nos. 1/2 (21–22), p. 336, dated 6 March 1899.

Like all events in history which later turn out to be major watersheds, convenient dates for dividing one period from another, the revisionist controversy has been, if not over-simplified, at any rate compressed. All writing of history is compression, but the scale on which it is done varies considerably, becoming most intense where one period is thought to link up with the next. Revisionism gave its compact name to a widely differing series of attitudes and policies, as much on the part of the historians as of the original participants. The intellectual content of the original revisionist controversy has been sharpened and simplified considerably, to produce the required political sales appeal for different periods of Communist history. The result is that today it is exceedingly difficult to liberate the analysis of contemporary attitudes from the heavy burden of later imputation.

The revisionist controversy as such can be dated approximately from the beginning of 1898. Not that the problems were entirely new; they had recurred consistently since 1891 but had always been dealt with as isolated questions of tactics without giving rise to any general discussion of principles as the foundation of party policy.¹ Towards the end of 1896 a man called Eduard Bernstein in his typically leisured and peaceful manner had sat down and analysed the events of the preceding ten years of Socialist history. This broad survey took the form of a dialogue between reality and illusion, between the existing policy of the SPD and the one that appeared to him objectively desirable. It was a complex subject; one thing necessarily led to another and in the course of his investigation Bernstein tackled almost every major aspect of Socialism.² Bernstein himself was a distinguished figure in the German party—he was particularly well liked for his good nature

¹ See 'The Roots of Revisionism', *Journal of Modern History*, 1939, pp. 334 ff.; also J. P. Nettl, 'The German Social-Democratic Party 1890-1914 as a political model', *Past and Present*, No. 30, April 1965, pp. 68 ff.

² It is not necessary to go at length into the problems examined by Bernstein and the solutions he put forward. Some of these will be discussed in due course. For a general discussion of Bernstein and his ideas, see Peter Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism*, New York 1952. The most recent and best biography of Bernstein is Pierre Angel, *Éduard Bernstein et l'évolution du Socialisme allemand*, Paris 1961. Bernstein's series of articles in *Neue Zeit* were under the general title 'Probleme des Sozialismus' (NZ, 1896-8). These were later published in book form as *Zur Geschichte und Theorie des Sozialismus*. Bernstein also summarized his immediate conclusions and proposals in another, better-known, book, *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie*, Stuttgart 1899.

and agreeable, restrained temperament. For a time he had been Engels's secretary and had always remained particularly close to him. He had shared the Swiss emigration with many important German leaders, among them Kautsky, to whom he was personally close. Then he had moved from Switzerland to London where he had remained—again on account of one of those mysterious and ever-pending indictments with which the imperial authorities belaboured Social Democracy and which would have led to a court case as soon as he put his foot on German soil. In fact, Bernstein did not return to Germany until 1901. In the course of his stay in England he had developed considerable sympathy with English attitudes. He had for years been editor of the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* which had at one time during the existence of the anti-Socialist laws been radical enough to require printing abroad. What he had to say, therefore, was treated primarily as the product of a well-known and respected mind. His peers unhesitatingly accepted Bernstein's right to speak on all these matters with authority. To them it was not so much what was said but who was saying it; among the elders of the Second International the content of opinion was never divorced from the personality of the writer.

The form which the great controversy was to take, and particularly the roles of Parvus and Rosa Luxemburg, cannot be understood without a clear appreciation of the attitude of the fathers of German Social Democracy to Bernstein's articles. Kautsky found them 'extremely attractive'; he had, after all, accepted them in his paper. When the first criticisms appeared from Dresden, Bernstein interrupted his series to reply to Parvus, and Kautsky accompanied this reply in *Neue Zeit* with an editorial note to the effect that he had received 'a number of polemical comments on Bernstein's articles which we have to turn down for publication because they are based on a mistaken conception of Bernstein's intentions'.¹ He later described Bernstein as one of his closest friends, with whom he had been 'one in heart and soul'; a friendship which other people regarded as that between 'a kind of red Orestes and Pylades'.² Kautsky was not a man who formed intimacies easily. Later, when Victor Adler accused him of supporting Rosa Luxemburg beyond the bounds of political reason, he

¹ Karl Kautsky in Felix Meiner (ed.), *Die Volkswirtschaftslehre der Gegenwart in Selbstdarstellungen*, Leipzig 1924, p. 19. Also *NZ*, 1897/1898, Vol. I, p. 740.

² Meiner (ed.), *Die Volkswirtschaftslehre* . . . , pp. 11, 34.

hotly denied that his political alignments could ever be governed by personal friendships—and cited his attitude to Bernstein in support.¹

Vorwärts, too, welcomed any critical appraisal of Marxist theory on principle even though Bernstein's ideas could in part have given rise to 'misunderstandings'.² Even the controversial *Leipziger Volkszeitung* had at first nothing sharper to say than 'interesting observations which none the less terminate in a mistaken conclusion; something that is always liable to happen especially to lively and critical people, but there is no more to it than that'.³

In the spring of 1898, Bernstein was far from being odd man out; it was Parvus who was demonstrably behaving like a maniac. He was editor of *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung*. The SPD party press had just begun to rise above its humble, purely agitational beginnings. Questions of theoretical interest were reserved by consensus to *Neue Zeit*; *Vorwärts*, the party's official gazette, had practically a monopoly of important official business, which it treated with ponderous and dull solemnity—much quoted and probably little read. The provincial papers suffered from a dearth of journalistic talent and also a lack of interesting material. The gutless state of party journalism had been obvious to Rosa Luxemburg from the day she arrived. 'I do not like the way party affairs are written up . . . everything so conventional, so wooden, so repetitive.'⁴ Only Schönlanck in Leipzig was creating a paper of wider range with a strong emphasis on culture; the traditional rivalry between the cities of Leipzig and Dresden was reflected in the struggle between their respective Socialist papers. Parvus, a man of impatient and scintillating temperament, was determined to make a revolution in *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung*. It was a revolution in every sense: his articles had a polemical bite quite unknown to German party papers, and in addition he kept the administration of the paper in a constant state of flux. His decision to mount a noisy artillery barrage against Bernstein was therefore as much editorial policy as it was an expression of Parvus's own literary appetites. In seizing on Bernstein as a target, he

¹ Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel*, p. 435: Karl Kautsky to Victor Adler, 18 October 1904.

² Paul Frölich, Introduction to Rosa Luxemburg, *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 17.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Seidel letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1959, No. 1(15), p. 69.

succeeded beyond his wildest expectations in putting his paper on the political map. By the time the party congress assembled that year, people were already talking of 'taking a *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* line'.¹

In fact Parvus cleared the editorial decks in Dresden and launched into a lengthy series of polemics against Bernstein beginning on 28 January and concluding on 6 March 1898. It was a prolonged upheaval which completely disrupted the work of the paper and greatly upset the staff. He began his series with the title 'Bernstein's Overthrow of Socialism', and almost every issue carried yet another instalment of fireworks.² The onslaught was such that Bernstein was compelled to interrupt his own series in order to reply. He took issue particularly with those of his critics who insisted on waving the Communist Manifesto as though it were the fount of all wisdom. 'Surely it is ridiculous to argue 50 years later with excerpts from the Communist Manifesto which are based on wholly different political and social conditions to those which face us today. . . . There is no genuine reason to assume that the basic considerations which motivated the party [in formulating the Erfurt programme] are necessarily those which Parvus thinks.'³ The argument thus moved from history to politics, from the past to the present, and back again. By the time Rosa Luxemburg appeared on the scene, the problem of whether current social conditions justified Bernstein or Parvus had already been posed, and was replacing the academic exercise of discovering what Marx really meant.

Parvus returned to the attack in increasingly personal terms. He did not take the factual range of discussion much further but

¹ See *Protokoll . . . 1898*, also 'Einige Briefe Rosa Luxemburgs und andere Dokumente', *Bulletin of the International Institute for Social History*, Vol. VIII, 1952, p. 9.

² See *SAZ*, 1898, Nos. 22 to 54. In the course of these articles Parvus pursued every one of Bernstein's subjects at length: the concentration of industry, the specific statistics furnished by Bernstein in support, the forces of revolution, the peasantry, the social structure, tariff policy, the class system of the German Reich, the pre-conditions of social revolution, and finally the broader problem of Socialism and revolution. The choice of title for the series was deliberately based on an analogy with Engels's polemic against Dühring which had appeared twenty years earlier in *LV*, under the title 'Herrn Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft'. (See W. Scharlau, *Parvus-Helphand als Theoretiker in der deutschen Sozialdemokratie, 1867-1910* (The role of Parvus-Helphand as a theorist in German Social Democracy), unpublished doctoral dissertation, Münster (Germany) 1960.)

³ E. Bernstein, 'Kritisches Zwischenspiel', *NZ*, 1897/1898, Vol. I, pp. 740, 750.

he did raise the temperature by several degrees. Moreover, it was Parvus who now suggested that since factual argument with Bernstein was hopeless he could only be treated as a ridiculous deserter from Socialism. It was at this stage that Rosa Luxemburg took a hand.

There is consequently a clear difference between the personal attitudes of Rosa Luxemburg and Parvus right from the beginning of the revisionist debate, and the actual contributions they made to the important questions that had been raised.¹ Parvus had forced the controversy on to the public conscience of the party by his uncompromising tone and the comprehensiveness of his dissent. Having earned notoriety for his paper and himself, he soon lost interest; as for Bernstein, systematic analysis was not really his line. But Rosa Luxemburg saw here an opportunity for short-circuiting the lengthy process of making an impact on the party. The situation of 1898 was a race for time: not only had she to throw her hat into the ring before the party congress, when the whole problem would be discussed by all the big guns before a critical audience, but she had to get her word in before her rivals. By the end of the year it became plain that Kautsky too could no longer keep quiet; an amusing race now took place for possession of a proof copy of Bernstein's new book, *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie*, which was to put his case more fully to the party. Rosa Luxemburg was the first to review this book and tried to ensure that Schönlanck would give her review absolute priority. Schönlanck had his personal interests to protect; it was important that he should be the first to comment on it, before *Neue Zeit*.

You probably read the notice in *Neue Zeit* about Kautsky's book and Ede's [Bernstein]. . . . Schönlanck writes that he had ordered Dietz to send it to him immediately after it comes out, still warm from the belly of the cow. . . . Probably it will be a proof copy. Naturally he does this so that he can get the review from me as quickly as possible. . . . In a daily paper I can move quicker and consequently beat Kautsky to the draw. The hope of publishing a pamphlet is tied up with *Leipziger Volkszeitung* because nobody will want to reprint anything from *Neue Zeit* . . . and a pamphlet it has got to be!²

¹ These contributions to Socialist doctrine will be examined in detail in Chapter v, pp. 212 ff.

² Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1962, No. 4(20), p. 181.

By the end of the summer a certain restiveness in the party was becoming apparent. But again this was not due to Bernstein so much as to Parvus. The leadership had been disturbed out of benign indifference by the tone of the *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung*. None the less, questions of tone apart, the counter-attack of the Dresden paper represented genuine and perhaps widely felt resentment against Bernstein's practical proposals, involving as they did a departure from the accepted comforts of revolution. It may seem strange to speak of a revolutionary doctrine as comfortable, but there is comfort in routine belief irrespective of *content*; Bernstein was proposing changes in outlook and policy which must radically alter many of the accepted notions on which the party's whole rhythm of life was based. To this extent Bernstein, with all his denial of violence and advocacy of reform, was the revolutionary, while the accepted doctrine provided the shelter of conservative tradition. Typically enough, it was old Wilhelm Liebknecht, with his romantic temperament and sentimental memories of previous struggles, who was only too willing to tilt at any 'comfortable' windmills.

The party congress assembled in the first week of October 1898 in Stuttgart. Schönland had persuaded Rosa Luxemburg that she too must attend—initially, as an expert on Polish questions. The Polish Socialist Party of Prussia, Rosa's local enemies of the PPS, might well raise the Polish question at the congress. Her mandates were provided from Silesia by Bruhns. In the event the Polish question was not raised, but Rosa was able to use her presence at the congress to participate in the much more interesting preliminaries of what was already beginning to be known as the revisionist controversy.

Parvus, who had no formal mandate, had been invited to attend and was anxious to use the assembly for a full discussion of the whole matter. His resolution, roundly condemning Bernstein and his views, was submitted by his friends representing the 6th electoral district of Dresden, but the party executive declined to support it. Bebel wrote to Kautsky on 3 September:

Parvus's resolution is tactless. The man is eaten up by galloping personal ambition and his resolution shows that he doesn't at all understand our circumstances. To have the party congress solemnly declare that it stands for social revolution—that really would be all we need!

Some time we will certainly get to another set-to about tactics but it is too soon to do it at Stuttgart. . . .¹

Even Liebknecht, though he agreed with the array of Parvus's facts, criticized the manner of presentation: 'A tone more suitable for a school master than for a party comrade . . . definitely *de haut en bas*.'²

The speakers at the congress did not separate theory from practice, but they did try to keep personalities out of it as much as possible. The leaders considered that the immediate problem was to soothe the feathers ruffled by the two tactless foreigners—mainly Parvus, but also Rosa Luxemburg. In trying to shunt the whole argument off on to rails of 'mere' theory, they certainly gave some delegates the impression of tacit support for Bernstein and his ideas. Clara Zetkin, editor of the Socialist women's paper, *Gleichheit*, and chief of the German Socialist women's organization, had already been attracted by Rosa Luxemburg's contribution. She wrote to Kautsky on 29 September:

The fact that Bebel has stated what the tasks of the party congress are is already some improvement on the notion previously held that it exists only to expedite 'business', and hasn't any right to mess about with 'problems' . . . ah, if only our Engels were still alive to wake him [Bebel] out of his enchanted sleep [*Dornröschen-Vorsicht*]. God in Heaven, how he would have laid about him with blunt instruments against all this opportunist rubbish in our ranks.³

Kautsky's position, too, was equivocal. He was beginning to have doubts as to whether the Bernstein formulations were really as harmless as he originally thought. While disassociating himself strongly from Parvus, he made it clear that, theoretically speaking, he did not share Bernstein's views, though the congress should at least be grateful to Bernstein for having provided the opportunity for a lively discussion and much fruitful rethinking—a platitude that roused Plekhanov, who attended the congress as a fraternal delegate, to fury.⁴

Rosa Luxemburg spoke twice at the congress. Her criticisms were directed not at Bernstein, absent in England, but at Heine, one of Bernstein's most prominent supporters in Germany. He served as a convenient scapegoat. In the course of the *Reichstag*

¹ 'Einige Briefe', p. 10.

² *Protokoll* . . . 1898, p. 133.

³ 'Einige Briefe', p. 10.

⁴ *Protokoll* . . . 1898, p. 126.

elections Heine had suggested that the party should concentrate above all on getting votes, and it was this fairly common and harmless suggestion that now drew Rosa's fire. Instead of playing down the revolutionary aspect of the party programme at elections, what was needed was its particular emphasis.

Our task can only be made comprehensible [to the voters] by emphasizing the closest possible connection of capitalist society as a whole with the insoluble contradictions in which it is enmeshed and which must lead to the final explosion, a collapse at which we shall be both executioner and the executor who must liquidate bankrupt society.¹

She did not miss the opportunity of seizing on Bernstein's formulation about the relative importance of aim and movement and turning it upside down. 'On the contrary the movement as such without regard for the final aim is nothing, but the final aim is everything for us.'²

Her second speech embroiled her in the personal recriminations which had soon broken through into the open. Just as Parvus was made to apologize for the personal implication of his articles, so Rosa Luxemburg had been taken to task by Vollmar.

Vollmar has seen fit to reproach me bitterly that I, a mere recruit, should lecture the veterans of the movement. This is not the case; it would indeed be superfluous since I am sure that the real veterans share the same point of view as I do. . . . I know I have to earn my epaulets in the German movement but I intend to do it on the left wing where the enemy is actually being engaged and not on the right where the enemy is being parleyed with. (General contradiction.) If, in reply to my concrete arguments, Vollmar comes with the specious argument—'you greenhorn [*gelbschnabel*], I could be your grandfather', then we can only take this as evidence that he must be on his last legs for more concrete arguments. (Laughter.)³

But the main spearhead of the attack against Parvus and Rosa Luxemburg did not come from the revisionist intellectuals like Heine and Vollmar, but from the shock troops, the south German leaders and the trade unionists.

¹ *Protokoll* . . . 1898, p. 99.

² *Ibid.*, p. 118.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

One should always be polite to ladies, but Comrade Rosa Luxemburg will certainly not insist on velvet gloves in political matters. She came and claimed that she had something original to say, but all she has dished up for us are commonplaces.

The way that Comrade Luxemburg and Comrade Parvus have appeared before us enables us to see clearly what kind of people we have to deal with. I specifically except Frau Zetkin who is full of genuine good intentions . . . but there are no such excuses for Parvus and Luxemburg . . . for having poisonously attacked our best, our most distinguished and most sensible comrades in the course of many weeks. Frau Dr. Luxemburg talks to us like God from the sky. Let these two confine themselves to the safety of their lecturing platforms but let them leave tactics to those of us who have to do the actual fighting and carry the responsibility for it as well, the responsibility not only towards contemporaries but future generations as well.¹

For Rosa there could be no question of any apology; she echoed Parvus's words: 'In an embattled party, sharp words cannot always be avoided.'²

She always dealt with the many attempts to deny her right to speak as a junior, a foreigner, or—worst of all—a woman, as obvious proof of her opponents' inability to deal with her arguments factually. It was a useful technique—even though her claim to despise personal issues did not prevent her from making many telling personal insinuations herself.

It looked at the congress as though the resentment against Rosa Luxemburg and Parvus would engulf the tentative doubts of many people about Bernstein. The executive besought everyone to go away and think more calmly? Who knew but that within a year the whole thing might not have blown over? The SPD leaders were good politicians; before they felt obliged to get involved in any party controversy, they provided every opportunity for it to die a natural death. Kautsky was still very reluctant to engage in public polemic against Bernstein, but had declared intellectual war against him in private. 'Our co-operation is finished. I cannot follow you any longer from this day on. . . .'³ Bebel's own reaction

¹ Ibid., pp. 118 ff.

² Ibid., p. 115.

³ Karl Kautsky to Eduard Bernstein, 23 October 1898, in Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel*, p. 278. Kautsky's dislike for public polemic was genuine and not just fear. But since he was not consistent in his dislike, he always succeeded in giving the impression of tactical hesitation rather than genuine reluctance; he invariably entered controversies too late, at a time when the dice had already

was similar. He, too, wrote privately to Bernstein, not with the teleological certainties of Kautsky, but with quite unusual sorrow and diffidence. 'I write to you so outspokenly because I want to save you from disappointments and because only unmitigated frankness might conceivably make you reflect very carefully once more whether you are not after all in a blind alley.'¹ Like Kautsky, Bebel recognized that he and Bernstein did not differ merely about details. But unlike the 'Marxists', he still saw the difference as one of opinions, and attributed Bernstein's 'contradictions and many wrong conclusions' to the latter's naïve tendency to absorb local colour too easily—in this case in England. What made the whole thing important was not so much the views themselves as Bernstein's status as an old friend and comrade. He had chosen to go out on a limb—not for the first time: 'Vollmar may be with you, Schippel hardly, under no circumstances Auer, however he may like to play the diplomat and moderator.' Bebel felt sorry for Bernstein, but not angry about a revisionism or reformism which he did not yet recognize as existing.

The real pressure on the executive to intervene against Bernstein was mounted after the congress, in private as well as in public. Throughout October Rosa Luxemburg continued to publish polemics against the revisionists in *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung*, of which she had now become editor.² Bebel was stung at least into private acknowledgements: 'I'll answer *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* as soon as the next article is out, and particularly [I'll deal with the question] why I—one of the old men—did not get right in there and fight at once.'³ On 31 October Rosa Luxemburg wrote personally to Bebel in the most unequivocal terms.

I am surprised . . . that you and Comrade Kautsky did not use the favourable atmosphere at the party congress for a resolute and immediate debate, but instead encouraged Bernstein to produce [a further]

been loaded by others. His historical analogy of the wisdom of Fabius Cunctator in the tactical debate of 1910 can be taken to apply to himself (see below, p. 428, note 3; also Erich Matthias, *Kautsky*, p. 182). Kautsky always felt impelled to explain his public position with lengthy comments in private letters to his friends—a sure sign of moral uncertainty; e.g. Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel*, p. 382, dated 21 November 1901.

¹ August Bebel to Eduard Bernstein, 16 October 1898, in *Einheit*, 1960, No. 2, p. 226.

² See below, pp. 157 ff.

³ Bebel to Kautsky, 12 October 1898, quoted in 'Einige Briefe', p. 12.

pamphlet which can only drag out the whole discussion. If Bernstein is really lost to us, then the party will have to get used to the fact—however painful—that we have to treat him henceforward like Schmoller or any other social reformer.¹

Similar communications flowed into the executive from other sources.

But perhaps the most significant pressure on the executive came from outside the German party altogether. The Russian Social Democrats in Switzerland, in the throes of founding their own united party at last, had followed the polemics with great interest from the start. Both Parvus and Rosa Luxemburg were well known to them. Plekhanov in particular saw in this debate the treatment of problems in which he had a vital and professional interest.² His natural counterpart in Germany was Kautsky and as early as May 1898 he had written to him suggesting joint and immediate action against Bernstein. Kautsky had pleaded preoccupation with his current book on agrarian questions and personal attachment to Bernstein.³ At the Stuttgart congress itself the distinguished Russian Marxist had been an honoured guest and had witnessed the executive's equivocations. Plekhanov thereupon decided to attack Bernstein himself. In October both Bebel and Liebknecht thanked him fulsomely for his intervention. 'Keep hitting him good and hard', they advised. Liebknecht went on to blame Kautsky for the German failure to take issue with Bernstein more sharply. Theory, after all, was Kautsky's *ressort*. 'If I had been him I would have gone for Bernstein with gusto. If Kautsky had not hesitated from considerations of principle, there would never have been a Bernstein case.'⁴

The controversy could no longer be buried as just a little intellectual squall or the product of personal friction. The executive hoped to have at least twelve clear months before having to meet

¹ IML (B). Reprinted in *Selected Works*, Vol. II, p. 728. Schmoller was a professor of economics and a prominent writer on social subjects. In propagating reform he was encroaching upon Social-Democratic preserves and was particularly disliked by Rosa Luxemburg. See below, pp. 230 ff.

² *Perepiska G. V. Plekhanova i P. B. Akselroda*, Moscow 1925, p. 205.

³ *Literaturnoe nasledie G. V. Plekhanova: Sbornik—v borbe s filosofskim revizionizmom*, 1938, pp. 261, 264: Plekhanov to Kautsky, 20 May 1898; Kautsky's reply, 22 May. However dilatory in action, Kautsky was always quick and punctilious as a correspondent.

⁴ *Literaturnoe nasledie G. V. Plekhanova . . .*, p. 269 (letter from Bebel), p. 271 (letter from Liebknecht).

the problem once more at the 1899 congress. Meantime, the party officials at the centre did their best behind the scenes to relieve the pressure which always built up at the annual jamboree. Men like Auer, the party secretary, deplored the public airing of what were largely questions of individual conscience. He wrote to Bernstein: 'My dear Ede, one does not formally make a decision to do the things you suggest, one doesn't *say* such things, one simply *does* them.'¹ And Bernstein, essentially a practical person, got the point; he even felt able to vote for future resolutions specifically condemning revisionism. All that was needed was to add 'a grain of salt to his vote'.²

The whole thing was like a modern version of the great Galileo controversy three hundred years earlier. There, too, the trouble had been the inexorable result of public commitment to what were honest if personal conclusions—*et ruat caelum*. The only difference was that the sixteenth-century Catholic Church was far more adept in its public relations than the modern SPD; while the Papal advisers realized early on that the controversy could get out of hand, the SPD leaders for a long time believed that the revisionists could be silenced by sustained and superior public argument. But in the end they too came to accept the simple need for a guillotine on discussion. Who, then, was the guilty party—in the old controversy as much as the new: the irresponsible questioners or the organization pledged to maintain order and cohesion irrespective of scientific truth? Have men and women the right to question dogma in public and still call themselves members of the Faith? Who is the real disturber of the peace, questioner or suppressor—irrespective of whether the questioner is revisionist and the dogma revolutionary?

As it turned out, by the autumn of 1899 the personal element had indeed receded, but the practical questions had only become that much more urgent. The revisionist controversy simply could not be confined to abstract propositions in the pages of *Neue Zeit*.³ For, unlike the Galileo controversy, the issue here was abstract truth indeed, but also the livelihood and policy of a great mass party. The dilemma can best be illustrated by Bebel's own attitude.

¹ E. Bernstein, 'Ignaz Auer der Führer Freund und Berater' in *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 1907, Vol. I, p. 846.

² Bernstein to Auer, quoted in the Introduction to Rosa Luxemburg, *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 20.

³ Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel*, p. 435, dated 18 October 1904.

The master tactician of the party was always sensitive to the needs and feelings of the members. Four years earlier he had complained that, 'in the party press we have got out of the habit of expressing any kind of criticism or independence. All this namby-pambyness makes one shudder. The more I look the greater the faults and deficiencies I see in our party.'¹ But by 1900 he had had his fill of controversy. The new tendency for personal polemics was now a sign of deterioration in the party, and could not be deprecated sufficiently.²

At the end of September 1898, even before the party congress could meet, Rosa Luxemburg benefited from an entirely unexpected event. Parvus, editor of *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung*, and his assistant editor, Rosa's old party comrade and doubtful friend Julian Marchlewski, were both expelled by the Royal government of Saxony. The blow fell on 25 September 1898 and the expulsion order gave them only a few days' grace before departure. They urged the local party press commission to appoint Rosa Luxemburg and cabled her to come at once. Jogiches insisted on a negative reply but Rosa went just the same. Marchlewski met her at the station and within a few days the appointment was confirmed by the press commission. The last doubts were overcome by the fact that both Parvus and Marchlewski made their future contribution to the paper conditional upon Rosa's appointment. By now the paper was an asset to the local party and Parvus's views could not be neglected.³ Rosa Luxemburg took up her duties more or less at once while Parvus and Marchlewski, after being refused residence in various parts of Germany, finally settled in Munich. Rosa Luxemburg already attended the party congress as editor-elect; it was this which promoted her from a possible adviser on Polish questions to full participant with the right to speak on the main problems of the day.

In Dresden she inherited an administrative mess of the first order. Much of the resentment against Parvus's haphazard editorship spilled over on to her, and the exercise of authority needed to

¹ August Bebel to Karl Kautsky, 3 December 1894, in 'Einige Briefe', p. 27.

² August Bebel to Karl Kautsky, 12 December 1900. By 1903, however, he had been roused once more; in the attempt to end the indiscipline of practising revisionism, he did not hesitate to pull out all the stops of personal invective—and encouraged his supporters to do the same. See below, p. 191.

³ 'Einige Briefe', pp. 11 ff.; Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1962, No. 2(18), pp. 89 ff.; also Frölich, p. 57.

put it right was strongly resented in a woman.¹ At the same time she continued his assault on revisionism, though without the pointed extremes of his tone. She used *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* to winkle the executive from its protective neutrality. In the course of this campaign for clarification, Rosa Luxemburg took issue specifically with *Vorwärts*, the central organ of the party. It was a mixture of journalistic rivalry and genuine disagreement over policy, or—as she put it—dislike of the central organ's lack of policy. The general slanging-match soon found a more particular focus, in the person of Dr. Georg Gradnauer, one of Rosa's predecessors as editor of *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* and now an assistant editor of *Vorwärts* as well as *Reichstag* deputy for Dresden. Gradnauer was a prominent revisionist. With all the authority of a *Reichstag* deputy, he had written a series of articles in *Vorwärts* commenting on the Stuttgart congress. It was sniping of a very special kind. One by one he picked off those with whose views he disagreed, each article a vignette compounded of politics and personalities.² He blamed the executive and the radicals for having 'created' the controversy. This annoyed Rosa Luxemburg and she took him publicly to task in *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung*. In particular, she used the opportunity for berating once more the pontifical attitude of *Vorwärts* with which Gradnauer was now associated. The latter first replied in *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* itself, but his next attempt to defend himself met with the negative exercise of Rosa's editorial discretion. He then turned to *Vorwärts*—only too glad to get even with the provincial upstart. 'Is it not remarkable that the one paper that has always stood for the freest discussion and mocked us when we tried to restrain such licence, should now itself censor the words with which a comrade—and one moreover who has been attacked in a most insulting manner—attempted to reply and justify himself before his voters?'³ At the same time Gradnauer placed the issue before the Dresden party organization as a question of principle and discipline. He was after all the sitting member for Dresden, an important person to whom the local party paper owed respect—which was probably why Rosa Luxemburg chose to take him on in the first place. The

¹ 'Einige Briefe', *Bulletin IISH*, p. 13: Rosa Luxemburg to August Bebel, 31 October 1898.

² *Vorwärts*, 4 October 1898 (Clara Zetkin), 16 October 1898 (Franz Mehring), 19 October 1898 (August Bebel).

³ *Vorwärts*, 30 October 1898.

dissatisfaction which had prevailed on the editorial board since Parvus's days now found a ready means of articulation, and three of her colleagues lined up with Gradnauer against her.¹

Rosa Luxemburg offered to resign at a meeting of the press commission of the provincial party executive of Saxony on 2 November. She stated that she could not continue to serve as editor if her own colleagues did not support her and even attacked her in public. The commission called a further meeting for 8 November in the hope that the differences might be settled in the meantime. However, *Vorwärts* had no interest in allaying the dispute. On 3 November a notice appeared that Rosa Luxemburg had already resigned—clearly based on a slanted 'leak' from someone present at the meeting. The executive now decided to intervene. Under instruction from Berlin, the press commission forbade publication of Rosa Luxemburg's apologia; they would not even let her print a personal reply to the attacks. She approached her friend Bruno Schönlink at *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, only to find that Bebel had blocked this avenue of publication as well.

I do not know what her explanations are, but Rosa Luxemburg acted wrongly and without cause. . . . Her inconceivably tactless statement against her colleagues justifiably should remain unpublished. . . . If I were to meet her I would tell her my opinion in much stronger words. You may show Comrade Luxemburg these lines. I am especially annoyed that she has proved herself too much of a woman and not sufficiently a party comrade. I am disillusioned with her. It is a pity.²

Bebel and Schönlink did not get on—the classic rivalry between self-conscious *Kultur* and equally self-conscious 'calloused hands'—but the matter was too serious to be left to run its natural course. Schönlink did not reply to Bebel but he did show the letter to Rosa Luxemburg, who promptly sat down and wrote to the party chairman at length.

¹ Two of them later became allies once more. Heinrich Wetzker was one of the few personalities in Germany who joined Rosa Luxemburg in her battle against Kautsky in 1910, though his reasons were personal rather than political; he was if anything a 'radical revisionist', who carried on a chronic, subterranean feud with the entire leadership. He was an editor of *Vorwärts* from 1899 to 1905 and had to resign during the purge in November of that year (see below, p. 312, note 1).

Emil Eichhorn was politically much further to the left. He became a member of the opposition to the leadership during the war and was on the left wing of the independent Socialists, the USPD. As Police President of Berlin at the beginning of 1919 he was to play a significant part in setting off the events which led up to Rosa Luxemburg's death (see below, p. 762).

² August Bebel to Bruno Schönlink, 3 November 1898, 'Einige Briefe', p. 16.

I prefer to reply directly to your letter of which a copy reached me through Comrade Schönkank. It is beneath my dignity to go into such matters as 'moral face slaps, unbelievable tactlessness' etc. . . .

. . . Since the days of Parvus conditions on the editorial board [of *SAZ*] have been so disrupted and untenable that there had to be a row sooner or later, the more so since my colleagues were all on edge after the long struggle with Parvus, and were determined to use the change in the editorship to get complete control of the paper. In this they had the support of the press commission who resented all the accusations against the unpleasant and vulgar tone of the paper. . . . For my part I consider it wrong to confine myself—as did Parvus—to the writing of tactical and polemic articles, and let everything else on the paper go to the devil. I considered it my first duty, after the discussion of tactical matters, to improve the state of this neglected paper, and so took an interest in a number of items which gave cause for new frictions with my colleagues. . . . You are of the opinion, then, that in all matters of substance the commission found for me. In fact, however, it turned down all my proposals and requests, it supported my editorial colleagues all the way, and if I had returned to the editorship—given the present conditions and the mood of the press commission—I would have had to give up my independence. Formally it may have appeared merely as a matter of altering my editorial manner but in effect I would soon have been unable to publish my articles—and, more important,—Parvus's articles. I said to myself: if *that* is the commission's point of view, then I have nothing more to do here, then everything is *already* lost to us. If the commission intends to give me the necessary freedom of decision they can still tell me so, even after my resignation. Please note, I repeated ten times during the meeting of the commission that I was being *forced* to resign, that there was no way out—they smiled at this as an empty threat, the sort of gesture that Parvus used to make repeatedly. . . .

I hope that with these facts I have shown you that you have been a little hasty in your verdict on my actions.¹

By this time the squabble had drawn repercussions from as far away as Vienna.

Rosa Luxemburg and Parvus make themselves unpopular by reproducing hoary and ancient wisdoms with a fanaticism which leads one to believe that the latest scientific discoveries—the fact that two and two make four—are the private property of their small sect. . . . They will learn and eventually we shall, let us hope, get a few drops of good

¹ 'Einige Briefe', p. 17. The letter was never published, but was found among the Bebel papers at IISH.

wine from all this undisciplined fermentation [*unbändig gärenden Most*].¹

The many enemies Rosa had made—all the seniors of the Second International who had been stung by the disrespectful young controversialist of Zürich—had watched her unexpected success in Germany with mixed feelings, however much they might admire her intellect. In Dresden she had laid down the law not only to her old opponents on the national question, but to the Germans—as well as the French, the Belgians, and any other party whose affairs came within the range of her interests. The editor of even a middling provincial party paper was a person of some consequence in the Second International. Thus Jaurès and Plekhanov and many others, as well as Victor Adler, were probably pleased that she appeared to have overreached herself. Perhaps now she would learn to serve by waiting a little. Certainly the feeling that Rosa's departure from *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* involved any matter of principle was entirely confined to herself.

The editorship of *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* was now offered to Ledebour. It was stated that the policy of the paper would not be changed, which also helped to preserve the appearance of a purely personal squabble without political overtones.²

So ended Rosa Luxemburg's first attempt to participate in the organizational structure of the SPD. She had taken on the editorship in order to project her influence in the party, but she fell victim to the truism that membership of a hierarchy necessarily involves limitations on personal freedom—particularly of public self-expression; that power and influence are sometimes parallel, but more often contradictory. Within the structure of the party her natural disadvantages—youth, foreign origin, sex, above all impatience and intellectual superiority—stood out glaringly. Collective responsibility and cohesion, the hierarchy's mutual self-protection against outsiders—which she despised and attacked—could not suddenly be invoked to her advantage. Her complaint to Bebel and to the press commission that her colleagues would

¹ Victor Adler in the Vienna *Arbeiterzeitung*, 16 October 1898.

² Ledebour himself stayed only a year. We shall meet him again frequently—a difficult, cantankerous personality, always ready to throw his conscience into the breach of any argument, and who not surprisingly did not get on with anyone for long. But he survived all the upheavals of the next forty-five years and died at an immense age long after the party with which he had been associated for so long had been for all intents and purposes destroyed by the Nazis.

not support her showed that the pressures of institutional cohesion were the same for her as for everyone else. She made one more attempt to 'belong' when she took on the joint editorship of *Leipziger Volkszeitung* after Bruno Schönlank's death. This, too, ended in failure. Henceforward Rosa Luxemburg would accept the implications of her temperament and remain an outsider seeking influence but despising power, attacking the hierarchy's inevitable efforts to cover up for its members, finally attacking the hierarchy—or 'ruling clique' as she called it—for its very existence.

V

THE DIALECTIC AS A CAREER

1899–1904

AFTER the fiasco in Dresden, Rosa Luxemburg moved back to Berlin. Although she now had a few friends—and a much greater number of detractors—there was an inevitable sense of anticlimax. She felt almost as lonely as when she had first come to the capital six months before.

As far as my own life is concerned, I feel very well in so far as I am able to get work done. Work—that is to say hard, intensive work, which makes complete demands on one's brain and nerves—is, after all, the greatest pleasure in life. . . . I am already getting over the frantic efforts in Stuttgart [the party congress] and Dresden, but I seem to have met my usual fate; I once more have a very dark room. This at least drives me every day for a walk in the Thiergarten.¹

It was the same routine as before.

The new rooms were at 23 Wielandstrasse, in Friedenau, a popular residential suburb in the western section of Berlin. Now she was only two streets away from the Kautskys. As a neighbour, she began to see more of them than of anyone else in the party. Their interests and political alignment were alike; close contact soon ripened into friendship. In 1899 she reported to her Swiss friend, Seidel:

The only people I meet here—Friedenau, near Berlin where I live—are the Kautskys, my neighbours, and from time to time Bebel, Mehring, Stadthagen, etc. Mostly however I prefer to sit at home at my desk, in my warm room . . . and read. I fear that more than ever I am able to make do without people, and withdraw more and more into myself. I suppose that this is abnormal, but I don't know—I seem always to have so much material to think about and live through, that I don't feel the vacuum.²

¹ Seidel letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1959, No. 1(5), p. 77: letter dated 30 December 1898.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 77–78.

Within the year, her friendship with the Kautskys became much closer. The immediate impulse was Rosa's ostentatious gesture in refusing to do a commissioned review for *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, Bernstein's paper, and offering Kautsky first refusal of her piece instead. Impressed and flattered, he asked her to visit them more often: 'We Marxists are unfortunately thin on the ground in Germany, and the present revisionist crisis gives us every reason to stick closely together.'¹ The awe-inspiring sage Franz Mehring, too, had taken a firm liking to the self-confident young woman, almost to the latter's surprise: 'quite undeserved . . . friendship always seems to me something unexpected—a gift'.²

She did not like Berlin any better—even allowing for the distortion of all comparisons. 'You in Zürich, in that happy, blessed Zürich, have no idea what darkness there is in Berlin during the winter. I have to light my lamp at half past three to write a letter, and you know . . . how I long for sunshine.' In July 1899 she managed the long-planned visit to Zürich and reunion with Leo Jogiches. The year before, her desire to see him had conflicted with the real fear that the atmosphere of Zürich would clash with her new state of independence in Berlin, that his strong personality would dominate her once more: if he could not come to Berlin, then Munich—neutral ground—was the farthest she would concede. Now she felt strong enough. The obvious reaction to the hated 'Swabians' was to escape from them occasionally. Also, the desire for sunshine and the south had become overwhelming. This passion at least she shared with the German class enemy, for this was the period when northern Italy and the Mediterranean coast were being 'discovered' by refined, sensitive, middle-class Germans in large numbers; the pioneers of that Anglo-German myth about the soft, all-permissive, lemon-growing 'South', *das Land wo die Zitronen blühen*, constructed on no less respectable a base than Goethe. For Rosa, too, the only thing that could occasionally thaw out the rigid confrontations of the class war was—the sun.

In the summer of 1900 Jogiches had suddenly to leave Zürich, and joined her in Germany at last. At first they lived together in

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 55; Rosa Luxemburg's handwritten copy of Kautsky's reply is in Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1963, Vol. VI, Nos. 1/2(21–22), p. 333. The whole slightly machiavellian ensnarement of Kautsky had been forced on a reluctant Rosa by Jogiches, who was jubilant at the Kautsky connection—which rather embarrassed Rosa, who did not like political friendships.

² Letter to Minna Kautsky, Karl's mother, 30 December 1900. IISH Archives.

Cuxhavenerstrasse, a more suitable apartment, where she had moved some time in February 1899. But Jogiches did not stay in Berlin very long. The SDKPiL was still largely moribund; the movement in Poland had failed to take hold and, as with the Russians, the newly emerged local leadership had to go into exile.¹ Jogiches, restless from the futility of an émigré command without troops—made all the more bitter by contrast with Rosa's successful participation in the SPD—took himself off at the end of 1901 to Algeria, where his brother was dying in a tuberculosis sanatorium. Leo Jogiches remained there for some months; what little party news there was could easily be supplied by Rosa Luxemburg in her frequent letters. He did not return until March 1902, by which time Rosa Luxemburg had finally found the ideal flat at 58 Cranachstrasse, still in Friedenau—the well-loved rooms in which she was to remain for almost ten years. She became very attached to this flat; even while imprisoned in Warsaw in 1906 during the revolution, she was more concerned that the rent payments should be kept up than with her own safety. The red and green rooms, the book-cases, the pictures—some of them painted by her—her cat Mimi; all constantly appear in her letters as the few anchors of an otherwise restless life.

What of the career, which had been driving Jogiches to jealous despair? By 1899 the revisionist controversy was coming to the end of its first, free-for-all, phase. The intellectuals—Kautsky, Parvus, Rosa Luxemburg on one side; Bernstein, Schippel, and Heine on the other—had fought each other to an inconclusive draw, as intellectuals on their own always do. But, though they had settled nothing by themselves, they had made sufficient noise to draw in the real powers in the party, the 'practicals', the leaders. During the intellectual onslaught on Bernstein, the south German SPD leaders had been singled out as revisionism's most skilful practitioners—and had hit back, not in defence of Bernstein at all, but for self-protection. Indeed, they carefully avoided all reference to Bernstein's ideas, confining themselves to personal tributes in which Kautsky and all the leaders generously joined; they did not intend to become involved in intellectual fireworks. If they had kept quiet, and lain low for a time, the whole thing might well have fizzled out as just another unreal *Wortstreit*, blown up by a

¹ See below, pp. 254, 256-7.

few ambitious editors of the party press. As it was, they decided to counter-attack the noisy, irresponsible outsiders—foreigners, to boot—and so forced a reluctant leadership to turn its full slow wrath against them, and against Bernstein too. For the most practical manifestation of revisionism was indiscipline and disobedience, a door opened to centrifugal bourgeois influences. It is difficult to do justice to Rosa Luxemburg's role in this process of 'politicization'—turning an intellectual dispute into a political problem and mobilizing the political forces in the party against the revisionists. Apart from her various articles on particular aspects of revisionism, her most significant contributions were the two series of articles in *Leipziger Volkszeitung* and her support of Schönland, its distinguished and influential editor. 'The gossip has gone round Kautsky, Mehring and Bebel . . . that Schönland's attitudes are largely due to my influence. Curious mud slinging!'¹ Rosa Luxemburg also suspected that Kautsky's current efforts to get Mehring to write for the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* were not merely a peace-making move but an attempt to counteract her own influence with that paper. This produced its own peculiar reaction: Schönland was by no means *persona grata* with Bebel, and Rosa Luxemburg had delicately to pick her way through the flood of solicitations to avoid commitment to any of the personal factions with which the German party was riddled. This unwillingness to become involved was one of the salutary lessons of her Dresden experience; she was becoming increasingly conscious of the delicate personal relations in the SPD and learnt to avoid them.

But tactics apart, she could claim with justification that her Bernstein pamphlet, more than any other, had provided an intellectual rallying ground for the opponents of revisionism. 'My articles and particularly my pamphlet have met with approval and are making their mark. They will put the seal on my right to participate in the discussion and you will see that even Bebel at [the coming party congress at] Hanover will simply repeat from my pamphlet, just as Clara Zetkin did [at her recent meeting in Berlin].'² She certainly received many letters of support and admiration.

Rosa Luxemburg's view of herself at this stage of the revisionist

¹ Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1963, Vol. VI, No. 3(23), p. 142, dated 24 April 1899.

² Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1963, Vol. VI, No. 3(23), 1 May 1899. Rosa Luxemburg also maintained that Kautsky's current writing on the Bernstein question was merely a repetition of what she had said.

controversy was a curious mixture of profound scepticism about people, coupled with self-confidence and belief in the possibilities of exercising influence in the German party. However much she feared and disliked the attitude of the German 'establishment', which used people and then discarded them—particularly outsiders—she still felt that the German party and the leadership were capable of greatness. She argued with Jogiches, whose tendency then as always was to advise personal, behind-the-scenes manipulation rather than open engagement.

As to your accusation that I am an idealist in the German movement, this is ridiculous and I don't agree. Firstly, there are idealists here also—above all an enormous mass of simple agitators from the working masses. Secondly, there are certainly idealists among the leaders as well, for instance Bebel. In the last resort none of this matters to me. The principle which I have adopted from my Polish and German revolutionary experience is this: be always completely indifferent to your surroundings and to other people. I definitely wish to remain an idealist in the German as well as the Polish movement. Naturally this doesn't mean that I want to play the role of a wide-eyed dreamer. . . . Certainly I want to achieve the most influential position possible in the movement but this really need not conflict one bit with one's ideals and does not require the use of any other means but those of my own 'talents', those that I know I have.¹

If anything, the disillusion in Dresden had been a salutary lesson, and had proved that personal participation in a cliquish, élite-conscious movement was much less productive than the development of her natural talents. Dimly Rosa Luxemburg perceived even at this early date what her real contribution to Socialism was destined to be.

You know what I feel lately but very strongly? Something in me stirs and wants to come to the surface—naturally something intellectual, something to write. Don't worry, it is not poems or novels again. No, my dear, something in the brain. The fact that I have not used a tenth, a hundredth part of my real strength. I am already very fed up with what I am writing, I already feel that I have risen above it. I feel in a word the need, as Heine would say, to 'say something great'. It is the form of writing that displeases me, I feel that within me there is maturing a completely new and original form which dispenses with

¹ Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1963, Vol. VI, No. 3(23), p. 151, 1 May 1899. For Rosa's more pessimistic characterization of the German party establishment, see above, pp. 139 ff.

the usual formulas and patterns and breaks them down, and which will convince people—naturally through force of mind and conviction, and not just propaganda. I badly need to write in such a way as to act on people like a thunderclap, to grip them by the head—not of course through declamation, but by the breadth of outlook, the power of conviction and the strong impressions that I make on them. But how, what, where? I don't know yet. But I tell you that I feel with utter certainty that something is there, that something will be born.¹

Bebel, Mehring, and Clara Zetkin were all urging her to capitalize on her new reputation with a speech at the SPD congress at Hanover. Jogiches from Zürich urged her to tie Bebel down to a formal commitment for a speech. This she knew was impossible; once more her very success would rouse the latent opposition of a jealous establishment. When Bebel wrote to her that she really must come to Hanover and discuss with him in advance a 'definite plan of campaign', she commented sarcastically: 'As soon as everything is clearly set to go well, he and Kautsky will quickly cool down and remove me from the agenda. I know this lot like I know my five fingers.' But to Hanover she went none the less; and speak she did. The congress lasted five days, from 9 to 14 October. It was a quiet congress compared with Stuttgart the year before; the executive had merely requested the participants not to engage in personal recriminations and to discuss problems rather than people. To Bebel and Auer, theory was still a useful safety valve which could not harm the political unity of the party.

In accordance with the official line, Rosa confined her speech largely to theoretical questions. None the less, her temperament soon got the better of her; attacking the validity of English analogies for German conditions, she referred to 'comrades with crazy ideas', and immediately her opponents, who had been waiting for just such an outburst, triumphantly called her to order. 'Sorry, I don't mean it insultingly, "erroneous" is what I meant to say. . . .' But she had let the cat out of the bag all the same. 'If it were only a theoretical argument on the part of one man [Bernstein] no one would worry. But our differences extend not only to

¹ Ibid., p. 136. The remark about poems refers to the production of an early manuscript to commemorate the 1st of May 1892 for publication in *Sprawa Robotnicza*—in iambic verse—a performance which Jogiches for years feared she might repeat.

theory, to abstract questions, but to highly practical matters. People cover their minor practical activities with false revolutionary phrases about Socialism.¹

This was the opportunity for Fendrich, Peus, and all the other trade unionists to hand out punishment for the insult of 'the labours of Sisyphus', one of those gullet-sticking phrases at which Rosa excelled.² On the whole it was Rosa Luxemburg who was on the defensive (Parvus, who had been merely an unofficial delegate at Stuttgart the year before, was not present at all this time), while the eminent 'practicals' took the offensive. Vollmar even paid her a back-handed compliment: 'Comrade Luxemburg has been surprisingly mild this time . . . in order to lay such a gaseous egg, was there really need for so much squawking?'³ Several times the chairman of the congress had to protect her from the sarcasm of her opponents, and Rosa herself reminded them that they were not a discussion club where words carried no real weight, but an embattled party. A resolution was brought in to sharpen the one submitted by Bebel on behalf of the executive. In this, Rosa Luxemburg was supported by Adolf Hoffmann, Clara Zetkin, and Georg Ledebour, an ally of very limited duration, whose opposition to revisionism was even more formal and pedantic than Kautsky's had been the year before. None of them except Rosa was really able to demonstrate the consistency of the relationship between the jealously guarded but remote principles on the one hand, and the manifold tactics along the entire battle front with bourgeois society on the other. To most of the delegates it was more a case of saving the good old principles from public abortion. The congress adopted the sharper resolution, largely because old Wilhelm Liebknecht himself gave his support. Heine's plea that 'to discuss tactics as a theoretical problem when there are gigantic practical tasks to be embarked on . . . is a fruitless undertaking' was of no avail.⁴

Encouraged by the increasingly firm stand of the executive against at least the theoretical conception of revisionism, Rosa returned to her attack on *Vorwärts*, an issue that had remained in suspense since the argument over the editorship of *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung*. Her old enemy Gradnauer was still ensconced in *Vorwärts*, together with Kurt Eisner and other even more clearly defined revisionists. In September 1899, even before the Hanover

¹ *Protokoll* . . . 1899, p. 173.

³ *Protokoll* . . . 1899, p. 215.

² See below, pp. 210-11.

⁴ *Protokoll* . . . 1899, p. 290.

congress, Rosa Luxemburg published an article in *Leipziger Volkszeitung* in which she roundly accused the party central organ of having no opinion of any kind. Such a wishy-washy policy could not, as Gradnauer claimed, be based on the party programme. 'The party needs neither a standing nor a lying but a forward-marching central organ, and it is to be hoped that the Hanover party congress will set it on its feet and give it a push.'¹ Gradnauer, with evident pleasure, replied in *Vorwärts* on 24 September 1899: 'Comrade Luxemburg should be the last to live under the illusion that it is her duty to lecture us on how to run a paper. She should not forget too quickly that her own attempt to head a party paper finished in the shortest possible time with the quickest possible push—for her; a tragi-comedy.'

This produced one of Rosa's sarcastic outbursts, after which there was little left to say. It was no use expecting *Vorwärts* to express an opinion; to express something, you must first have it. No editor of *Vorwärts* would ever walk out voluntarily as she had done in Dresden; questions of principle, of backbone, never arose there. 'There are two types of living organisms, those who possess a backbone and therefore walk, at times even run; the others, invertebrate, who either creep or cling.'² She developed an almost gallic gift for political epigram, which made her not only readable but quotable, that essential prerequisite for political influence.³

Her personal contact with party eminences increased accordingly. One thing led to another and the frequent visits to the Kautskys were especially helpful. She met Bebel privately from time to time; the latter's personal reservations about her were beginning to melt a little, though she continued to be a useful ally and spokesman more than a personal friend. As early as March 1899 she was trying to mediate in one of the many disputes in which Franz Mehring had become involved, this time with Schönland, the editor of *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, and Rosa's intellectual *beau*.⁴ It became one of Rosa's regular if unofficial duties

¹ 'Unser leitendes Zentralorgan', *LV*, 22 September 1899.

² *LV*, 26 September 1899.

³ She found an equally telling phrase for a press service started in 1904 by Friedrich Stampfer, in which well-known revisionists like Wilhelm Keil participated: 'an opinion factory for the confusion of working class brains'. Friedrich Stampfer, *Erfahrungen und Erkenntnisse, Aufzeichnungen aus meinem Leben*, Cologne 1957, p. 94.

⁴ 'Einige Briefe', p. 28.

to act as an intermediary between the over-sensitive Mehring and the group of party editors—Kautsky, Schönknecht, and others—with whom she was friendly. She tacked carefully between Kautsky, the editor of *Neue Zeit*, and Mehring, the distinguished contributor. Mehring was always very conscious of his status. This mediation was a service that Rosa was to render Mehring again during the war; her letters from prison were full of tactical suggestions as to how he might best be approached, what to say and what above all not to mention. There were of course long periods when she herself was not on speaking terms with him, but none the less Rosa seems to have had a more than usual comprehension of the personal touchiness of her irregular friend and collaborator, who was usually his own worst enemy.¹

The support her resolution had received from Wilhelm Liebknecht at Hanover brought about a *rapprochement* between her and the old man shortly before his death. Their differences had largely been over Polish questions, for Liebknecht, 'the secretary of all foreign parties in Berlin', had not only a sentimental attachment to the old Marxist ideal of Polish independence, but a voracious appetite for telling foreigners their business—or rather, suggesting it forcefully.² But the insistent and opinionated young woman was much less disagreeable when, in the revisionist debate, she used her Marx more literally—the right way up—and when her pen flashed in the same direction as his own. He was as warm and uncomplicated in his friendships as in his disapprovals, and always willing to let bygones be bygones. When in September 1899 one of the editorial places at *Vorwärts* became vacant, he himself suggested Rosa Luxemburg. Her candidature was also supported by Adolf Hoffmann, the chairman of the press commission, who had collaborated with her in the resolution at the congress. The executive wanted to put some life into the central party organ, but had difficulty in finding a suitable young man and had even cast about as far as Vienna for candidates.³ It was a measure of the creeping hold of the revisionist controversy on the party that the candidate was specifically required to hold 'orthodox' views on

¹ For a modern 'party' biography of Franz Mehring, written with considerable warmth and insight, see J. Schleifstein, *Franz Mehring, Sein Marxistisches Schaffen*, Berlin (East) 1959. His long life (1846-1919) and continuous leftward progress made him an important link between early Marxism and post-war Bolshevism.

² Victor Adler, *Aufsätze, Reden und Briefe*, Vol. 6, p. 297.

³ Adolf Hoffmann to Victor Adler, 23 October 1899.

this subject. The questionnaire to applicants stated: 'What is your position in the Bernstein question? Please do not reply by stating that your position is that of the Bebel resolution at the Hanover congress, for as you must know, Bernstein too stands by that resolution, and therefore this answer is not sufficient. . . .'¹ However, Bebel, a more astute politician than Liebknecht, saw that Rosa's appointment could only lead to trouble: 'I shall advise Comrade Luxemburg to withdraw. I think she will have a tough time and would shortly leave on her own account. The editors admittedly made as if she were welcome, but that is pure hypocrisy. I shall vote for Ströbel.'² He bluntly told Rosa the same thing; the last thing he wanted was a repetition of the Dresden scandal in the inner sanctum of the party leadership.³

Sensibly enough, Rosa herself wrote to the chairman of the press commission briefly and formally, withdrawing her candidature. She too recommended Ströbel. She even preferred him to another candidate recommended by her friend Clara Zetkin. 'What we need on *Vorwärts* are precisely people with *temperament*.'⁴

After this incident and until Liebknecht's death in August 1900, there was a pale autumnal friendship between them. Rosa was more upset by his death than she herself expected. At the time she wrote:

Recently when I was at the *Vorwärts* office, the old man took me aside and suddenly whispered in parting, 'I will always do everything I can for you. My suggestion for you to become an editor was meant perfectly seriously and I would have been glad to have you. Whenever you have something stirring to say [*etwas fulminantes*] give it to me for *Vorwärts*; it does after all carry more weight there than in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*.' I promised to do so, and he extended a warm invitation to me to visit him, saying that he and his wife would always be glad to see me. A bagatelle, but I was glad to have parted from him in peace.⁵

At the end of December 1899 she was canvassing once more in the Polish areas of Upper Silesia, whence had come her mandates

¹ Adolf Hoffmann to Karl Kautsky, 27 November 1899.

² August Bebel to Karl Kautsky, 24 November 1899; also August Bebel to Victor Adler, 27 November 1899, in 'Einige Briefe', p. 30.

³ Jogiches letters, end of November 1899, IML (M).

⁴ Rosa Luxemburg to Adolf Hoffmann, 29 November 1899. For Rosa's purpose, Ströbel's 'temperament' proved of limited duration.

⁵ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 66, about 9 August 1900.

for the Hanover congress. She had one of her brief flashes of euphoria, when she suddenly wrote letters to a number of relatively neglected friends and reminded them gaily of her existence. On such occasions she at once seemed years younger. Even Winter was no longer a menacing enigma, but merely a harmless hack. 'It turns out', Rosa reports delightedly, 'that the formidable Rosa Luxemburg is now considered quite human.'¹ Certainly the political alliance with Winter was, this December, blossoming unseasonably. He had reviewed Rosa's doctoral dissertation most favourably in *Neue Zeit*.² On the shoulders of this left-wing intellectual, who had been a pupil of Werner Sombart at Breslau, was carried almost the entire responsibility for the SPD's effort to organize the Polish workers of Upper Silesia in the German party, and to combat the rival PPS organization. The loneliness and strain in the end nearly broke his health; in 1903 he finally got his transfer to Stettin on the verge of nervous collapse.³ He was not made of Rosa Luxemburg's stuff.

The SPD was living in increasing discomfort with the Polish Socialist Party of Prussia, founded in 1893 if not as a completely separate and independent party, at least as a means of miniature Polish duplication of all SPD functions, from local cell to national party congress. For Rosa's purposes it was the Russo-Polish PPS all over again. The Poles in Germany played hard on the SPD's bad conscience about the underprivileged Poles, and on the peculiar and incomprehensible nature of Polish politics. At first the question was mainly one of organizational definition, so that the parties should not get in each other's hair. From the beginning, the Poles got moral support and advice from Daszyński across the Austrian border; his ideal was the Austrian Social Democrats, a federated party made up of independent national organizations.

¹ Rosa Luxemburg to Luise Kautsky, 30 December 1899, 'Einige Briefe', p. 32. The letter strongly implies, without actually asserting, that this was the first time she had met Winter. The reason may well have been the excessive furtiveness she displayed to all German friends about her Polish activities.

² A. W., 'Rezension von R. Luxemburg', *NZ*, 1898/1899, Vol. I, p. 440. See above, pp. 105-6. The PPS of course had denounced it as an entirely vicious piece of historical fabrication. See Res (Feliks Perl), 'Wielki przemysł w Królestwie Polskim', *Krytyka*, September 1899, No. 6, p. 316. But it was not until 1907 that the same author attempted a general economic refutation of Rosa Luxemburg's thesis. See below, p. 829, note 4.

³ For Winter, an interesting and important local figure, see Joseph Bloch, 'Rundschau: Winter' in *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 1907, Vol. I, p. 323. Also his own autobiographical sketch 'Ein Testament', 1903, quoted in Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Sozialdemokratie und Nationalstaat*, Würzburg 1962, p. 130.

The Prussian Poles also received SPD subsidies, especially for their paper, the *Gazeta Robotnicza*. But with the appearance of Rosa Luxemburg in Germany, the latent organizational friction was brought into the open by the question of principle which she had brought, battle-scarred, from two international congresses—Polish self-determination. As the controversy in 1896 had shown, no important member of the SPD shared her theoretical platform in public, though some agreed with her on the quiet. However, events soon played into her hand. By constant hammering on the covert emergence of a separate PPS organization in Germany, duplicating and displacing that of the German party, Rosa Luxemburg touched the SPD on its most sensitive spot—not intellectual unanimity but organizational control. Gradually, under such iron-clad cover, she managed more and more to insinuate her ideas of principle into the minds of the SPD leadership, self-confessedly ignorant about Polish affairs. She did this with great tactical skill and forbearance, never overplaying her hand; indeed, it was the only tactical campaign of her life from which she emerged wholly victorious.

The first thing was to transfer the battle from Upper Silesia 200 miles to the north, to the politically hostile 'jungle' of Posen (Poznań). Here an old comrade-in-arms was installed. Marcin Kasprzak had remained in Prussia after his release from prison in 1896.¹ The Prussian PPS, which he had joined as political cover, had evicted him after the sustained campaign alleging theft and treachery which emanated from the leaders of the PPS in London. Already in 1898 she had tentatively inquired how he stood in regard to the questions she was currently agitating in Upper Silesia, and had received a characteristically curt but favourable response. Now Rosa Luxemburg, Kasprzak, and Gogowski—another Polish supporter of Rosa's—worked on the creation of a trade-union organization in Poznań, favourable to her principles of complete integration in the SPD.² Poznań was industrially one of the least organized areas in Germany, and the Polish workers supported the bourgeois Polish National Democrats. One of Rosa's friends graphically described the work to the sympathetic Kaut-

¹ See above, pp. 94 ff.

² Zbigniew Szumowski, 'Ruch robotniczy w Poznaniu do 1918 roku' (Labour movement in Poznań until 1918) in *Dziesięć wieków Poznania* (A millennium of Poznań), Vol. I of *Dzieje społeczno-gospodarcze*, Poznań 1956, p. 182; also *Protokoll des dritten Gewerkschaftskongresses 1899*, p. 23.

skys four years later during the 1903 *Reichstag* election campaign. 'Our Rosa has gone into the desert and is now immersed in very hard, health-breaking work . . . and what a desert! Not a trace of modern culture, only clericalism and feudalism, everything has to be started from scratch. The worst of it is, I can't help her myself [not being a German citizen].'¹

The PPS at first tried peace overtures. Rosa herself attended the fifth Prussian PPS congress at Easter 1900. 'Her supporters submitted two sharply worded resolutions against the "nationalist fantasies" of the Prussian PPS; indeed, the resolutions called for no less than complete dissolution of the Polish party and its absorption by the SPD.'² Rosa supported the resolutions with a pointed and polemical speech.³ The party congress naturally resisted this attempt to make it vote its own dissolution, and Rosa—who probably had never expected that her resolutions would be adopted—cleverly withdrew them and offered a compromise: the creation of a press commission to be responsible for propaganda and for supervising the editorial policy of *Gazeta Robotnicza*. The executive of the PPS apparently believed that this sudden change of direction could lead to the conversion of their bitterest opponent into a potential supporter, and even supported her election to this proposed press commission. However, Rosa merely used the opportunity, as might have been expected, to combat the ideas of the PPS from within it and to try to destroy the close connection between the PPS executive and its paper. When, later, the PPS tried to obtain her agreement to the idea of an independent Poland as a 'compromise solution', Rosa Luxemburg instantly took up in public her complaints against 'the destructive operations of the nationalists'. Within three months the artificial alliance had been exploded.⁴

At the next German party congress in Mainz, 17-21 September 1900, she again represented Polish constituencies in Upper Silesia and Posen, and spoke mainly on Polish questions. The congress had before it a resolution protesting against the Prussian government's measures to eradicate the use of the Polish language in

¹ Adolf Warszawski to Karl Kautsky, 20 May 1903, IISH Archives, D XXIII, 63. See also *Vorwärts*, 20 October 1899.

² *Vorwärts*, 3 April 1900; *Gazeta Robotnicza*, 7 April 1900.

³ The speech was reprinted in *Gazeta Robotnicza*, 28 April, 5 May 1900, and also in *Vorwärts*, 18, 20 April, and other papers. It made quite a stir.

⁴ *Vorwärts*, 18, 20, and 29 April, 24 and 26 August 1900.

schools and the general tendency to treat Poles as second-class citizens. Rosa, now on the offensive, wanted to augment this resolution, to adjure the Polish worker 'to give up national utopias, and to accept that his national interests are best taken care of by Social Democracy, and not by taking up a separate position as a Pole in the wake of nationalist parties'. One of the PPS speakers attacked Rosa Luxemburg, referring particularly to an article she had written in which she had used the objectionable words 'social nationalists' and 'social patriots'.¹ 'She would not have dared to rely on the words of Wilhelm Liebknecht if he had still been alive; one need only refer to the letter he wrote her shortly after the Hamburg congress in 1897.' The International congress resolutions in London and Paris, Karl Kautsky's articles against Rosa Luxemburg in 1896—all were once more trotted out against her. As far as opposition to Polish self-determination was concerned, 'only the Warsaw Commandant of Gendarmerie, Colonel Markgravsky, agrees with her'.

By this time the PPS had reached the stage of putting up Polish-speaking candidates against the official SPD candidates, thus splitting the working-class vote in the Polish-speaking areas. This was obviously news for the majority of the congress; when Rosa Luxemburg mentioned it there was a general disturbance. Most of the delegates, even the leadership, were unfamiliar with the problem, as they freely admitted. Rosa also pointed out that it had been her influence at the last provincial congress that had prevented the Polish organizations in Germany from authorizing an official Polish candidate to be put up against the SPD in Upper Silesia to spite Winter. But, in addition to separate parliamentary candidates, the *Gazeta Robotnicza*, German-financed but Polish-controlled, was now even calling for the establishment of exclusively Polish trade unions.

In the winter of 1900, at the insistence of Rosa, a 'summit conference' between SPD and PPS executives was at last organized; Dr. Winter, Gogowski, and she herself attended as consulting 'experts'. The Germans now took the offensive, accusing the PPS of nationalism, of irresponsible attacks against Kasprzak, an innocent comrade. They insisted that either he or Rosa must join the editorial board of *Gazeta Robotnicza*. When this was refused, the Germans withdrew their subsidy as of 1 April 1901. What

¹ *Protokoll . . . 1900*, p. 125. The article is in *Vorwärts*, 26 August 1900.

annoyed them even more was their failure in the Posen by-election for the *Reichstag* in March 1901. The SPD executive had requested the PPS to support Kasprzak, their official candidate, or at least not to oppose him openly; instead, the Poles agitated loudly against him with all the old accusations and nearly put up their own opposition candidate, as a result of which—or so it was held—Kasprzak obtained less than 3 per cent of the total poll.¹

At the Lübeck congress (22-28 September 1901) the executive, despite the protest of several members, obtained the party's approval for its decision to withdraw financial support from the *Gazeta Robotnicza*. The official grounds for stopping the subsidy were slightly hypocritical: not the oppositional tendencies of the Polish Socialists, but the failure of the paper to achieve a circulation commensurate with the expenditure which the SPD executive had lavished upon it. The PPS supporters reverted once more to personal denigrations borrowed from the old PPS armoury. Biniszkiewicz told the Lübeck congress that Marcin Kasprzak 'had fled to the German party and pretends to be an honest man, but in reality it is because his existence in Poland has become impossible . . . we cannot work together with people like Kasprzak . . . some of the so-called Poles in Germany are not Poles at all, are born abroad, and do not even speak a word of Polish.'²

These harsh words were the product of defeat. Guided by Rosa, the SPD executive treated the PPS with increasing hostility. In doing so it obtained the support of what, for Rosa, were unfamiliar allies in the party—establishment figures like Auer who believed that organizational unity was sacrosanct, and that the reasonable interests of the majority must prevail against a minority, however vocal.³ There were others who simply felt that a big German party was not going to be dictated to by a small Polish one, especially one that big brother was financing. The whole concept of separate Polish organizations, even within the broader framework of SPD

¹ *Vorwärts*, 7 February 1901; *Gazeta Robotnicza*, 20 March 1901; also Florian Miedzyński, 'Marcin Kasprzak 1860-1905' in *Wybitni Wielkopolanie XIX wieku*, Poznań 1959, p. 436.

² *Protokoll* . . . 1901, p. 125. The executive in fact reported its investigations into the Kasprzak case at this congress. The PPS executive had formally accused him of treachery and various other things, which finally boiled down to the concrete complaint that he had stolen 60 marks deposited with him by Polish comrades. A commission of the SPD had looked into the charges and declared them groundless.

³ Quoted by Wehler, *Sozialdemokratie*, p. 141.

policy, was challenged in the course of the German counter-attack. And under such massive cover, Rosa and her friends infiltrated further into the PPS stronghold. In Posen a new Polish organization mushroomed out of the ground demanding sole recognition by the SPD authorities, 'now that relations between German Social Democracy and PPS had been totally broken off'.¹

Now Rosa Luxemburg felt strong enough to come out openly once more for her own basic principles and against Polish self-determination, instead of taking refuge behind the organizational squabble. Whether this was deliberate planning or emerged in the heat of debate at the 1901 SPD congress at Lübeck was uncertain, though Rosa had by now acquired sufficient self-control to overcome the impulses of spontaneous anger. We may safely assume that her outburst was planned.

At this congress the main champion of the Poles was Ledebour. Although not particularly familiar with Polish affairs, he represented in this, as in so many other matters, the German Socialist conscience at its most prickly and acute. To support the Polish case for separate organizations, he dredged up as much detail of the disputes between PPS and SDKPiL as possible—including the undignified squabble over mandates at the International congresses in 1893 and 1896. It was primarily with him in mind that Rosa declared 'it is no use trying to be fair to oppressed nationalities if one does not understand the circumstances'. In so saying, she in fact showed her whole hand. Whatever differences there were behind the scenes between Rosa and the German efficiency experts at headquarters, who were indifferent if not hostile to the whole Polish problem in its personal as much as its national form, in public their views now appeared identical. Rosa Luxemburg addressed the congress as an SPD expert, not as a suppliant or competing Pole. But to the Poles themselves, and to those like Ledebour who tried to represent their interests, she spoke as one of them, with their interests very much at heart.

It is not a matter of German representatives being anti-Polish, but of a purely internal Polish dispute about the problem of national self-determination. . . . The Polish Socialists at their last congress [PPS]

¹ LV, 30 May 1901; *Vorwärts*, 29 and 30 May 1901. For the PPS side, see *Sprawozdanie z obrad VI Zjazdu PPS . . . 1901 w Berlinie* (Report of Proceedings of the 6th PPS congress . . . 1901 in Berlin), ZHP.

made a point of declaring that they were cutting the last ties between themselves and our party [SPD]. . . . At the last Silesian provincial party congress of the PPS, one of the delegates now present here said: 'We do not give a whistle for the resolutions of the German party congresses.' . . . Next Wednesday I am travelling directly from here to Posen to answer a charge of insulting the Prussian Minister of Education, allegedly contained in my pamphlet 'In Defence of [Polish] Nationality', so you see we also want to protect the Polish nation to the very best of our ability.¹

This pamphlet was Rosa's answer to the charge that she opposed even the cultural and ethnic separateness of Poles. Still more important, it fulfilled the claim that her organization was just as capable as the Prussian PPS of defending the interests of Polish Socialists, politically as Socialists, culturally as Poles. She strongly attacked the Prussian government's campaign against the Polish language in schools, and concluded with the oft-repeated Luxemburg appeal: 'The landlord, the manufacturer, and the capitalist, whether German or Polish, are our enemies; but the German worker, who suffers like us from the exploitation and oppression of the ruling class, is our ally.'² The immediate result of the pamphlet was not, however, widespread desertion from the PPS, but a prosecution by the Prussian authorities 'for insulting the Minister of Culture',³ which was apparently dropped on appeal.

Meantime the PPS attempted to defy the German party openly. At a meeting at Auschwitz (Oświęcim) in Austrian Silesia on 13 July 1902, eight Polish opposition candidates were nominated to stand against the SPD. At the SPD congress at Munich on 14 September there was accordingly a more heated discussion than ever; Rosa Luxemburg and Ledebour met head on. 'The Poles protected by Ledebourski must be saying to themselves "God preserve us from our allies",' she taunted him—and 'Ledebourski' it then remained for many years. Rosa and twenty-two German delegates submitted a resolution 'condemning the independent grouping of the PPS and their separate mandates as sharply as possible, and calling on them to dissolve their separate organization'.⁴ Even Bebel criticized Rosa Luxemburg's intransigence—

¹ *Protokoll* . . . 1901, p. 127.

² Rosa Luxemburg, *W obronie narodowości*, Poznań 1900.

³ Frölich, p. 94. I have been unable to trace the history of this prosecution through the Prussian archives.

⁴ *Protokoll* . . . 1902, p. 148.

though it was the high point of their friendship and co-operation—and submitted a compromise amendment to her resolution. ‘Comrade Luxemburg told me *privatim* a short while ago that if I was not prepared to go all the way with her point of view, there was in the end no point in her being restrained and sensible for once’, at which everyone laughed, Rosa included. Yet the problem of the Polish population in Germany, quite apart from the 60,000 mine workers in the west German coalfields, was crying out for a solution, either a German or a Polish one. Bebel and the German executive began to think that perhaps they should not drive things to an extreme. Bebel sighed that relations with the Poles in Germany would be far better ‘if only these were headed by a man of Daszyński’s intelligence’, which was no compliment to Rosa Luxemburg.¹

The PPS was in dire financial straits, and also had second thoughts. A new unity conference took place in October 1902, shortly after the SPD congress, made up of the two executives, with a panel of experts consisting this time of Daszyński from Galicia, Rosa Luxemburg, and representatives from Posen and Silesia. The Germans presented their organizational demands, and Rosa contributed her own special theses: the Prussian PPS to become the ‘Polish Social Democracy in Germany’, with explicitly no self-determination in its programme; the Polish party executive and the board of *Gazeta Robotnicza* to be made up equally of representatives from Posen, where she was strong, and Silesia, where she was not.² How Rosa must have enjoyed sitting opposite her old enemy Daszyński, with all the weight of the great SPD behind her. She was at the height of her influence. When the PPS, after bitter argument, decided at its seventh congress to accept the German organizational conditions and in effect merge with the SPD, Rosa suddenly reappeared in print with a further demand—for the inevitable statement renouncing self-determination, though this thesis had not been insisted upon by the SPD at the October meeting; indeed, she had specifically withdrawn it there, since at one stage it had been the only obstacle to agreement.³

¹ *Protokoll* . . . 1902, p. 152.

² *Vorwärts*, 10, 11 October, 28 November, 28 December 1902. The PPS wrote an open letter to the SPD, a copy of which, in Rosa Luxemburg’s writing, presumably noted from the original for propaganda purposes, is in ZHP.

³ The new condition is discussed in *Vorwärts*, 28 December 1902, and in full in *Sprawozdanie z VIII Zjazdu PPS . . . 1905 r. w Katowicach* (Proceedings of 8th PPS congress 1905 in Katowice), pp. 8–12.

This was sheer bravado, but Rosa still retained the support of Dr. Winter and the SPD executive—as she had known she would. The latter went back on the word of their previous negotiator and insisted on further negotiations. Once again the self-determination thesis was withdrawn at the last moment, but the Germans insisted that Rosa and Marcin Kasprzak be formally invited to join the PPS, and even this slap in the face was accepted.¹ But the now thoroughly roused organizational fears of the SPD were still not allayed. Baulked on her question of principle, Rosa determined to push the complete destruction of separate Polish organizations down the throats of her opponents; they were not even to elect their own executive in the future, and were to sign a secret protocol ‘not to pursue any separate policy demanding the re-creation of an independent Poland’.² And it was only through Bebel’s intervention that the required undertaking was made into a secret instead of a public document, a device that Bebel was notoriously to use again later.³

But this time Rosa’s determination to humiliate her opponents had gone too far. Infuriated more by the breach of faith than by the actual conditions, the PPS now withdrew all its consents and, on 14 March 1903, finally broke off negotiations. A temporary arrangement for the 1903 elections was nevertheless worked out at the last moment, though the SPD-PPS results in Silesia and Posen were disappointing.

The supporters of the PPS, especially Ledebour and Konrad Haenisch—there were many Polish labourers in the Dortmund area where the latter worked—attacked the methods of the executive at the Dresden congress of 1903. Ledebour made a point of pillorying the real initiator of these perfidies, Rosa Luxemburg. He disclosed that the paper published by her group, the *Gazeta Ludowa*, which the SPD was now subsidizing instead of the *Gazeta Robotnicza*, cost the executive 70 marks per subscriber, since the subsidy of 2,600 marks had to cover precisely 37 of them.⁴ But by this time the executive and the party congress were tired of this question; Rosa wisely undertook to answer Ledebour’s charges later and outside the congress, though she and Ledebour argued

¹ *Vorwärts*, 1 January 1903; *Volksrecht*, Breslau, 12 January 1903; in general, see Wehler, *Sozialdemokratie*, p. 149.

² Rosa Luxemburg’s note in *Open Letter*, p. 20 (see p. 180, note 2 above).

³ *Protokoll . . . 1903*, p. 280. See below, pp. 366, 446.

⁴ *Protokoll . . . 1903*, p. 277.

the toss intermittently for another two months in the hospitable but indifferent pages of *Vorwärts*.¹

At the congress she had, however, reiterated her position of principle in the clearest terms: 'It cannot be the task of a proletariat to create new class states, and if the London resolution [of the International] mentions self-determination of oppressed peoples, it means the right of self-determination in a Socialist society, not the creation of a new class state on a capitalist basis.'²

The history of the Polish problem in the SPD shows how Rosa Luxemburg was able to get her way in the end, at least on the surface. In spite of the commitment to offer all matters of importance for the judgement of the party congress, many of the day-to-day decisions in the SPD had to be taken by the executive, and these created a momentum of policy that was very hard to break—and especially in awkward, unfamiliar matters like the Polish sub-life in German Socialism. Rosa Luxemburg and her friends succeeded, between 1899 and 1903, in cutting the ground from under the feet of their opponents in the German party. By 1903 Rosa was the acknowledged authority in Germany on Polish questions. Requests to speak were incessant, sometimes in strange company with the danger of physical assault. 'I'm supposed to go to Posen to a meeting of the Polish People's Party to open the discussion, seeing that we can't have any meeting hall for ourselves. Nice prospect; in several such meetings our people have been beaten up and pretty thoroughly . . . I'm very curious whether I shall stop a few blows myself.'³ Anyone in Poland who wanted something from the SPD executive, and especially from Kautsky or Bebel, was well advised to obtain her clearance first. Even in Galicia the small, independent Polish Socialist party, *Proletariat* (the third *Proletariat*), made certain of getting her agreement before asking Kautsky for reproduction rights of his writings.⁴

Of course the separatist movement among the Poles in the Reich was too strong to be reversed. The PPS programme of national restoration exercised a great pull; even the SPD executive could not prevent the PPS increasing its influence from its strong base

¹ *Vorwärts*, 17 October, 5 December, 20 December 1903.

² *Protokoll* . . . 1903, p. 278. See above, p. 99.

³ Rosa Luxemburg to Franz Mehring, 1903(?) IML(M) Fund 201, No. 844, photocopy IML(B), NL2 III-A/18.

⁴ Wacław Klimowicz to Karl Kautsky, 15 March 1903, IISH Archives, D VII, 50.

in Austrian Poland. In the process, relations between the German and Austrian Socialist parties became very strained—and Victor Adler and his lieutenants, at any rate, thought they knew exactly whom they had to blame for the SPD's uncompromising policies of integration. Though the revolutionary atmosphere of 1906 finally produced a German-Polish agreement—on SPD terms—by 1908 the Poles were back once more to separatist propaganda and activities. From 1906 till 1913 relations between the two parties oscillated between politely cool and very frosty. But by that time Rosa was herself preoccupied with the revolution in Russian Poland and SDKPiL policy in the Russian context; after her return from Warsaw she lost interest in the minutiae of party affairs and concentrated on broader aspects of policy. Finally, she fell out with Kautsky and Bebel; by 1911 she had lost much of her influence on the SPD executive in German matters and made no sustained efforts to mobilize German support against the new, far more nationalistic, executive of the PPS which had taken over from the old leadership of Berfus in 1905. Her direct attempts to influence and organize a Polish labour movement in Posen based on her ideas and those of her friends Kasprzak and Gogowski were also doomed to failure. In this area of agriculture and small industry the influence of clergy and middle-class nationalism was too strong. The *Gazeta Ludowa* with its 37 subscribers of 1903 finally folded up a year later; the last issue appeared on 1 July 1904 after the SPD had withdrawn financial support from it as well as from its PPS opponent.

But Rosa's reputation as the leading orthodox Marxist expert on all things Polish continued, even though she had little to do with German-Polish relations after 1904. In 1912, when Rosa was almost completely isolated—and barely able to represent the SDKPiL at the German executive—it was impossible to get anyone of similar standing to write on Polish matters in the SPD press. Ryazanov answered Kautsky's request for possible names with a shrug. 'I am sorry it won't be Rosa . . . your question is *difficile* . . . if you want anything sensible about Polish history you have to go either to Rosa or to a bourgeois historian.'¹ Similarly, her opponents held her responsible for what they considered to be the SPD's bludgeoning tactics towards the Poles. '[The failure of Polish trade unions in Germany] was due to the last traces of Rosa's

¹ Ryazanov to Kautsky, 1912 ; IISH Archives.

influence on the party executive', Otto Bauer wrote to Kautsky at the end of 1913. 'It is simply impossible to force Rosa's policy and Rosa's creatures [on the Poles] from Berlin against their wishes. The fact that her opponents are nationalists is true in the last resort. But nationalism can only be combated from inside a nation, not by outside pressure.'¹ The Austrians at least had been consistent for almost twenty years in their opposition to Rosa's policy and their antipathy towards her person. Though growing nationalist tendencies at home, particularly in Czech Bohemia, were to cause Victor Adler and Karl Renner much trouble and almost wreck their precious federal formula, Adler and his followers still considered Rosa and her anti-national platform by far the greater evil. Official SPD support for Rosa Luxemburg's integration policies also produced some sharp public backbiting between the Austrian and German leadership, and particularly between Bebel and his old friend Victor Adler.²

But there was another aspect to all these activities. As official SPD consciousness became almost glazed with the Luxemburg Polish policy, her own importance was correspondingly enhanced. From her position as a difficult, brilliant interloper in 1898, she had become by 1903 an established figure in the life of the SPD, a force to be reckoned with, friend of the great, hammer of revisionists. Whatever its intellectual pretensions, the SPD was in one way much more like the English Labour Party than any of the French Socialist groups: a party of horny-handed, practical organizers who knew their grass-roots. No intellectual, however brilliant, could ever have made his way by the pen alone—and men like Mehring never did. Her work in Upper Silesia and Posen grafted Rosa on to the SPD hierarchy as nothing else could have done, especially after her two editorial failures. Yet at the same time the glow of official approval was for Rosa a false glow, and the period in question, 1903-1904, the most boring of her life.

As in 1898, Rosa Luxemburg's success with the German Poles earned her the respect of party headquarters, in particular that of the highly organization-minded Bebel. Organizational preoccupations were now generally to the fore in the party. The revisionist

¹ Otto Bauer to Karl Kautsky, 9 November 1913, IISH Archives, D II, 499.

² See Dietrich Geyer, 'The attitude of German Social Democracy to the split in the Russian party', *International Review of Social History*, 1958, Vol. III, pp. 419 ff.

controversy had developed into an open power confrontation within the party, regional against central authority, trade unions against party, spontaneity against discipline. Bernstein and his analysis was nowhere. Not entirely with cynicism, Bernstein had subscribed to the vaguely condemnatory congress resolutions in 1898 and 1899 which asserted the continued, chronic validity of 'the good old principles'—and was to do so again when a much sharper resolution appeared in 1901. On this point there was nothing left to argue about. But the cohesion and discipline of the party, the alignment behind the central executive of all the important publications and regional executives was still a very open question. Thus by 1901 the SPD executive—and Bebel in particular—were ready for a more taxing trial of strength with the practitioners of revisionism. They drummed up a crusade. Parvus was expressly summoned from a lengthy silence into a new outburst of polemics.¹ Fully aware of the irony of this sudden courtship, he wrote to Kautsky, not without justifiable sarcasm: 'Now by taking issue with me over my strong language, and so keeping yourself at a careful distance from me, you can help to defend our common point of view all the more ruthlessly. You are, as it were, advancing under covering fire—whether you would have fought so bravely without covering fire, I doubt.'² Rosa, too, was formally enlisted for the Lübeck congress by the executive. 'Best regards to Rosa, and tell her to put on her most shining armour for Lübeck.' Bebel himself promised to intervene actively. 'The next speech which I will fire at [Bernstein] will be such a battering as he has never hitherto experienced.'³ For Bebel, a superb tactician, still found it advisable to flog his enemy at one remove—through the convenient pelt of Eduard Bernstein; another example of a technique adopted but not invented by today's Communist leaders.⁴

The general recommendation of fierceness was followed by precise combat orders. 'I recommend that Rosa keep her eye firmly on the Baden legislature [voting for provincial budgets].

¹ 'Der Opportunismus in der Praxis', *NZ*, 1900/1901, Vol. II, pp. 609, 673, 740, 786.

² Parvus to Kautsky, no date (1901), 'Einige Briefe', p. 27.

³ August Bebel to Karl Kautsky, 24 July 1901, 'Einige Briefe', p. 28.

⁴ Nor was it inherited from Lenin, for whom no one was beyond criticism. This manner of dispute has recently been much to the fore in the Russo-Chinese dispute, with the Chinese getting at the Russians through Tito and Togliatti, and the Russians using Albania as their stalking-horse.

Better still if a resolution on this subject were put up—she can always refer to the appeal by the party executive. . . .¹

At the congress itself Bebel pronounced a lengthy and powerful indictment of the revisionists. Rosa's own contribution was limited, partly because she had to leave before the end in order to appear in court on a charge of sedition, arising out of her pamphlet 'In Defence of Nationality'.² Her opponents, however, took the opportunity of her absence to attack her as well as Parvus for their renewed polemics. As Parvus had correctly pointed out, they were being used as scapegoats for the executive. The party membership did not know that the sudden revival of the onslaught in the press against the revisionists was in part officially inspired. Bebel himself admitted the equivocal nature of their position.

. . . the articles [Parvus's 'Der Opportunismus in der Praxis'] are not in fact a personal degradation of Vollmar and Bernstein but an objective if not always correct criticism. But our sensitive brethren [*Gefühlsmeier*] who are always opposed to anything personal, and who anyhow have Parvus stuck in their throats like a fishbone, will certainly be all worked up [at the congress] and will make our position difficult. You cannot imagine the animosity against Parvus and also La Rosa in the party, and even if I am not of the opinion that we should be guided by such prejudices we cannot at the same time afford to ignore them completely.³

Other prominent party members had their piece to say in private as well as in public about the tone of the polemics. Ignaz Auer wrote to Kautsky about 'all that noise down there from Rosa, Mehring, Parvus . . . who consider themselves to be the exclusive proprietors of the last and final truth . . . look round in our party, who cares about the rigid tactics preached by you [all]? Not a soul.'⁴

Both Rosa and Parvus appeared on the face of it to be much more isolated than they really were. The personal onslaught against them both at Lübeck made Bebel prevaricate once more about the tone of their polemics. It requires 'considerable tastelessness to present distinguished party comrades as it were in their bathing costumes to the public gaze', he now admitted.⁵ Richard Fischer

¹ August Bebel to Karl Kautsky, 29 August 1901, 'Einige Briefe', p. 28.

² See above, p. 179.

³ August Bebel to Karl Kautsky, 4 September 1901, 'Einige Briefe', p. 28.

⁴ Ignaz Auer to Karl Kautsky, 11 June and 9 December 1901, *ibid.*

⁵ *Protokoll* . . . 1901, p. 165.

spoke of 'literary Teddy boys' (*Raufbolde*); one of the south German delegates spoke of the 'unpleasant tone in the party press produced by the male and female immigration from the East'. And it was Heine who had to be officially rebuked by the congress chairman for drawing the final conclusion—that Parvus's and Rosa's articles were positively correlated to the rising wave of anti-Semitism in Germany.¹ But the mood of the party had subtly hardened against the revisionists; their outcry was no more than the diversion of a rearguard. No one attacked Kautsky any more for supporting Rosa and Parvus. Even Victor Adler in Vienna, though still fulminating against Rosa's monstrous tactlessness, admitted that 'I can begin to understand these otherwise incomprehensible excesses when I consider my own discomfort at the spread of revisionism in all its various manifestations.'² The warmest support for Rosa and Parvus on this issue came from the Russians, especially Martov.³

On 30 October 1901 Bruno Schönlanck died, and Rosa Luxemburg was invited to take over as joint editor of *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, in which she had published most of her work since her break with the Dresden paper three years before. Schönlanck had made it perfectly clear that he wished his protégée to succeed him. By this time she was a national figure. When the news of her appointment was published, the Conservative *Kreuzzeitung* called on the police to extradite her; the *Vossische Zeitung* suggested that at least the party should get rid of her. Franz Mehring congratulated 'our young friend at the horror which the mere mention of her name called forth [on the other side]'.⁴

It was to be a co-operative effort between Mehring and herself as joint part-time editors—the most distinguished journalistic talent the SPD could muster. Rosa was still reluctant to move to Leipzig altogether. To Clara Zetkin she wrote on 16 March 1902 that she still had 'so much unquenched thirst for education and knowledge; I am so strongly drawn to scientific, theoretical work. . . . You know as well as I do that conscientious editorship and scientific self-education don't go together. . . . Franz [Mehring] and I have specifically taken on the political direction and have a free hand to

¹ *Protokoll* . . . 1901, pp. 191, 189, 195.

² 'Unmassgebliche Betrachtungen', *NZ*, 1900/1901, Vol. II, p. 779.

³ See Ignatov (Martov), 'The Lübeck SPD congress', *Zarya*, Nos. 2-3, December 1901, pp. 417-19.

⁴ *LV*, 31 May 1902.

do as we like on the paper. We can carry out all necessary reforms, hire and fire collaborators, etc.¹

In any case Mehring's congratulations were short-lived. In practice the day-to-day collaboration with Rosa did not work out happily. The details were not made public, but by the late spring of 1902 they had completely fallen out. Mehring complained about her to all and sundry; to Kautsky he wrote in his style of warped courtesy about 'the lady Luxemburg's power complex, her dirty power-grabbing attitude'—at a time when they were still officially collaborating!² It is not hard to guess what happened. Rosa tried to emulate her distinguished predecessor Schönlank, to impose her will and policy on staff and collaborators alike; they, however, were not willing to accept from a young and rather aggressive woman what they had taken from the most distinguished journalist and editor in the SPD. Mehring, instead of helping, hindered and obstructed at every turn; he felt his own status to be at stake. It was the story of the *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* all over again, though this time there was not even any matter of principle involved.

After a few months Rosa left this post as well. Her departure was less publicized than the earlier one from Dresden, and the circumstances have never been entirely cleared up. Apparently the editorial board tried to put the new editor under firmer control and Rosa found this unacceptable. One of her biographers has suggested that she lacked staying power, that she was essentially a rolling stone as far as any administrative work was concerned, but the evidence suggests that her reasons for leaving Leipzig were more positive than this.³ In the course of her departure she fell out with

¹ Photocopy IML(B), NL2/20, pp. 46–47.

² Letter dated 5 January 1902, No. 162, IISH Archives. But see Dietrich Geyer, *Lenin in der Russischen Sozialdemokratie*, Cologne 1962, pp. 366–7, note 76, for the view and evidence that Rosa Luxemburg collaborated with Mehring in his edition of the posthumous papers of Marx, Engels, and Lassalle published in 1902 (*Aus dem literarischen Nachlass von Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels und Ferdinand Lassalle, 1841–1850*, Stuttgart 1902). In the preface to Vol. III Mehring expresses himself as strongly opposed to any Polish national revival (pp. 40 ff.); see also F. Mehring, 'On the Polish Question', *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, 1904, No. 4, pp. 141–5. I believe that far from any collaboration in 1902, this was the 'theft' of Rosa Luxemburg's notes on Poland of which she later complained to Luise Kautsky (see above, p. 106, note 4). By 1904, when Mehring's piece was reprinted in the Polish review, things were slightly easier between them, and Rosa would not have hesitated to use Mehring's prestige for Polish purposes irrespective of their personal relations. She actually wrote and thanked him rather frigidly for his 'unexpected support' (letter dated 7 July 1904, IML(B), NL2 III-A/18, pp. 47–49).

³ H. Roland-Holst, *Rosa Luxemburg*, p. 47. Rosa's own version in Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1965, No. 1.

Mehring openly and completely, especially since it was he who now took over as sole editor. By October 1902 she had given up all collaboration with the paper. She claimed that too many of her articles found their way into the wastepaper basket, and that her successor would not defend her interests with sufficient vigour. Frölich speaks of 'an icy letter breaking all relations', which she is supposed to have written to Mehring.¹ Whatever the real issue of the quarrel, they were again on better terms the following year, after Rosa had defended him at the 1903 congress where he suddenly found himself the subject of a highly personal and bitter attack for his anti-Socialist writings thirty years earlier.

The affair of the Leipzig editorship certainly helped to confirm Rosa's reputation as a cantankerous female, even among those who wished her well. An incidental result was that, as a regular contributor, only the pages of *Neue Zeit* now remained open to her, and she was only too well aware of the limitations which this imposed.² Bebel, at the moment kindly disposed towards her, warned her not to fall out indiscriminately with Left and Right by hitting out in all directions; this could only result in her complete isolation in the German party.³ The warning was well meant—a politician must know how to close down his anger—but Rosa, stung by the monotonous attacks both within the SPD and in the bourgeois press, was roused to an excited defence of her position.

. . . If I were inclined to sulk, I would truly have had ample opportunity already—from the first moment of my appearance in the German party, from the Stuttgart party conference onwards. In spite of the peculiar reception which I and other non-Germans—comrades not *de la maison*—have had to put up with, I have not missed any opportunity to stick my neck out for trouble. It did not occur to me, quite apart from any question of sulking, even to withdraw to the much more agreeable safety of purely scientific study. . . .

. . . Since June I have been pushed out [of *LV*] step by step through Lensch [one of the editors], and if I have committed any sin, it is an excess of my almost cow-like patience, with which I have let myself be kicked around by too much consideration for personal friendships, instead of getting out on my own account and at once.⁴

¹ Frölich, p. 92.

² Seidel letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1959, No. 1(5), p. 86.

³ 'Einige Briefe', p. 34.

⁴ Rosa Luxemburg to August Bebel, 11 October 1902, *ibid.*

'Cow-like patience' was perhaps going rather far, but Rosa had the Russian view of polemics—a necessary form of Socialist self-expression, in which people's names and to some extent even their personalities served as symbols in a political equation. Personal dislike as a political end in itself was alien to her; one should not attack people in public except for political purposes. To this extent her attitude was the exact opposite of her German colleagues' who deplored personal politics in public but respected private personal dislike. Rosa was of a more political character than almost anyone in Germany and extended the area of politics well beyond the essentially bourgeois limits of the SPD—not in terms of attitude but of range. When she relaxed, wrote letters about botany or classical literature, took pity on a frozen beetle, she was not withdrawing from politics but fulfilling her concept of a wholly political life. This is what gives all those 'non-political' letters a slightly self-conscious, even unctuous tone, and the appearance of a theatrical performance; private life, perhaps, but always with a highly political basis. Rosa's real privacy was of a different and very secret order.¹

In any case these events did not seriously weaken her position. The executive had not yet finished with the Polish problem, nor with the revisionists. In the 1903 *Reichstag* elections the SPD made an important advance in voting strength, raising its *Reichstag* representation to eighty-one. Rosa contributed to this triumph in Polish-speaking Posen and in Chemnitz, the centre of the textile area, where she established her campaign headquarters for Saxony. Every day there were crowded meetings, in the open air, in beer halls—anywhere with enough space. Thousands came to hear her. The candidate she was supporting was none other than Max Schippel—her old friend Isegrim.² 'He would prefer no meetings, no handbills, no argument . . . he feared that his opponents might recall that Bebel had called him a rascal [at the 1902 party congress]. That of course was a jab for my benefit. . . .'³ But when it came to fighting against the class enemy, it made no difference whether the candidate was *kosher* or revisionist. Rosa worked whole-heartedly on his and the SPD's behalf. She strongly objected to the suggestion that any personal resentment would prevent her from supporting SPD candidates anywhere in an

¹ See below, pp. 671–5.

² See below, p. 216.

³ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 70, dated 6 June 1903.

election: 'Right off the beam. To hell with it, I used to work for the worst revisionists; now I should let personal friction prevent me from helping my political friends!'¹

This success at the polls encouraged the executive to make what they hoped would be a final reckoning with the revisionists at that year's party congress. The areas of permissible contact with bourgeois politics were at last tightly defined and limited. In another long speech, Bebel re-emphasized the party's attitude to existing society: 'I am and always will be the enemy to the death of the existing system.'² Rosa's direct participation was no longer required, since the executive was itself prepared to occupy the positions of the advance guard which it had pushed out in 1901.

During these years before the revolution of 1905, Rosa Luxemburg reached the height of her influence in the SPD. She had the complete public support of Kautsky; undoubtedly he was greatly influenced by her, and she provided most of the sting in the *Neue Zeit* which he was temperamentally unable to provide himself. She was a regular contributor to the paper and as associate editor had considerable say in editorial policy. She now dispensed—or denied—some of the patronage she had herself sought six years earlier. A number of her friends besought her to help place their articles in the German party press, to the extent of straining her patience. 'I have received a letter from Seidel naturally containing a new pamphlet and some poems, which of course he wants me to place. . . . I shall do something for the poems, but not for the pamphlet.'³

However close the collaboration with Kautsky, she always sensed a feeling of reserve on his part, an ultimate refusal to commit himself personally. She put this down to fear and jealousy—'he wants to cut down my influence'; 'he sits and scribbles for all he is worth so as not to be pushed out of the forefront by me; he even copies from my work but how palely', she had written in 1899.⁴ In spite of all friendship, something of this competitive caution always remained. Nor was it just Rosa's imagination. But what she put down as a personal reaction to herself was in fact a feature of

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 28: letter to Konrad Haenisch, 2 December 1911. The 'political friend' in question was Henke from Bremen, a Left radical and friend of Karl Radek, whom he had staunchly supported against the SPD executive and against Rosa. See below, pp. 461-3.

² *Protokoll . . . 1903*, p. 313.

³ Jogiches letters, 3 January 1902, IML (M).

⁴ Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1963, Vol. VI, No. 3(23), p. 133, dated 11 April 1899.

Kautsky's relations with all fellow writers, indeed with everyone—kindness and coldness combined. This made her excessively sensitive to any sign of political cowardice on his part; she expected from him the same unqualified public support that she was always willing to give. Thus Rosa wanted to print a rejoinder in *Neue Zeit* to the attack on her *in absentia* by Fischer at the 1901 Lübeck congress.¹ Kautsky asked her not to insist, and she agreed, but at the same time she could not help taking him to task. She wrote him one of her 'take heed' letters.

Of course I am willing to refrain from publishing my declaration in the *Neue Zeit* but allow me to add a few words of explanation. If I were one of those who, without consideration for anyone, safeguarded their own rights and interests—and the number of such people is legion within our party—or rather that is the way they all are—I would naturally insist upon publication, for you yourself have admitted that you as editor had certain obligations towards me in this matter. But while admitting this obligation, you at the same time placed a revolver of friendly admonition and request at my breast [to prevent me] from making use of this obligation and thus getting my rights. Well, I am sickened at the thought of having to insist upon rights if these are only to be granted amid sighs and gnashing of teeth, and when people not only grab me by the arm and thus expect me to 'defend' myself, but try in addition to beat me to a pulp, in the hope that I may thus be persuaded to renounce my rights. You have gained what you are after—you are free of all obligations towards me in this case.

But it would seem that you labour under the delusion that you acted solely out of friendship and in *my* best interests. Permit me to destroy this illusion. As a friend you ought to have said: 'I advise you unconditionally and at any cost to defend your honour as a writer, for greater writers . . . like Marx and Engels wrote whole pamphlets, conducted endless ink-wars, when anybody dared to accuse them of such a thing as forgery. All the more you, a young writer with many enemies, must try to obtain complete satisfaction. . . .' That surely is what you should have advised me as a *friend*.

The friend, however, was soon pushed into the background by the editor of the *Neue Zeit*, and the latter has only one wish since the party congress [at Lübeck]; he wants *peace*, he wants to show that the *Neue Zeit* has learned manners since the whipping it got, has learned to keep its mouth shut. And for such reasons the essential rights of an associate editor and regular contributor . . . must be *sacrificed*. Let a collaborator of *Neue Zeit*—and one at that who by no means does the least or the

¹ See above, p. 187.

worst of the work—swallow even a public accusation of forgery as long as peace and quiet is maintained!

That is how things are, my friend! And now with best greetings, your Rosa.¹

The public Kautsky-Luxemburg front was made of political rather than personal stuff. His papers in Amsterdam clearly show that he kept open house and letterbox, but few of those who passed through were people whom he really liked—even though he often managed to convey this impression. He had stuck up for Rosa against Victor Adler in the Belgian controversy, and the Austrian leader was irritated enough to accuse Kautsky of letting his judgement be swayed by personal sentiment.² Kautsky replied promptly as usual, admitting that he and Rosa Luxemburg were in close political agreement. 'But the friendship is in fact very lukewarm and, where party matters are concerned, I have already for substantial reasons torn up far more intimate friendships.'³ Thus while Rosa was very close to Luise Kautsky, her friendship with Karl was always a little lopsided, dragging in the frothy wake of their political collaboration, and supported on his part by an outward tolerance, good nature, laziness almost. He hated personal unpleasantness.

Apart from the Kautskys, Rosa had made a firm friend in Clara Zetkin whom she had known for some years, almost since that first congress at Stuttgart in 1898 where Rosa had made her début. Clara Zetkin stayed with her in Berlin whenever she came up from Stuttgart for the meeting of the party Control Commission of which she was a member. It was to be the most secure friendship of Rosa's German life. The woman whom she had described at the first arrogant sniff as 'a sincere and worthy woman, but also something of an empty piece of rubber hosing', had become Rosa's total ally in all things—and her devoted friend. Clara Zetkin had only a slippery hold on Marxist theory, her revolutionary devotion was sentimental rather than conspiratorial or scientific, and her passions were fired by indignation and protest, very real human qualities as a reaction against injustice, but easily transformed into visionary mysticism about a Socialist future or—when things went wrong as they did all too often—into black, almost physically

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, pp. 68-69, dated 3 October 1901.

² See below, p. 243. Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel*, p. 430, 14 October 1904.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 435, dated 18 October 1904.

paralysing despair. To a disciplined and independent person like Rosa Luxemburg she was frequently a trial, and Rosa was, to say the least, indifferent to the Socialist women's movement which was Clara Zetkin's special interest. But they both took their stand instantly and without question on the left wing over every issue, and Clara Zetkin was only too willing to defer to Rosa's superior intellect on tactics or analysis. Their mutual interest and consideration for each other extended into private life, though Clara Zetkin who knew no guile gave rather more than she got. The distance between Berlin and Stuttgart was considerable and both led busy lives; but in Rosa's letters to her friend in south Germany there lives a spirit of rare love and affection, occasionally tempered with good-natured impatience with the older woman's almost masochistic despairs.¹ Politics, and above all revolutionary politics, are a hothouse for personal relations; they sharpen, magnify, distort—and destroy prematurely. With Mehring and Kautsky, Rosa's relationship was primarily political, and personal feelings had to adjust accordingly. Only with Clara Zetkin could the political aspect be taken so much for granted that uncompetitive personal friendship was allowed full play.²

Other than this, Rosa had a lot of acquaintances but few German friends. Her close group was still Polish and secretive; the other half of a double life. Besides, Leo Jogiches was now living permanently at Cranachstrasse. Ever suspicious and resentful of people—'her people'—and frustrated by his own enforced inactivity, he restricted Rosa to only the most 'political' contact with Germans. Besides, from the beginning of 1903 onwards, there was a rising tide of Polish work for her.

Rosa took a short holiday at Hessenwinkel in the summer of 1904 in the sandy pinewoods of Brandenburg, to recover from another hectic week of agitation in the Polish areas. She was due to travel to the International congress at Amsterdam with Luise Kautsky. She had to be there a few days before the official opening, to parti-

¹ This substantial collection of letters is preserved in IML (M), and has to my knowledge been used only in one or two Russian editions of miscellaneous passages from the letters of various German Socialists, and by Luise Dornemann, *Clara Zetkin*, Berlin (East) 1957.

² This friendship was one of the dependable axes of the radical Left, and known to all. Since Clara Zetkin joined and remained unswervingly loyal to the German Communist Party until her death in 1933, Rosa Luxemburg's female biographers, though acknowledging the friendship, have presented it as less than enthusiastic on Rosa's part, as a burden more than a pleasure. This is quite wrong. See H. Roland-Holst, *Rosa Luxemburg*, p. 117.

cipate in a meeting of the International Socialist Bureau, of which she had been a member since 1903 as permanent representative of the SDKPiL. Already the intractable problem of Russian unity had been put in the Bureau's lap, and Rosa was perhaps its only uncommitted expert.

This was the high-water mark of Rosa's position and prestige. She attended the congress itself in a dual capacity, both as a German delegate with a mandate from Bydgoszcz (Bromberg), and as a Polish delegate with a mandate from the SDKPiL central committee in Poznań. For the first time there were no mandate challenges. She was one of the two German members on a congress committee to report on trusts and unemployment, and the Polish representative on the more important commission on international Socialist tactics. In the latter she brought an amendment to a resolution by the Italian Ferri, in which she reiterated that Socialist tactics could only be based on the total class struggle—her contribution to the general pressure on the French to achieve unity based on firm Marxist principles. She defended the right of the small delegations—Russia, Poland, Bulgaria, Spain, and Japan—to vote on the congress resolution on Socialist tactics, against the proposal by the Belgian Socialist Anseele that only the parties most affected should be allowed to meddle in such an important issue with its vital consequences for the important French party. 'We must not permit the congress to divide delegates into active and passive ones, to build a European concert of big powers who would be the only ones to decide the basic principles of international Socialism.'¹

In a photograph taken at the congress, Rosa stands out as the only woman among so many old, mostly bearded and wise-looking men, significantly stuck between her old hero Vaillant and her enemy Victor Adler. The main achievement of the congress was in the victory of German principles over Jaurès, for which she had fought in so many printed pages and which she again demanded at the congress in a short, sharp speech, summing up her entire case against revisionism.² And she contributed to the general feeling of euphoria—with French unity now in sight—by a small, personal gesture towards her great opponent Jean Jaurès,

¹ *Protokoll, Internationaler Sozialistenkongress zu Amsterdam . . . 1904*, Berlin 1904, p. 49.

² See below, pp. 241 ff.

whom she never actually managed to dislike, while he had not even attempted to dislike her, respecting her talent and integrity in spite of the many bitter polemics. When he had finished his eloquent defence of his party's position, ridiculing both the stale, cheap theories of Kautsky—'sur demande'—and the misguided passions of Rosa Luxemburg, there was suddenly no one to translate for him. Rosa jumped up and reproduced his moving oratory: from French into equally telling German. It was the kind of gesture—*vouloir* and *pouvoir* combined—which the Second International loved (impossible to imagine in Stalin's Comintern). Amid general applause, Jaurès thanked her elaborately, and felt certain that this was evidence of a solidarity greater than all their surface differences.¹

Rosa was well satisfied. Both the SPD and the International had, after much delay, finally voted the complete negation of revisionist ideas and tactics. The orthodox line had triumphed at the highest Socialist court of appeal. In private, Rosa at first placed no great faith in Jaurès's intentions of putting into practice the resolutions of the International; the centrifugal experiences of Poles and Russians did not set an encouraging example of self-denial.² But she was wrong. Her experience of conceptual wrangling with the German revisionists blinded her to the calibre, the attachment to international Socialism, of an individualist like Jaurès. This was the seamier side of Rosa's internationalism. For with the denial of all national solutions went a monochrome universality which even obliterated national distinctions. The great battle against revisionism had been won in Germany—won at least in the way in which Rosa Luxemburg still conceived of victory, with words on paper and in resolutions; for the moment the whole world *was* Germany. It was Kautsky's conception but in public it had her full support: *lingua Kautskiana in bocca rosana*. It appeared as though Socialism, after six years of struggle, had now been declared free of disease. The yellow flag of quarantine, all the sacrifices of the siege, could be lowered at last.

But Rosa's own dialectic was already at work, undermining the

¹ *Sixième congrès Socialiste internationale à Amsterdam, Compte rendu analytique*, p. 174. The German version of the congress protocol contains no reference to this incident—though not for any sinister reason; it is simply shorter.

² "The fuss about unity in France is completely pointless, except to unmask Jaurès's hypocrisy. He who directly killed the principle of unity, now has to turn and twist to avoid it—a joke for the Gods!" (H. Roland-Holst, *Rosa Luxemburg*, p. 213, letter dated 27 October 1904.)

satisfactions of apparent triumph. While Kautsky's politics were essentially a chain of static situations, hers were a process; while he moved towards a given end, and then a new one, her ends were no more than a sophisticated means, chimerical postulates with which to whip the tired caravan onwards through the desert. The monochrome universality had come before the triumph, not with it; a means once more, not an end—the very triumph of Amsterdam actually bred dynamic disillusion. She wanted more action, not less. Instead of peace, the success at the International meant sharper struggle. The only problem was how, what, above all—against whom.

From the International congress at Amsterdam, Rosa returned to Germany—straight to jail. In July 1904 she had been sentenced to three months' imprisonment. The charge was insulting the Emperor, that same William II who prided himself on his inspired capacity to understand the problems of the German workers better than any Social Democrat. The authorities took exception to her remark in a speech during the 1903 *Reichstag* election campaign that 'a man who talks about the security and good living of the German workers has no idea of the real facts'.¹ The incident did not have much repercussion at the time because the SPD was more preoccupied with the big trial at Königsberg in East Prussia during the same month, in which a number of prominent Social Democrats, including Otto Braun, were indicted for helping to smuggle revolutionary literature into Russia. Rosa Luxemburg herself referred to this trial, and the happy result of acquittal of the major defendants.

Above all we ought to congratulate ourselves upon Königsberg. It is a real triumph, at least I feel it as such here, and I hope you feel the same where you are, notwithstanding the heat and the beauty of nature. [St. Gilgen in Austria, Kautsky's favourite holiday resort.] Great Scott, such a judgement of blood on both Russia and Prussia is still much more beautiful than any majestic mountains and smiling valleys.²

¹ Frölich, p. 94; see also Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1965, No. 1(29), pp. 121-9. These were written from jail. I have not seen a record of the trial or whether she was sentenced in person or *in absentia*.

² *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, pp. 71-72, dated end of July 1904, from Hessenwinkel. For a time the SPD had given official assistance to the RSDRP (Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party) for their transport of revolutionary literature to Russia. A press had been housed in the cellar of the *Vorwärts* building. Later, afraid of the police, the SPD executive had requested its removal. In order to keep its official hands clean, it circularized for comrades willing to help in a private capacity. See Botho Brachmann, *Russische Sozial-*

Rosa began her sentence at the end of August 1904 in the jail at Zwickau. 'Rest quite easy about me, everything is all right—air, sun, books, and good fellowship on the part of fellow human beings.'¹ First, she caught up with her correspondence. She followed party affairs closely from prison—her relations with Mehring had been re-established, and the thought that he might resign from the job of editor of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* now caused her consternation, though it was a threat which Mehring repeated monotonously. The enforced idleness, however, gave her time for deeper reflections, which in Rosa's case invariably culminated in impatience with the existing state of things. From prison she wrote to Karl Kautsky:

So now you still have other battles to fight. I am quite happy about this for it shows that these dear people [the editorial board of *Vorwärts*] felt our victory in Amsterdam quite severely. That is why I am annoyed that you envy me the peace and quiet of my cell. I don't doubt that you will thoroughly hit out [at the 1904 Bremen party congress]. But you must do it with guts and joy, and not as though it was a boring interlude; the public always feels the spirit of the combatants and the joy of battle gives resonance to controversy, and ensures moral superiority. Certainly you will be quite alone; August [Bebel] will remain in the vineyard of the Lord until the last moment and both dear Arthur [Stadthagen] and dear Paul [Singer] will be 'elegiac' as you put it. Would that thunder and lightning struck them seven fathoms into the ground if they can still go on being 'elegiac' after such a congress [the last congress at Dresden]—and this between two such battles when one ought to be happy to be alive! Karl, this brawl is not just a forced skirmish, fought out in a listless atmosphere . . . the interest of the masses is on the move; I feel it even here penetrating through the prison walls. And don't forget that the International is looking at us with bated breath. . . . I am writing you all this not to stir you up to rebellion—I am not so tactless—but rather to make you happy for battle, or at least to transmit *my* joy to you, for here in cell No. 7 I cannot make much use of that commodity. . . . I am sure that Clara Zetkin is not [elegiac] but treasures her contact with you and me. . . . Do arrive at an understanding with her in good time, you can depend on her.²

demokraten in Berlin 1895-1914, Berlin (East) 1962, pp. 40-52, for a summary and sources. The East Prussian SPD organization was naturally most closely involved, since the transport route passed across its territory. Karl Liebknecht was one of the defending counsel at this trial, his first major public appearance.

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 77, dated 1 September 1904.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 82-84.

Instead of serving three months, Rosa was released—‘or rather almost thrown out’—after six weeks, on 15 October 1904: the usual amnesty at the coronation of a new monarch, King Friedrich August of Saxony. Rosa did not want to accept such forms of royal grace and favour, but she had no choice.¹ From her cell she went straight back to work in Berlin. Her impatience mounted. She expressed it most clearly in a letter to her Dutch friend Henriette Roland-Holst. The two women, totally dissimilar in origin and temperament, had formed a momentary friendship—and tried hard to convert an intellectual relationship into something more involved and human. The effort—and the friendship—did not last more than a few days, but for the moment Rosa was able to adopt a much more intimate tone than with Karl Kautsky, much less ‘managed’; she could speak frankly.

With you I want to talk about our general situation. I am not in the least happy about the role which the so-called orthodox ‘radicals’ have played up to now. Chasing after each opportunistic hare, and yacking critical advice doesn’t satisfy me; in fact, I am so sick and tired of this sort of activity that I would really rather keep quiet in such cases. I envy the certainty with which some of our radical friends merely find it necessary to lead back the strayed lamb—the party—into the safe domestic fold of the old principles [*prinzipienfestigkeit*] and don’t realize that in this wholly negative manner we don’t move forward one single step. And for a revolutionary movement not to move forward is—to go back. The only means of radical struggle against opportunism is to move forward oneself, to enlarge [the range of] tactics, to increase the revolutionary aspect of the movement. Opportunism is in any case a plant which only flourishes in brackish water; in any strong current it dies on its own. Here in Germany a move forward is an important and burning need! And how few people realize it. Some fritter their effort away in arguing with the opportunists, and others believe that the automatic mechanical growth in membership (at the elections and in our organizations) represents a move forward. They forget that quantity has to be turned into quality, that a party of three million cannot adopt the same flexible tactics as a party of half a million. . . . We must talk about this, otherwise this letter will turn into a leading article. . . . The problem is not just a German one, but an international one. The congress at Amsterdam made me very conscious of this. But German Social Democracy must give the signal and provide the direction.²

¹ H. Roland-Holst, *Rosa Luxemburg*, pp. 210-11, letter dated 27 October 1904.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 215-16, letter dated 17 December 1904.

Nothing could be clearer than these two examples of pending disagreement between a party executive, which only a year earlier had finally measured up to her rigorous standards in the condemnation of opportunism, and Rosa Luxemburg, urgently looking for new and sharper weapons of struggle. She was constant in one thing only: the new tactic had to be found in Germany, where the victory over revisionism had been won.

These years from 1900 to 1904 marked a definite stage in the development of Rosa Luxemburg's personality. The youthful eagerness, the deliberate enthusiasms—playing it young—this was over. No more Don Quixote engagements with party bosses, or harmless practical jokes. Instead, a maturer acceptance of immobility as a political phenomenon which had to be fought with political weapons, and not just so many personal obstacles against which one could charge head on. Bebel was a political force as well as a grandad in whose shoes, placed outside hotel rooms at night, one could leave scurrilously funny notes.¹ What was needed was a broad revolutionary mass movement that would sweep these obstacles away, or at least sweep them along.

Her personal life was also to enter a new phase of maturity, with all the losses and sadnesses that this implies. She would lose friends, and lose her lover; the Prussians she hated would get increasingly on top of her, and her ideas find less and less response. The past slipped rapidly away. It is curious how thorough was the break of 1905–1906; Rosa never again referred to the happy hunting years of revisionism. One link with the past, however, was snapped without regret in 1903: Rosa finally obtained her divorce from Gustav Lübeck. Lübeck had apparently provided the grounds for the divorce—presumably desertion—and Rosa, who had no very high regard for his reliability or common sense, was anxious to assure him that his 'guilt' would be a mere formality. 'Typical Lübeck . . . naturally he will not have to pay a penny.' She was still on friendly terms with his mother, the impossible Olympia, and with a little pushing and tugging everything could be finally arranged.² Her father, too, had died in 1900, regretted in retrospect, but jostled out of the picture in the last years of his life by the excitements of her battle against revisionism.

Not that Rosa fulfilled herself in as narrow a life as 'politics'.

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, Introduction, p. 22.

² Seidel letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1959, No. 1(5), 7 April 1903, p. 86.

After the first flush of party activity she read widely once more, went out to concerts and theatres, building up that cultural base on which she would rely so heavily in the doldrum years. But it was a lone venture. Jogiches was a reluctant participant; he had to be dragged by main force, as much because he loathed being seen with Rosa in public as from his dislike of any form of public entertainment. More important still, culture was the secret preserve of a few party intellectuals, the Kautskys, the Stadthagens, the Mehrings—when she was on speaking terms with them. This meant the society of people who were by choice remote from the masses, whose battles and victories were fought on paper—the group who wanted to enjoy the fruits of victory over the revisionists, for whom the Russian revolution was welcome as long as the theory could be examined in Germany but the practice remain in Russia. Like Trotsky, therefore, Rosa Luxemburg kept her artistic and cultural interests more and more to herself, or cultivated special friends for this purpose; privacy became almost an obsession after 1906. This made the totality of her political opposition all the easier.

VI

DEFENDING THE FORTRESS: THE BATTLE AGAINST REVISIONISM

REVISIONISM was all things to all men—supporters and opponents alike.¹ To Plekhanov, attending the 1898 Stuttgart congress of the German Socialist Party as a fraternal delegate, it was mainly a problem of philosophy and, as such, peculiarly important and fascinating. He found the lowly political concerns of the Germans unworthy and disagreeable. ‘You say your readers have no interest in philosophy,’ he wrote to Kautsky, ‘then you must force them to take an interest; “*c’est la science des sciences*”.’² But philosophy did not mean abstraction or restraint. ‘If you want me to write against Bernstein you must give me full freedom of speech. Bernstein must be destroyed [*anéanti*] and I will gladly undertake this task if you will let me.’³

This was an extreme position which tells us much about Plekhanov but little about German revisionism. It was shared by no one in Germany, and is therefore of little direct consequence to our analysis of the revisionist debate and Rosa Luxemburg’s contributions to it. Paradoxically, Plekhanov’s desire for a tough-minded philosophical campaign against Bernstein had specific

¹ For the purpose of this discussion, no attempt has been made to distinguish meaningfully between revisionism, reformism, or opportunism. In theory, and at the start of the ‘troubles’, revisionism was specifically identified with the body of speculation produced by Eduard Bernstein as a revision of the Marxist dialectic, and revisionists were those who accepted his analysis. Reformism was the more practical and particular aspect of achieving Socialism by reform without revolution. Opportunism was the most diffuse version—and also the pejorative one—of seizing tactical opportunities without any regard for principles. In the course of the events described, these words become largely interchangeable, though opportunism grew into a vast cesspool of a category which eventually included revisionists, reformists, and all your other enemies. I stick to revisionism wherever possible, use opportunism only in the broad cesspool sense, and reformism not at all.

The word ‘revision’ was first used in its present context by Bruno Schönland at the 1895 Breslau party congress when he spoke of the proposals for agrarian reform being a ‘revision’ of the SPD programme.

² Ibid., 24 December 1898, No. 588.

³ Plekhanov to Kautsky, 16 September 1898, D XVIII, 586, in Kautsky Archives, IISH Amsterdam.

political results—it shamed the German party leaders into taking a position against the revisionists earlier and probably more strongly than they would otherwise have done. For how could the spearhead of attack on revisionism—essentially a German matter—be left to the Russians who had not even a united Social-Democratic party of their own?¹ These results, though, were not direct but derived.

We shall divide our analysis of the revisionist controversy into three parts, the question of theory, its relation to tactics, and the political impact of the tactical question on the German party itself. These are different aspects of the same problem though in the first instance their analysis involves some rather arbitrary separation. As the revisionist debate proceeded—and in a sense it never really ended until the war, though its main energy was spent by 1904—the emphasis changed increasingly from theory to tactics, from first principles to political immediacies, and then back again. But this chronology is the broadest of generalizations. In fact, it is more helpful to think of emphasis on theory and tactics, not as superseding each other in time, but as a pattern variable, a dichotomous state of the system of each participant's interests, habits, and beliefs. We must confront each major contributor's attitude to the revisionist debate in terms of this particular variable—from the extreme of a mutually exclusive alternative between theory and tactics to some intermediate balance between them, or even synthesis of them. These individual variables in practice aggregated broadly into the two opposing camps of revisionists and orthodox, with the latter disintegrating eventually into radicals and centre. But politics, unlike philosophy, is not capable of dividing into infinite subdivisions; the dynamic factor of polarity insures a unifying reaction to each divisive action—in the end revisionists and centre fused once more. Thus, while analysing the revisionist controversy in terms of our variable, we shall exercise the full advantage of historical hindsight, knowing that the articulations of the revisionist controversy were temporary and to some extent an illusion.

The Theory of Revisionism

Bernstein did not intend to produce any new political system, or to substitute his own ideas for the SPD's existing philosophy.

¹ See above, pp. 104-5.

Primarily he expounded what he thought he saw. Somewhat remote from the day-to-day struggle in Germany—he was still living in London at the time—Bernstein attempted to underpin his empirical observations with a set of causalities. Like any good Marxist, to whom the systematic examination of past and present is only meaningful in terms of a ‘historicist’ prediction of the future, he extrapolated his findings. His conclusions were not that Marx was wrong, but that his postulate of revolution only made sense if revolution meant adaptation and substantial change without any *a priori* notion about the manner in which these would come about. The whole thing was really a piece of good-natured social *bricolage*, using all the tools and materials and the acknowledged skills of the great master. These were never in question. But what distinguishes *bricolage* from systematic analysis is precisely the open-ended final product; you can never tell where it will lead. Having created a furore on a scale which he had certainly never anticipated, he admitted that far from any passion for rigorous totality, the whole exercise had been no more than a series of unrelated *pensées*, filling in some obvious gaps in the party’s analysis of the contemporary scene. ‘Systematic thought and logical progression sat heavily upon me’, he ruefully admitted.¹ His critics did not fail to notice his empirical approach and had no great difficulty in showing that, as a logical system, Bernstein’s ideas left much to be desired. ‘Bernstein has the capacity to unite the most complicated matters and to confuse and break up the simplest ones.’² Much of Rosa Luxemburg’s criticism of Bernstein was concerned with exposing the logical inconsistencies of both Bernstein’s assumptions as well as his conclusions. ‘And if today, half a century later, a conception already torn into a thousand pieces by Marx and Engels has been sewn together once more and offered to the German proletariat as the last word in science, then clearly this is the work of a tailor—but not a very good one.’³

None the less, Bernstein did produce, if not a complete philosophical system, at least a fairly consistent critique of an existing one. Briefly he concluded that the evidence of the last few years showed serious weakness in Marx’s prediction of capitalist col-

¹ See Bernstein’s autobiographical sketch in Felix Meiner (ed.), *Die Volkswirtschaftslehre der Gegenwart in Selbstdarstellungen*, Leipzig 1924.

² Quoted in Rosa Luxemburg, *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 16, Introduction by Paul Frölich.

³ *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 80.

lapse. Capitalism had a far greater potential for survival than Marx had realized—the evidence was based on the survival of the small capitalist against the predicted process of amalgamations and concentration, the use of credit as a means of evening out the excessive cycles of slump and boom, above all the factual absence of any crises for the last twenty-five years. Not that Bernstein abandoned the *aims* of Socialism. He was no more a liquidator, except in the eyes of his opponents, than all the Mensheviks were liquidators, except in the eyes of Lenin. He emphasized the moral content of Socialism, its importance as a means of redistributing income and opportunity. These ends would be achieved by pressure on and within the existing system instead of an unreliable utopian hope for its overthrow. The means of pressure were co-operatives of producers and consumers, and the trade unions. The role of the SPD would be that of a radical or reformist party using its electoral strength and opportunities to press for reform; Bernstein admitted the possibility of resistance and therefore the need for pressure, substantial at times. Nor did he demand a radical change from existing policy. What he recommended was in fact what the SPD was already doing; all that was needed was for the party to ‘dare to appear as what it actually was: a democratic Socialist party of reform’.¹

Bernstein’s doctrine, particularly as expressed in his articles in *Neue Zeit* and in *The Underlying Assumptions of Socialism and the Tasks of Social Democracy*, was therefore something of a compromise; neither a new philosophy nor a series of specific proposals for immediate action. If anything, he had gone further towards a systematic demolition of Marxism than he actually desired.² He was concerned to bring practice and theory into a more positive relationship. By removing the arbitrary assumptions about revolution, he felt that he had corrected theory and brought it more closely into line with reality. ‘I have no objection to the practical aspect of the Social-Democratic programme with which I am entirely in agreement; only the theoretical part leaves something to be desired’, he replied to Kautsky’s accusation of destructive-

¹ This very short summary hardly does justice to the full import of Bernstein’s views, as expressed in his many writings. But, though short, I believe it to be a just summary. For a fuller discussion and a rather different interpretation, which makes Bernstein much more important, see P. Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism*, New York 1952.

² Gay, *Democratic Socialism*, p. 232.

ness.¹ Bernstein was close enough to the leaders of the SPD to realize that they held the practical programme of the SPD in far higher esteem than its theory; to them first principles were no more than a kind of holy writ inscribed on scrolls and locked up in the tabernacles. Bebel himself had said years before that 'a correct tactic is more important than a correct programme'.² Consequently he neither expected nor desired a lengthy theoretical debate, particularly not the acrimonious onslaught of Parvus and Rosa Luxemburg: at most, an amicable discussion in the pages of *Neue Zeit*, as speculative as his own analysis had been; more *bricolage*. It was significant that the theoretical rebuttal of his views came not from expert philosophers like Plekhanov in Geneva, but from Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg, and Parvus, and all for highly practical reasons. Their replies to Bernstein, and particularly the fierceness of their replies, can only be understood in terms of practical concerns. Bernstein's very refusal to be wholly serious was part of Rosa Luxemburg's list of charges against him: 'We are not a discussion club, but an embattled party.'³

Rosa Luxemburg commented on Bernstein's *Neue Zeit* articles with a series of her own in *Leipziger Volkszeitung* from 21 to 28 September 1898 (which became the first part of her pamphlet). The second part of the pamphlet consisted of a review of Bernstein's further thoughts contained in his book *The Underlying Assumptions of Socialism and the Tasks of Social Democracy*. Both sections were issued together in 1899 under the title *Social Reform or Revolution*.⁴ She handsomely acknowledged the importance of Bernstein's follow-up book. It was, she admitted, what it set out to be—a more systematic justification of certain practices, which she then enumerated.⁵ Most of the instances cited were very recent; in fact they had all taken place since the spring of 1898 when Bernstein had first been attacked by Parvus. There was no doubt that everyone's vision had now become much sharper. Though she said that 'the opportunistic tendencies in our movement date back . . . a considerable time', this was not part of her indictment against Bernstein so much as a reluctant admission of his own case for

¹ *Vorwärts*, 26 March 1899.

² A[ugust] B[ebel], 'Zum Erfurter Parteitag', *NZ*, 1891/1892, Vol. I, p. 33.

³ *Protokoll* . . . 1898, p. 219.

⁴ *Sozialreform oder Revolution*, Leipzig 1899, reprinted in *Collected Works*, Vol. III, pp. 35–100, from which quotations are taken.

⁵ *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 96.

historical accuracy. In general she denied Bernstein's claim to be speaking for a well-developed, even dominant tendency in the party. Nor indeed could she do otherwise, for her whole argument was based on making Bernstein into the symptom of something new rather than the confirmation of something old. Throughout *Social Reform or Revolution* and all her other writings on revisionism, the emphasis was always on the need to defend established orthodoxy against unwarranted innovations. 'The proletarian movement has not suddenly become Social-Democratic, it *has been and becomes* more Social-Democratic every day . . . and what is surprising is not the emergence of opportunist tendencies but their weaknesses.'¹ Though Rosa Luxemburg did not use the phrase which was to emerge as the executive's slogan—'the good old tactic'—everything she wrote was in its defence. And when she did take up the phrase after 1906—as a mark of contempt and in order to belittle it—she never fully realized the extent to which she herself had contributed to making it the dominant philosophy of the party.

But Rosa Luxemburg's analysis was no mere reliance on traditional even if unspoken assumptions. In order to defend existing Social Democracy against Bernstein, she analysed its purpose and philosophy at considerable length. Her emphasis was twofold: first, the *importance* of theory; secondly, its *validity*.

What distinguishes [all the opportunist tendencies in the party] on the surface? The dislike of 'theory', and this is natural since our theory, i.e. the bases of scientific Socialism, sets our practical activity clear tasks and limits, both in relation to the *goals* to be attained as much as in regard to the *means* to be used and finally in the *method* of the struggle. Naturally those who only want to chase after practical achievements soon develop a desire to liberate themselves, i.e. to separate practice from 'theory', to make themselves free of it.²

The notion that any Social-Democratic activity could have meaning or validity apart from its causal relationship to theory was anathema. Rosa Luxemburg defended the political and economic lessons of Marxism at great length and in much detail to show not only that its provisions covered every conceivable aspect of political life—and that there was therefore no activity which could not be positively related to theory—but that it was the only

¹ Ibid., p. 99.

² Ibid., p. 96.

theory that did so. The distinction between bourgeois and Marxist politics was precisely that the former was practical in the sense that it had no systematic meaning, while the latter was practical by being part of a theoretical necessity. Any attempt to relate practical activity only to its immediate purposes, and abstract it from the causal pressure of necessity, was an irrevocable step out of Socialism and into bourgeois politics. This in fact was the main basis for the accusation that Bernstein was no longer a Socialist. She countered his appeal for Social Democracy to recognize what it really was—a 'practical' party, according to his definition—by asking the party to get Bernstein to face a similar disillusionment and to admit that he was no more than a radical *petit bourgeois* democrat.¹ There was nothing here of any love for abstract theory.

Concurrently with the exposition of the need for theory went the proof of its validity. But to achieve this it was necessary to dismantle every one of Bernstein's assumptions about the nature of capitalism and the role of Social Democracy. This detailed critique of Bernstein is still part of the standard tradition of Marxism up to the present day and can be found in every textbook on Marxism; only a brief summary is necessary here. Credit did not reduce crises but accentuated them. Instead of a regular series of minor crises you had an irregular series of greater ones, hidden but not alleviated by the development of banking finance. The small and intermediate capitalist was not an identifiable group of given size which must decrease and disappear before capitalism was ready for its final collapse. Instead it represented the most dialectic facet of capitalism. Such capitalists were getting fewer but they would never disappear altogether. Periodically they were 'mown down like so much ripe corn' and absorbed into larger concentrations; at the same time the actual victims were replaced by a new spawning of small capitalist developments in the shelter of the periodic increases in the rate of profit following each depression.

... The conditions of production demand the employment of capital on a large scale. They likewise require its centralization, that is a devouring of small capitalists by the great capitalists and decapitalization of the former ... [But] this process [of separating producers from their requirements of production and centralization of capital in a few hands]

¹ Ibid., p. 100.

would soon bring about the collapse of capitalist production if it were not for counteracting tendencies which continually have a decentralizing effect by the side of the centripetal ones.¹

On the political side the tendencies towards democracy, which Bernstein had hailed as a positive herald of change opening up exciting and objective possibilities for social reform, were dismissed as no more than the political manipulations of the *bourgeoisie*. Far from making revolution unnecessary, they provided the very factors which made it essential. As long as the situation of the oppressed class was a matter of formal law, such laws could presumably be changed—hence the partially legal character of all bourgeois revolutions. But wage slavery—the real basis of contemporary oppression—was not a matter of law at all.

Instead of resting on laws the level of wages is . . . governed by economic factors. . . . Thus the basic conditions of capitalist class domination cannot be altered by reforms of the law, like their original transformation into [the present] bourgeois conditions, since they had not themselves been brought about by such laws in the first place.²

The extra-legal nature of bourgeois domination was precisely the reason why revolution rather than reform was logically necessary. There could be no other way.

This particular aspect has been quoted at some length because it is the only point where Rosa Luxemburg departed from the more usual Marxist analysis of bourgeois liberalism as the legal and constitutional reproduction of bourgeois class domination. Instead of basing herself on the somewhat formal idea that bourgeois society was as much expressed by its laws as any other and that revolution was necessary because a change of the law would be resisted, she introduced the novel idea that it was the *particular* feature of bourgeois society that its main engine of oppression was extra-legal—and therefore incapable of being changed by law, even if such a thing had been politically possible. Unfortunately this interesting idea was not developed by her or anyone else and she herself reverted later to the more usual formulation. Even in her pamphlet the development of this idea was not consistent. 'Democracy is essential not because it makes the capture of

¹ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III [edited by Frederick Engels and translated by Ernest Untermann], Chicago 1909, Part 2, pp. 288-9.

² *Collected Works*, Vol. III, pp. 87-88.

political power by the proletariat *unnecessary*, but on the contrary because it makes the seizure of power essential as well as uniquely possible.¹ The notion of democracy as a means, a Socialist tool, was much more usual.

Having demolished Bernstein's revisions of theory, Rosa Luxemburg went on to emphasize most strongly the essential relationship between *correct* theory and practice. Correct theory postulated revolution—and consequently everything that Social Democracy did or left undone must contribute to that end. In asserting the relationship between theory and practice, Rosa Luxemburg necessarily characterized practical activities in a way which reduced them to a secondary and contributory factor only, without any meaning or validity of their own. Her criterion of the relationship was qualitative, not quantitative, with principles definitely of a higher order than practice. Theory was the life force of tactics. At the same time theory severely limited the choice of practical measures. Some of Bernstein's heraldry of hope she dismissed altogether as illusory, like producer co-operatives; others were relegated to the backwater of insignificance.

The natural and absolute rule of capital makes it impossible for workers to be capitalists in relation to each other. Consumer co-operatives did have some capacity for survival. [But] far from being an instrument in the struggle against production capital, i.e. against the mainstream of the capitalist economy, they are only a weapon against trading capital and particularly against small and intermediary traders, i.e. against a relatively minor branch of the main tree of capitalism.²

With regard to trade unions, Rosa Luxemburg once again followed the classical Marxist notion of limiting their role to regulating the apportionment of labour's due amount of wages but without any hope of altering the iron law which governed their actual level. If there were no trade unions, not even the amount due to labour in Marx's economic formula would be paid out. In times of boom, especially, labour would get even less than that to which the capitalist economy entitled it. But that was all. The limits within which trade unions could operate were between the absolute and the relative decline of wages in proportion to the gross national product, which would grow as a result of the postulated increases in productivity.

¹ Ibid., p. 89.

² Ibid., p. 77.

Thus the trade union struggle, thanks to the objective circumstances of capitalist society, becomes like the labour of Sisyphus. This Sisyphus labour is of course essential if the worker is to receive the amount due to him in any given situation, if the capitalist law of wages is to be realized and the perpetually oppressive tendency of economic development is to be paralysed or more gradually weakened. Any notion, however, that the trade unions can reduce profits *pro rata* in favour of wages presupposes firstly a halt to the proletarianization of the middle strata and to the growth of the proletariat, and secondly an end to the increase in productivity. . . . In other words a return to pre-capitalist conditions.¹

This description of trade-union work was to have rumbling political consequences. Although it followed directly from Marx's own, the striking phrase about the labours of Sisyphus gave great offence and was to be the symbol of the trade union's chronic enmity towards Rosa Luxemburg. But it is curiously ironic that this classical, if highly coloured, analysis of trade-union roles should have had far greater political repercussions than many of the really new and startling formulations she produced in the same pamphlet.

Consumers and producers, co-operatives and trade unions—this was the extent of Rosa Luxemburg's examples of practical activity. The argument was concerned with up-grading theory and expounding it; practical work was merely its executive arm, any elaboration of which was needed only to illustrate the relevance of theory, a simple diagram of how to apply it in practice. Rosa Luxemburg did not find it necessary to enlarge on party tactics in order to buttress her argument. She had established the conceptual framework between theory and practice. She had created a synthesis of the two modes of Socialism, a tightly-knit fugue. All that now remained was to use the fugal technique on the different melodies of the moment. But paradoxically, the great bulk of her writings on revisionism was in fact concerned with questions of practical policy. Since it is contradictory to demote a form of activity to secondary importance and then to upbraid people at length for performing it wrongly, she had to give positive content to the pattern of causality between theory and practice. This was the doctrine of class consciousness. We shall see how it was built up into the lynch-pin of her causations. Only by intense promotion of class consciousness was it possible to show that wrong

Ibid., p. 78.

practical action could affect, obscure, and indeed destroy theory.

But before examining this transformation, we must investigate some further implications of Rosa Luxemburg's theoretical elaborations and compare these with the replies to Bernstein put forward by Kautsky and Parvus, her main allies.

Rosa Luxemburg's analysis was pervaded by a strong sense of purpose. This may be overlaid, disguised by the polemical nature of the pamphlet; her arguments arose in the first instance only in reply to Bernstein's. The points she made and the extent to which she developed them are therefore partly haphazard. But the aim, the purpose, was for totality. Rosa Luxemburg's whole case was based on the assumption that Bernstein was not contradicting a few minor facets of Marxism but excising the heart of its matter. Essentially, therefore, *Social Reform or Revolution* is a reassertion of classical Marxism with particular reference to the present needs of the SPD. The totality she aimed for and achieved was no more than the essential totality of Marxism. But her assertion of totality was so forceful that it seemed remarkable, almost new, to many contemporaries and later critics.¹

None the less, at the risk of being repetitive, she was not merely after the totality of a respectable philosophical system. The purpose which permeates *Social Reform or Revolution* is a political purpose—that of ensuring the alignment of policy to the final aim of revolution.

For Social Democracy the practical daily struggle for social reforms, for an improvement in the situation of the working classes within the framework of the present . . . is no more than a means of working towards the final aim of seizure of power and the removal of the wage system. For Social Democracy an unbreakable connection exists between social reform and social revolution, in that their struggle for social reform is the means and social upheaval the purpose.²

Rosa Luxemburg wrote at some length of this final revolution, its purpose, its manner, its chronology. Here again she followed orthodox Marxism fairly closely; she added little to what Marx himself had said, but also subtracted nothing from the consensus of opinion which—on this subject at least—remained in existence

¹ See Georg Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, Berlin 1923; reprinted as *Histoire et Conscience de Classe*, Paris 1960.

² *Sozialreform oder Revolution*, *Collected Works*, Introduction to the first edition: Vol. III, pp. 35–36.

until the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. All the problems of closer definition, over which Communists and so-called democratic Marxists have since irrevocably fallen out, could be ignored—simply because they had not then appeared above the horizon of contemporary history. The only novel feature of Rosa Luxemburg's analysis of revolution itself, which incidentally anticipated the future application of her ideas in practice, was her insistence that revolution was a lengthy process. She denied the validity of a single, once-for-all upheaval. Again the problem came from Bernstein—his fear of premature or 'unpolitical' attempts to seize power. But far from deriding this as unlikely, she attacked it head on.

The premature revolution which prevents Bernstein from getting his sleep menaces us like the sword of Damocles, and against it no prayer or preaching, no fear or hesitation will be of any avail . . . first because such an enormous upheaval like the change of society from a capitalist to a socialist order is inconceivable in one hit through one victorious strike on the part of the proletariat. . . . The socialist upheaval predicates a long and bitter struggle. . . . Consequently such 'premature' seizure of power cannot be avoided, since such 'premature' attacks by the proletariat are themselves a factor—and a very important factor—in creating the necessary conditions for final victory. . . . The proletariat is not capable of seizing power in any sense other than 'prematurely'. Once or even several times it must inevitably take power 'too soon' in order to capture it permanently and so the opposition to such premature seizures is nothing else than opposition to the very *notion of seizure of power on the part of the proletariat*.¹

In this way Rosa Luxemburg anticipated her later and more precise doctrine of a long revolution. At the same time she developed in embryo the same reasoning which later enabled her to greet the daring impulse and yet oppose the clinging methods of the Bolshevik revolution. Their immediate seizure of power would be supported against all those who were waiting for more suitable objective conditions, but the frank acceptance of momentary failure was essential and in no way lowered the value of their achievement. Any reader who cared to pursue section 3 of the second part of *Social Reform or Revolution* in November 1917 would have found the direct ancestor of Rosa Luxemburg's analysis of the Bolshevik revolution. Her pessimism—which was in fact a form of

¹ Ibid., pp. 91–92. Cf. comments on the Bolshevik seizure of power; below, pp. 541–2, 698–9.

optimism—about the Bolshevik attempts to retain power was not a specific criticism of the Bolshevik revolution at all, but a logical continuation of her entire thinking on this matter.¹

It was also her sole contribution to the study of revolutionary techniques; little else on this subject is to be learnt from Rosa Luxemburg. Having subordinated the day-to-day activities of the party to the final aim, she did not try to embellish this final aim with any imminent or picturesque relevance. 'Practical' as this aim was to her, she could not present it in other than abstract terms—though often shot through with vivid perceptions. But they are sparks from the beak-sharpening on Bernstein's cuttlefish, and not vulgar concessions to artistic realism about revolution. For instance, the sudden and acute perception about liberal democracy:

The extension of a single world-wide economy and the sharpening and universality of international competition have made militarism and marinism [its naval equivalent—a peculiar contemporary formulation] the tools of international as well as domestic policy by the great powers. But if militarism and world politics is an *increasing* tendency in today's situation, then logically bourgeois democracy must be *declining*.²

Thus she recognized the very real and historical decline of liberalism long before it became part of the essential Bolshevik/Polish analysis of the 1905 Russian revolution and was from there re-transported triumphantly westwards by Rosa Luxemburg, Radek, and other analysts of imperialism—first to Germany and then, with declining social validity, to France and England. But at the time it could either serve as a counter to Bernstein's flirtation with an allegedly growing liberalism, as an assertion of traditional doctrine, or form the basis of a new prophecy about the future, but not both. The confusion in Rosa Luxemburg's characterization of liberalism at this time is very marked, and was due to her dual but irreconcilable purposes. The same confusion appeared even more clearly when she examined England and France in greater detail, the former as a sally into Bernstein's conceptual heartland, the latter because of the great events of *L'Affaire Dreyfus* and its consequences.³ In the end liberalism was to be examined afresh

¹ Compare particularly pp. 683–6, below.

² *Collected Works*, III, p. 82.

³ See the extraordinary false abstractions in 'Die Englische Brille', *LV*, 9 May 1899, and the articles on France in *Collected Works*, Vol. III, pp. 265–389.

on the basis of a totally different experience in 1905–1906, and the Russian conclusions were then swept westwards as something entirely fresh and new. The best proof of the insufficiency of Rosa Luxemburg's arguments about liberalism in *Social Reform or Revolution* is her own deletions and alterations in the second (1907) edition of the work. The unfortunate remarks about France, where she predicted the imminent revival of the monarchy—ideas discarded twelve months later in her analysis of the Millerand case of 1899—were firmly removed. With more recent events under her intellectual belt, she gave a different example of the exhaustion of liberalism in the new edition. 'In Germany . . . the most recent Reichstag elections of 1907 fought out under the aegis of colonial policy provide the historical funeral of German liberalism.' Not even the class enemies of Marxism can justifiably be buried more than once—*either* in 1898 *or* in 1907.

Neither then nor later did Rosa Luxemburg ever pursue her denigration of liberalism with any sophisticated social analysis. The only heir of liberalism's first demise of 1898 was the abstract 'state'; from 1910 onwards it was imperialism, which again was a political rather than a social concept.¹ The declining social importance of classic liberalism's class spokesman, the *grande bourgeoisie*, never impinged on her critical consciousness. The *petite bourgeoisie*, which in Germany particularly was to be the specific carrier of nationalism and the direct successor and destroyer of liberalism, was and remained for her an unimportant abstraction, a mere '*Lumpenbourgeoisie*'; just another word in the vast lexicon of Marxism. 'Realization of Socialism does not predicate the absolute disappearance of . . . the *petite bourgeoisie*.'²

The same lifeless abstractions were also strongly apparent in the economic arguments of *Social Reform or Revolution*. No doubt this was due to the fact that in these matters Bernstein was at his safest and most 'practical'. Besides, there were weaknesses in Marx's economics which Rosa was specifically to tackle much later in *The Accumulation of Capital*—but meantime her orthodox arguments against revisionism had a hectoring, stereotyped air. She dismissed the idea of customs tariffs simply as an out-of-date reactionary measure which must itself prevent capitalism from reaching its maturity and therefore hinder Social Democracy

¹ See below, Chapter XII.

² *Collected Works*, III, p. 68.

pro rata—precisely the same inflexible schema which she ridiculed so acutely as a *political* question when discussing the premature seizure of power, and for which she attacked the Mensheviks in 1906.

Tariffs today are no longer a means of safeguarding growing capitalist production against mature competitors, but a weapon in the struggle of one nationalist block against another. They do not assist industry to grow and capture the domestic market, but merely serve the cartelization of industry, i.e. assist the struggle of capitalist *producers* against *consumers*. . . . Thus a policy of tariffs is in fact no more than a means of casting *feudal interests in capitalist form and giving them a false appearance*.¹

The same argument was further elaborated in a series of articles in which Rosa Luxemburg polemicized against Schippel and which were reprinted as an appendix to the pamphlet *Social Reform or Revolution*.²

Another and even more striking example of Marxist *laissez-faire* was in the oddly formal and arid analysis of militarism. This, later to be one of the great bastions of her doctrine of imperialism and the aphrodisiac extraordinary to Social-Democratic action, was in 1899 no more than a tired symptom of—revisionism. It had been argued by one of Bernstein's supporters, Schippel, that under certain circumstances a military budget could provide employment; that militarism with all its unpleasant consequences could provide specific if limited economic benefits for the working class. To Rosa Luxemburg this was to be deplored as a perversion of theory—economic theory—not because militarism was the armed sword of society on the war-path. "The labourer might avoid a reduction of his wages through the existence of a military budget but he loses to that extent his opportunity for improving his lot *permanently* by building up the very force which will be used to prevent him fighting for that improvement."³ Any artificial shoring up of society by tariffs or armaments meant a postponement of Socialism; if actually propounded by Socialists, it therefore cast doubt on their fervency of belief in the final goal. If, meantime, the working class had to suffer

¹ Ibid., pp. 57–58.

² 'Miliz und Militarismus', *LV*, 20–22 February 1899. See also 'Possibilismus und Opportunismus', *SAZ*, 30 September 1898.

³ 'Miliz und Militarismus', reprinted in *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 136.

unemployment, then this was inevitable, a necessary stimulant to the class struggle.

There is thus an innate contradiction between Rosa Luxemburg's sophisticated political dialectic and her rather schematic—or Menshevik—position on economic matters. This might be put down with some justification to defects in her own thinking, but probably follows more directly from the peculiar difficulties of Marxist economics which we shall discuss separately.¹ Rosa Luxemburg did become aware of the increasing gap between an over-formal schema of economics and a sophisticated theory of political action, and tried to improve the former in *The Accumulation of Capital*. However, the difficulty was not solved quite so easily; it is probably the most difficult aspect of Marxism and she was merely saddled with the consequences of admitting the discrepancy; by transposing (unjustifiably) her economic formulae into the political field, her critics created the doctrine of Luxemburgism.²

To make theory supreme, practical measures had to be relegated to a position of unimportance, and in particular the hope of economic alleviation within capitalism confined to a narrow sector of the parameters. 'Fourier's idea of transforming the water of the seven seas into lemonade was very fantastic, but Bernstein's notion of changing the ocean of capitalist bitterness into a sweet Socialist sea by pouring individual bottles full of social reformist lemonade is merely stupider without being one jot less fantastic.'³ Though put forward with all the skill and brilliance of a writer who had mastered Marxist techniques, such a concept did imply a particular state of mind—and also postulated it for the entire party. This could not be justified. Rosa Luxemburg was young and had very recently arrived in Germany. Her participation in Socialist politics had hitherto been confined to an intellectual peer group pretending to be a party—in which her task had anyhow been far removed from the grind of organization and conspiracy. Correct or not, her attachment to a final revolutionary goal, which she could neither promise for the immediate future nor describe as painless, could hardly suit a movement whose whole strength was based on practical considerations and a well-established routine. The

¹ See below, Appendix 1.

² See Fred Oelssner, *Rosa Luxemburg, Eine Kritische biographische Skizze*, Berlin 1951, pp. 164 ff.

³ *Collected Works*, Vol. III, pp. 60–61.

carefully nurtured charisma of the leadership was even more carefully underpinned with the coral-like accretion of innumerable routine activities. It was therefore natural and inevitable that her spirited defence of theory should unleash an outcry against abstract theorizing as a discipline; 'if that is what it leads to. . .'. In the process, the actual ideas she put forward were swamped. In order to answer Bernstein's theory she had elaborated a theory of her own, embracing the relation of means to ends, of practice to principle; and had made it mandatory on the party. In this she had two kinds of ally. First Parvus, who shared her temperament and had, like Rosa Luxemburg herself, a real feeling for the practical implications of turning a revolutionary party into a reformist one. For him this was essentially a process of *embourgeoisement*. He had been the first to hoist the gale warning against Bernstein—though he himself had provided the gale. Unlike Rosa Luxemburg, however, his attacks on Bernstein were based on a strong *feeling* for revolution which never cemented his proposals into a coherent, disciplined whole. His attack had been piecemeal. He used even stronger language than Rosa because his response was that of an individual personality stimulated to attack another individual's outlook on life. Where Marxism for Rosa was itself a way of life, it was for Parvus no more than a useful tool—particularly for attacking others. What attracted him was the revolutionary content of Marxism rather than the scientific and inevitable manner of its coming.

To begin with, he and Rosa Luxemburg fought shoulder to shoulder and the revisionists found little to choose between them. Their differences were encapsulated in the strong bond of their similar temperament. But by 1901 their presentations of the case were beginning to diverge.

If there is to be a revision of party principles, then it can only be done towards the left . . . in the sense of extending rather than restricting political activity . . . of sharpening social revolutionary energy . . . of heightening aim and will; but not in the sense of a chicken-hearted retreat. . . . The proletariat must either be the grave-digger or the slave of capitalism.¹

This was almost a call for *new* principles. Parvus was not averse to any arrangement, however 'tactical', that could benefit Social Democracy and harm its opponents; he was in fact the first

¹ Parvus, 'Der Opportunismus in der Praxis', *NZ*, 1900/1901, Vol. II, pp. 746, 794.

Socialist to advocate that Social Democracy should 'penetrate the capitalist state and make it into the tool of revolutionary struggle . . . by using every possibility offered by this state in order to turn it upside down.'¹ This included any alliances with liberals, any intervention in the present system of society—the same positive tactics advocated by the revisionists but for the opposite purpose. Here was the first ever suggestion of a deliberate Fifth Column. He had warmly defended a specific arrangement between Social Democracy and the Centre in south Germany: '[Through the electoral arrangement] the Liberals were pathetically beaten up, they experienced all the disagreeable aspects of the voting system with their skins . . . the result was that, after the elections, all parties were in complete opposition and complained bitterly against the electoral system.'²

This was a Russian conception which was later on to be practised nakedly by Communist parties in the Third International. But it conflicted with Rosa Luxemburg's notion of right and wrong. The two allies engaged in a minor and quite friendly polemic on the subject. Rosa Luxemburg wrote: 'We regard the Bavarian electoral arrangement as horse trading of a kind unacceptable *in principle*. It has the additional disadvantage, as these things always must, of resulting in a major blunder in practice.' Unwittingly, Parvus's recommendations led to the same result as those of the revisionists. Still, she knew his heart was in the right place and therefore rather unctuously forgave him.

He need not worry, no one will mistake him for Vollmar on account of this example of false reasoning . . . the result of bad judgement on this one occasion. . . . That is the reason why we let Parvus off so lightly. An occasional slip-up doesn't matter, in general he and we take the same line and we hope that, though he says he hasn't much time at the moment for our disputes, he will keep a wary eye open and . . . deal with all manifestations of opportunism in the forceful and primeval manner so peculiarly his own.³

She was not the only one to misunderstand Parvus's intention. Bebel, too, thought that he had become a recruit to revisionist causes. 'Look at our Parvus. Everyone could have sworn until

¹ Winfried Scharlau, *Parvus-Helphand als Theoretiker in der deutschen Sozialdemokratie 1867-1910*, Unpublished dissertation, Münster (Germany) 1960, pp. 279-80.

² 'Der Opportunismus in der Praxis', loc. cit.

³ 'War es ein Kompromiss?', *LV*, 28 September 1899, reprinted in *Collected Works*, Vol. III, pp. 422-3.

recently that he was a dyed-in-the-wool radical. And this solid pillar, after a short while in Munich, now lies broken in bits on the local heath . . . the same fate as other high-principled comrades . . . after a few years in Munich.¹

Was it a slip, or a difference of temperament? Morality was not a word used gladly by Rosa Luxemburg; it reeked of ethics, the negation of scientific historicism. Yet her Socialism was suffused with morality—to the extent that it was permeated by purpose; morality and purpose were so evenly balanced as to be almost synonymous at times. If *Social Reform or Revolution* was coldly and ambitiously prepared, carefully timed for maximum 'career effect', the reason it was so widely acclaimed was not only the brilliant argument but the passion. Bernstein, too, had been moved in the last resort by moral purpose, to restore to the party its lost sense of purpose, its anchor in reality—only an equal moral fervour could ever answer him adequately. Parvus did not possess it; for all his revolutionary impatience he was wholly amoral as to means, and even the end—revolution—was a process rather than a teleological finality. Kautsky, as we shall see, had morality and to spare—but no revolutionary temperament. Only Rosa had both. Well disguised as they were, the differences between her and Parvus were therefore fundamental. Their dispute in 1899 was but a glimmer of what was to come sixteen years later.

By 1901 Parvus had already become impatient with the party's stand-fast defence against revisionism, as he was to become increasingly impatient with the SPD over the next few years. He was not interested in defending a tradition, much less a concept. Parvus described his own activities essentially as those of a galvanizer: 'I prefer to lash out into the frog pond from time to time.'² What had begun as an attempt to defend revolutionary principles in 1898 had by 1901 turned primarily into a defence of the *status quo* in which the emphasis was on tradition more than revolution. Rosa Luxemburg, much more interested in totality than Parvus, went further in her defence of the existing system, of tradition. Where Parvus's concerns, like those of the revisionists, were with practical things, Rosa had subordinated these to a disciplined concept of revolution as the final aim. Since this subordination was traditional to the German party, she in fact

¹ *Protokoll* . . . 1903, p. 311.

² 'Einige Briefe', p. 27: Parvus to Kautsky, no date (1901).

defended tradition. And in this she was joined after some initial hesitation by Kautsky.

He was never light-headed. As an old friend of Bernstein's he had had to overcome a personal reluctance to engage in open and public polemic. The German party leaders, Bebel and Liebknecht, blamed him largely for their own belated stand in the revisionist debate.¹ But by 1899 he was the unchallenged spokesman of the party in theoretical matters and had come down heavily against Bernstein in his book *Bernstein and the Social-Democratic Programme*.² He acknowledged the importance of the controversy; Bernstein's book was 'the first sensational piece of writing produced in the literature of German Social Democracy'. Like Rosa Luxemburg, he was concerned to rehabilitate theory, particularly the great bases of Marxism—the impoverishment of the proletariat, the theory of growing crisis, the inevitable capitalist collapse. Like Rosa Luxemburg he treated tactics in abstract, formal terms. But unlike Rosa Luxemburg he did not emphasize the connection between theory and tactics as a causal one, with the former preceding and creating the latter, but regarded it rather as a poor relation. Thus 'theory assists . . . the choice of a correct tactic . . . and questions of theory are not irrelevant but very closely connected with tactics'.³ It was really a defence of theory as a necessary adjunct to practice and not, as in Rosa Luxemburg's formulation, the predominant causality of practice. He reminded the party of its tradition of *Prinzipientreue*, which in practice meant adherence to the principles that he himself had worked out in the 1891 Erfurt programme. Kautsky was defending a tradition in which he had a stake. For if principles went by the board, there was little room for him. If new principles were substituted for the old ones, then Bernstein instead of Kautsky would become their new interpreter. For this reason it was necessary to show that Bernstein's theory was of a lower order in the intellectual hierarchy than his own; he contemptuously called revisionism the 'mere theory of a practice' and more than twenty years later was still talking about 'a problem of tactics more than principle'.⁴

¹ See above, p. 155.

² Karl Kautsky, *Bernstein und das Sozialdemokratische Programm*, Stuttgart 1899.

³ *Protokoll* . . . 1903, p. 382. See also Erich Matthias, 'Kautsky und der Kautskyanismus', p. 170.

⁴ Matthias, 'Kautsky', p. 165; Karl Kautsky, *Der Weg zur Macht*, p. 15 (introduction to 3rd edition, Berlin 1920).

Thus Kautsky, too, elaborated the theoretical principles which he was defending, but his main plea was democratic legality: they had been constitutionally adopted and could not therefore be changed by argument alone. Rosa Luxemburg had mildly taken Kautsky to task for his almost neutral resolution at the 1898 Stuttgart congress. But she thought his book 'typical, adequately illuminated by facts, clear, straightforward, solving the problems posed'.¹ From then on their intellectual collaboration was close. Their personal friendship was in large measure the product of their common Marxist defence against revisionism.

Here again the innate differences between them were disguised rather than obliterated in the course of their co-operation. Kautsky never questioned the principles, and therefore did not, like Rosa Luxemburg, revalidate them. The validity was pale and negative. Though willing to elaborate and popularize, he took their political dynamic largely for granted. This in fact restricted him to a defence of a limited sector—theory. As long as no attacks on theory were made (or on him as its main champion) he was willing to let revisionist practices continue unscathed. Gradually the executive turned more sharply on the surface manifestation of revisionism, and Kautsky was drawn into the general backwash of condemnation. By 1903 he had emerged as the official spokesman against revisionist practice, and happily continued in this role from the International congress at Amsterdam in 1904 right through to the last and greatest south German budget scandal of 1912. But this was not a personal crusade of right against wrong so much as the fulfilment of his unofficial role of theoretical cab-driver for the executive.²

The initial defence of existing Social Democracy against the revisionists was therefore undertaken by a coalition. First Parvus, to whom the disappearance of revolutionary attitudes implicit in the revisionist conception was anathema; whose approach to tactics was based on the criterion of their revolutionary success; to whom in the last resort Marxism was a useful means of achieving social revolution—and not an analysis of its historical necessity. Secondly Kautsky, defending the existing principles against detraction and amendment. Finally, Rosa Luxemburg, to whom

¹ Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1962, No. 4(20), p. 181.

² See Matthias, 'Kautsky', p. 171; also below, p. 429.



(a) Karl Kautsky



(b) Luise Kautsky



(a) Leo (Lev) Jogiches, probably
before 1889



(b) Leo Jogiches as a student in
Switzerland, between 1890 and 1898

the principles were a means of keeping tactics revolutionary, but who subordinated the choice of tactics to strict conformity with Marxist principles. She occupied an intermediate position between Kautsky and Parvus—intermediate and at the same time all-embracing. In fact, only her ideas were capable of providing a bridge between the active revolutionary spirit of Parvus and Kautsky's attachment to Marxist theory. Rosa Luxemburg thus played a vital role in the revisionist controversy, as the hinge on which the intellectual alliance against revisionism could turn. She provided the means of joining the executive's practical campaign against the revisionists to Kautsky's championship of theory. Her analysis was the only one broad enough to contain both the supremacy of theory and its critical confrontation with tactics. It is significant that Parvus soon lost interest in the whole dreary business and renounced all participation, while Rosa Luxemburg remained in the forefront of the controversy until the Russian revolution of 1905.

How did the abstract and limited elaboration of *tactics*—as opposed to theory—in *Social Reform or Revolution* come to provide a basis for the practical concerns of the executive after 1899? Or to put the question more precisely, how was Rosa Luxemburg able to develop her formulations to cover the many aspects of revisionist practice which she examined in such detail in the next few years? On the face of it, *Social Reform or Revolution* could easily have led to a defence of theory for its own sake, much like Karl Kautsky's. The link between theory and practice, the nexus which contained and coloured the daily political routine and rescued it from mere abstract subordination to the final goal, was the doctrine of class consciousness. Through it the meaninglessness of Sisyphus was allocated a vital role which enabled the executive to use and quote Rosa Luxemburg with complete approval for the next six years.

The notion of class consciousness was of course not invented by Rosa Luxemburg. It springs from Marx's own analysis of knowledge and dialectic. Already half-way through the nineteenth century it had become the main justification for his political activities. Rosa Luxemburg was therefore not original in her reliance on class consciousness. She never explained it, since it was already known to be an essential part of the process for creating

the conditions for revolution, a process to which the SPD was fully committed. In bringing it to the fore in the revisionist debate she was merely reiterating the fundamental necessities of the class struggle against the attempt to 'revise' it. By questioning the final aim of revolution, Bernstein was incidentally destroying the very need for any separate proletarian class consciousness and reducing it to the level of a narrow and sectional interest. Class consciousness was an integral part of the doctrine of totality; revisionism—here as in other things—broke up the totality into self-sufficient, limited, and therefore meaningless purposes—meaningless, that is, in terms of a general class confrontation.

Once we get away from the exclusive preoccupation with the improvement of the immediate situation of the workers—the need for which is common as much to the traditional purpose of the party as to the purpose of the revisionists—the entire difference becomes this: according to the traditional conception the Socialist purpose of trade-union and political struggle consists in preparing the proletariat for social upheaval, i.e. emphasis on the subjective factor. According to Bernstein the purpose of trade-union and political struggle consists in limiting capitalist exploitation, in robbing capitalist society increasingly of its capitalist nature and impressing a Socialist character upon it, i.e. to bring about the social upheaval in an objective sense. . . . In the traditional conception the trade-union and political struggle brings the proletariat to realize that it is impossible to alter its situation through such a struggle . . . and convinces it of the inevitability of its final seizure of political power. In Bernstein's conception we start with the importance of seizing political power in order to achieve a Socialist order as a result of the trade-union and political struggle.¹

Social Reform or Revolution, the product of a brilliant 28-year-old intellectual, bristled with such Talmudic subtleties encased in Hegelian splints. Such a progression of paradoxes, or driving the implications of any polemic to their extremes and then confronting the extremes with teeth bared, was always to be Rosa Luxemburg's method of argument *par excellence*. She had the opportunity to use it to the full only in those few 'basic' writings in which she was able to survey the entire field of debate, instead of concentrating on particular aspects. *Social Reform or Revolution*, the Mass Strike pamphlet of 1906, the *Russian Revolution*, to a lesser extent her polemic with Lenin in 1903, and *The Accumula-*

¹ *Collected Works*, Vol. III, pp. 61–62.

tion of Capital, were all exercises in dialectic summitry, in which the reader is perforce led to the highest mountain, the world divided into peaks and dark valleys with no flat resting places in between. Nowhere was this tendency more pronounced than in *Social Reform or Revolution*. Rosa Luxemburg, fresh from the absolutes of émigré Polish politics in Switzerland, had not yet had to compromise with reality, with tactical requirements; for some years she was to treat every single tactical problem in such absolute terms. This explains many of the minor absurdities in her analysis of current affairs. Such facile intellectual extremism was a symptom of the whole revisionist debate which affected not only Rosa but most of the other orthodox defenders. It was ultimately to ruin Kautsky and help ruin the SPD. Rosa Luxemburg escaped from it after 1905 when the Russian revolution luridly lit up the flush of intellectual self-sufficiency in the SPD; she veered away sharply. With her new understanding, she even analysed the phenomenon of intellectual rigidity as the product of shapeless opportunism; a formless jelly at one end of the political scale often caused cramps at the other—a metaphor with which she illuminated French, Russian, and also German conditions.

Rosa Luxemburg continued her analysis of developing class consciousness as the main purpose of Socialist tactics as follows: 'The great Socialist importance of the trade-union and political struggle consists in *socializing the knowledge*, the *consciousness of the proletariat*, in organizing it as a class.'¹ This sentence contained the essential sociology of Marx and its particular implications for that time in Germany; the practical activities of Social Democracy, far from achieving any positive or objective results, could only serve to introduce a Socialist reality into the vacuum of alienation. 'Knowledge' (*Erkenntnis*) is the Marx-Weber term on which rests the entire modern sociological theory of knowledge; its use in this context was clearly intended to convey a frictional process of intervention in the mental vacuum of a proletariat oppressed by objective circumstances, unable as yet to appreciate the subjective requirements of its class interests.

It is at this point that we reach a fundamental statement about the nature of the class struggle which has been missed by most commentators. Here, for instance, was the real difference between her analysis and that of Lenin—which has usually been looked for

¹ Ibid., p. 62. My italics.

in the polemics about organization in 1903.¹ For these polemics, in spite of the rhythmic downbeat of 'first principles' throughout, were really concerned with derived phenomena rather than fundamentals. Both sides plugged their conflicting views about party *organization*; both sides insisted that the purpose of the party must be the creation and representation of proletarian class consciousness. But in *Social Reform or Revolution* Rosa Luxemburg went further than this. It was not the *existence* of the party—and even the best organization was only a manifestation of its existence, not a substitute—which helped to foster class consciousness, but the *frictions* from contact with society arising out of the tactical activities in trade-union and political work. Lenin, however, specifically denied the creative function of such conflict. In order to ram home the imperativeness of his organizational ideas, he claimed that trade-union and political activity could reproduce only a hollow echo of bourgeois consciousness in the working class—in other words a false and corrupt class consciousness.² Though the issue never arose clearly between them, they differed over the meaning and effect of alienation. The concept as such was not familiar or interesting to Lenin, and he saw the problem as a simple one: either revolutionary proletarian class consciousness or bourgeois infiltration, without any intermediate stage of 'emptiness'.³ Rosa Luxemburg's notion of a vacuum, for which the two alternatives competed, as it were, provided a more sophisticated version of Marx's doctrine of alienation. It allowed for the existence of self-instruction resulting from the small-change of Socialist activities, the legal aspect of the struggle which existed in Germany but could hardly exist in Russia. Instead of assuming a closed circuit in which only ruthless injection of proletarian principles under pressure could ever displace bourgeois consciousness, Rosa Luxemburg assumed an open-ended situation in which the routine activities necessarily had their effect and the problem resolved

¹ For this, see below, pp. 286-94.

² Lenin, 'What is to be done?', *Sochineniya*, Vol. V, pp. 368-409, 442 ff.

³ The secondary or incidental importance of the theory of cognition and class consciousness for Lenin is curiously illuminated by the hesitation and blank stares with which Communist theoreticians meet the question of Lenin's views on this problem. It was all tributary to his overriding interest in organization. Whenever he could he seized the opportunity of elaborating his organizational ideas and reasons in their most direct form, unburdened by philosophical speculation. See 'Letter to a comrade about our organizational tasks', *Sochineniya*, Vol. VI, pp. 207-24.

itself into one of *purpose*, i.e. the relationship between tactics and final goal; 'why' rather than 'how'. Only a deliberate misinterpretation of tactics *à la* Bernstein could cause the creation of a false bourgeois class consciousness; left to themselves (to the established principles of the party), daily activities must create correct class values. Lenin was innovating and already substituting; Rosa Luxemburg was rescuing existing and traditional analyses.

The organizational differences between them are thus secondary, derived. So, to a lesser extent, is the problem of the party's role. The heart of their disagreement concerns the interpretation of developing class consciousness, with Rosa Luxemburg seeing this as a growing, dynamic process which could only be diverted—and it was her job to see that it was not; a defensive role. Lenin believed in a critical minimum-effort thesis, not unlike modern views about economic development and take-off; efforts less than the critical minimum must return the system to bourgeois equilibrium and stagnation. The effort could be made only by discipline and self-conscious assertion; any other notion of 'growth' was mere illusion.

Once more it will be obvious that the different conceptions of Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin, here as elsewhere, arose out of the totally different circumstances absorbing their attention. A Leninist conception in Germany would have reduced tactical activities to pointless, carefully manipulated jerking at the periphery—Sisyphus indeed, but without the saving grace of growing class education and consciousness. If Rosa Luxemburg was bitterly attacked for subordinating tactical activities to the final goal, then Lenin, who denied their value even for this purpose, could not have survived at all. Even in 1904, when the two views were confronted, Rosa Luxemburg argued for the universality of the German concept against Lenin defending—without any claims for universality—a purely Russian concept. It was this that gave their debate an unreal air, a confusion increased by the insistence of both participants, but especially Rosa Luxemburg, on talking about first principles and so making the argument universally valid instead of limiting it to particular circumstances. It is as wrong to blame Rosa Luxemburg for an incorrect analysis of German conditions as it was for her to offer a German analysis for Russian conditions—even though the events of 1905/1906 in

Russia were to prove Rosa Luxemburg right and Lenin largely wrong, while 1917 would prove the opposite.

Rosa Luxemburg's analysis of class consciousness as a product of friction adumbrated a theory of action which was only to be developed a decade later. The hint in the one sentence quoted above was elaborated a few pages later:

Clearly the traditional Social-Democratic tactic does not consist of *sitting down and waiting* for the development of contradictions in capitalist society to their final point, followed by their dialectic resolution. On the contrary, once the direction is recognized, we only base ourselves on it [in theory] but use the political struggle to develop these contradictions as much as possible, this being the very nature of every revolutionary tactic.¹

It is an odd paradox that, finding herself on the side of the majority in the SPD for the next few years, the implications of action as the creative factor of subjective class consciousness was largely lost in a welter of tactical debates and victories which led inexorably into a blind alley of immobility and self-satisfaction. If Rosa Luxemburg and Parvus had remained the extreme outsiders which they were at the beginning of the revisionist controversy in 1898, if the executive had turned against them in substance and supported Bernstein, the radical doctrine of action which Rosa Luxemburg developed after 1907 would probably have emerged much earlier. It was to be essentially the product of opposition to the would-be powers in the SPD, but could not emerge as long as she fought alongside the executive against the revisionists. We shall later examine the nature and implications of this alliance between Rosa Luxemburg, Kautsky, and the executive.

Unlike Kautsky, who always considered theoretical analysis in general and his own work in particular as filling a permanent need—or vacuum—in the minds of the proletariat, Rosa Luxemburg was well aware that in practice this vacuum was largely an arbitrary postulate and not a reality. Writing could never be a means of social education. She was as conscious as Lenin of the possibilities and dangers of perversion. Wrong tactics *à la* Bernstein would also produce a type of class consciousness in the proletariat, but a wrong one. As with Lenin, the alternatives were proletarian class consciousness versus bourgeois class consciousness. What

¹ *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 64. My italics.

Parvus *felt* as *embourgeoisement*, Rosa Luxemburg analysed at some length and with much evidence as a substitution of bourgeois values for proletarian values. To do this, it was necessary to show that Bernstein's ideas were not a different version of Socialism but straight bourgeois policy which had nothing to do with Socialism at all. And this in fact was the main purpose of her critique. Towards the end of *Social Reform or Revolution* Rosa Luxemburg clearly outlined the issue at stake.

By letting off his sharpest arrows against the dialectic, what does Bernstein do but take issue with the specific mode of thought of the rising and class conscious proletariat? He attacks the very weapon which hitherto has helped the proletariat to break through the mists of its historical future, the mental weapon with which, economically still in chains, it has already defeated the *bourgeoisie* by recognizing its transitory nature and with which it has already carried out its revolution in the sphere of theoretical comprehension by recognizing the inevitability of its own victory. By saying goodbye to the dialectic and placing himself on the see-saw of 'on the one hand'—'on the other hand', 'if'—'but', 'more'—'less', he necessarily accepts the historically limited conception of the doomed *bourgeoisie*, a conception which accurately reflects the *bourgeoisie's* social existence and political activities. . . . The endless qualifications and alternatives of today's *bourgeoisie* are exactly like Bernstein's quality of thinking and the latter is nothing but the most refined and accurate symptom of a bourgeois consciousness.¹

With increasing sharpness, Bernstein and other purveyors of opportunism were attacked not so much for their 'wrong' tactics as such (though these, too, were attacked, as we shall see), but as carriers of the bourgeois virus into the Socialist camp. Faced with the need to defend Social Democracy against an enemy who possessed such a substantial Fifth Column—and its real extent was only to emerge frighteningly in the next few years—all thought of an advancing tactic had to go by the board as long as the internal front was not secured. This was why the 'action' doctrine as a means of sharpening class conflict and thereby hastening the revolution was left hanging in the air at the time; a mere hint which could only be brought back into the sphere of practical immediacy, and developed, once the rescue operation was completed.

Having right from the start exposed Bernstein's theories as an infiltration of bourgeois values in Socialist fancy dress, Rosa

¹ *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 95.

Luxemburg soon discovered the secret transport route—and a fat nest of smugglers for good measure. The link with Bernstein had no longer to be proved, but was obvious for all to see. There were at this time a group of radical and progressive bourgeois theorists—academic social scientists, mostly—who, while strongly denying the validity of Marxism, none the less accepted the need for substantial concessions by society to the working class. These prophets of social integration were Bernstein's link. They manned one end of the bridge in society while Bernstein manned the other in the Socialist camp. Like Bernstein, they were anxious to overcome the dialectic, to deny class conflict; they urged concessions on the government in much the same way that Bernstein urged concessions on the doctrinaires of the SPD. This complementarity was seized upon by Rosa Luxemburg.

Suddenly, all these good people, whose paid profession it is to combat Social Democracy with their theories from the lecture platform, found themselves, to their astonishment, transplanted into the middle of the Socialist camp. In Bernstein's theories—and those of his supporters—the platform Socialists, the 'subjectivists' who had lived, died and rotted away with their long and useless talk, who had buried themselves in words, suddenly found a new lease of life. . . .¹

The more sophisticated and emphatic the plea for collaboration and social harmony, the more violent Rosa Luxemburg's denunciation. In a way, *Kathedersozialisten* (academic Socialists) like Schmoller, Sombart, Roscher, Konrad Schmidt, and Böhm-Bawerk were even more dangerous than Bernstein. They were outside Socialist jurisdiction and therefore could not be disciplined by expulsion which, it must be remembered, was still Rosa Luxemburg's final solution to the revisionist problem—at least until the end of 1899. If we think of bourgeois society and Social Democracy as two armed camps, then the siren sound of these academics was doubly dangerous since it came from society's camp; many misguided Social Democrats who would have shrugged Bernstein off as hopelessly utopian might well change their minds if they saw him supported and to that extent validated by sympathetic echoes from the other side. A steady tradition in the SPD had always maintained that the antithesis between Socialism and society was due as much to the latter's rejection

¹ 'Hohle Nüsse', *LV*, 22 July 1899; *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 215.

and expulsion of the former as to any dialectic necessity.¹ Thus Rosa Luxemburg reached heights of bitterness and satire in her attack on Professor Werner Sombart which far exceeded anything she wrote against the revisionists themselves. She naturally considered Sombart's approval of working-class claims on society as nothing more than a ruse—and so it was. For the attempt to reward labour—as represented by the trade unions—was contingent upon labour's rejection of Social Democracy.

Here we have the whole secret of the 'correct', 'realistic', 'historical' method. To fight against Social Democracy, to refute its programme?—Goodness no, how unmodern, how unrealistic, how unhistorical! Instead, precisely to accept the working-class movement, the trade unions and Social Democracy as well as class warfare and even the final revolutionary goal; to accept everything! Only—to give the trade unions a basis *in their own interest*, which is necessarily in contradiction to Social Democracy, to civilize Social Democracy *in its own interest* into a national Socialist party. . . . In a word, to break the neck of the class struggle in the interests of the class struggle—that is the secret!²

Rosa Luxemburg's whole article was a savage validation of Social Democracy in theory and in practice. Sombart's attack on Socialist agitators as an unnecessary luxury which the working class could well afford to discard in its own best interests, was answered in the most personal terms—as though Rosa Luxemburg were the incarnation of all agitators.

'How repellent, how wounding, how coarse' the tone of discussion in which they engage. So, Mr. Associate Professor, you want to rid the working classes of their 'caricatures' or 'political agitators'? And whom, pray, do you mean by this exactly? Is it the countless canvassers of Social Democracy that you have in mind, those lazy devils whose prison sentences under the anti-Socialist legislation added up to a millennium? How dare you, you economic scribbler, spending your whole life in the security of the academic lecture and drawing-room!

Or do you perhaps have in mind the modest editors of our small provincial papers, the people who address our meetings, who have worked themselves up from their proletarian origin with untold efforts,

¹ For an elaboration of this view for foreign consumption, see Theodor Barth, 'Kaiser Wilhelm II und die Sozialdemokratie', *Cosmopolis*, (London), Vol. I (1896), No. 3, p. 873.

² Rosa Luxemburg, 'Die Deutsche Wissenschaft hinter den Arbeitern', *NZ*, 1899/1900, Vol. II, pp. 740, 773; *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 237. The pamphlet under review and attack was Werner Sombart's *Dennoch. Aus Theorie und Geschichte der gewerkschaftlichen Arbeiterbewegung*, Jena 1900.

who have struggled to possess every ounce of knowledge and who through their own efforts have become apostles of the great doctrine of freedom? Are these the 'weak-minded, irresponsible firebrands' to whom you refer? You yourself are an irresponsible firebrand, fed since youth on the lukewarm platitudes and tautologies of so-called German science in order that one day, with the help of God and of right-thinking people, you might actually become a full Professor instead of merely an associate!

Or is it our countless and nameless canvassers, risking their very existence and that of their families at every moment, who never weaken in their unrewarding work to instruct and enthuse the masses, who bring them a hundred and thousand times the old and ever new words of our Socialist faith—are these your 'caricatures of political agitators'? . . . You miserable caricature of a Lassalle, who can do no more than stammer like a parrot the ancient litany of bourgeois economics and the even older saws about the danger of Social Democracy! You dare not even shout your doctrine from the roof tops, but lisp and defame and sink your poison into the masses by counting on their *naïveté* and good nature.¹

For, contrary to the claims of the *Kathedersozialisten* to be a real opposition to government policy, they were no more than the velvet glove occasionally but cynically pulled over the iron fist.

The German social scientists have always functioned as an extension of the police. While the latter act against Social Democracy with rubber truncheons, the former work with the weapons of the intellect . . . first by stupefying public opinion with the production of pot-bellied professorial wisdom . . . then through polemics and slanders against Marx and his pupils, finally by creating a special bourgeois/Socialist concoction called academic wisdom.²

Again and again Rosa Luxemburg left the internal preoccupations of the SPD to lash out at those she considered the manufacturers of Bernstein's ideas. A special place in her pantheon of hatred was always reserved for social scientists in general and German social scientists in particular. There was first the established tradition of contempt of the positive doctrinaire for the neutral social scientists which Georges Sorel expressed so concisely: 'Autre chose est faire de la science sociale et autre chose est former les consciences.' Then there was the particular poverty of the German academic contribution, with its arid formulations divorced from real life—the sort of thing taught by Julius Wolf.

¹ *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 237.

² *Loc. cit.*

It is no accident that Italy was the cradle of mercantilism, France of the school of Physiocrats, England produced the classic thinking on international trade, while Germany is the birth-place of the 'historical' school of Political Economy. Whereas these other great systems of national economy led and inspired the practical policy of the rising *bourgeoisie* with their broad ideas, it was precisely the fate of the German 'national' economists to furnish weapons to the bourgeois-feudal block against the rising working class.¹

After 1906 Rosa Luxemburg was to contrast this with the social analysis provided by Russian literature—in favour of the latter.

But most significant of all was perhaps the paralysing feeling of intellectual inferiority which pervaded German Social Democracy—and which psychologically helped to produce the frenetic tone of aggression. The Second International had hardly any established academics in its ranks. A few, like Sombart, came close to Marxism but sheared off at the last moment. There was no German Labriola. The role of academic spokesman had therefore to be taken over by people like Rosa Luxemburg and Franz Mehring, academically qualified but not academically established. The SPD was quite content to leave its intellectual defence in their hands.

But in spite of the violent rejection of the political and social doctrines of the *Kathedersozialisten*, the personal attitude of Socialist theorists always remained somewhat equivocal. Mehring, in an outburst typical of the man, accompanied Rosa Luxemburg's polemic against Sombart with the following notice.

In the pamphlet of Professor Sombart, reviewed by Comrade Luxemburg, the Associate Professor mentions that I did not fulfil a promise made several months before, to take him up on his flirtation with the trade unions. He is quite right. Urgent party work, which came to me unexpectedly, a long absence from Berlin, made it impossible for the time being, and when, after my return, I wanted to get on with it, Kautsky told me that Comrade Luxemburg had meantime taken pity on the Associate. Comrade Luxemburg was kind enough to show me her manuscript, and since I found in it everything which I wanted to say, only said far more competently, I shall but humbly request the Associate to accept her review also as fulfilment of my own promise. . . .²

But this was not simply an outright rejection of academics and their peculiar values. One of the greatest moments in Mehring's

¹ 'Im Rate der Gelehrten', *NZ*, 1903/1904, Vol. I, p. 5; *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 249.

² *NZ*, 1899/1900, Vol. II, p. 782.

life was the arrival in Berlin of a formal letter of appointment to honorary membership of the Soviet Socialist Academy of Social Sciences in September 1918.¹ Kautsky never made it—in East or West. But in his later life he was particularly flattered by emphasis on his reputation as an intellectual. ‘In my eyes you belong to the paladins of the new era of proletarian liberation.’² The only one to resist this temptation completely was Rosa Luxemburg. She rigidly rejected all academic recognition and preserved her hatred of intellectuals (*Gelehrte*) all her life. Throughout her debate with Kautsky in 1910 there ran an undercurrent of the revolt of the practitioner of politics against the theoretical emasculator.

We may think of the SPD at the time of the revisionist controversy, therefore, as a fortress beleaguered by a hostile society. Suddenly an important Fifth Column was discovered, partly innocent carriers of a virus, partly deliberate purveyors of the enemy’s ideas. To start with, an effort was made to distinguish between these two types. Rosa Luxemburg soon recognized Bernstein as a deliberate Fifth Columnist—after all, he had chosen to elaborate his seditious doctrine at great length and with considerable subtlety. For him, expulsion—in the first edition of *Social Reform or Revolution* a clear and unmistakable appeal was made to the party to evict Bernstein if he would not himself recognize that he belonged to the other camp and depart on his own.³ Others like Heine and Schippel were treated to an exposition of the possibly unintentional consequences of their views, and merely warned.

While the cleaning-up operation inside the fortress was being carried out, sorties against the enemy outside were out of the question. The weapons of offence were put into cold storage. In order to succeed in mopping up the internal enemy, it was necessary to put the citizenry on its guard, and this led to the public witch-hunt against revisionism which Rosa Luxemburg conducted with such vigour for the next few years. Since, moreover, the

¹ Decree of the All-Russian Central Executive of the RSFSR, dated 25 June 1918; quoted in letter of the Presidium of the Academy, 2 September 1918, facsimile No. 3 in J. Schleifstein, *Mehring*, Berlin (East) 1959.

² Ignacy Daszyński to Karl Kautsky, 28 October 1924, IISH Archives, D VII, 336.

³ *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 100.

proletariat was an international concern—the international aspect always preoccupied Rosa Luxemburg—the lessons of the domestic diagnosis were carried post-haste to other beleaguered fortresses in France, Belgium, and elsewhere, all equally sick with the enemy's virus of opportunism. In Polish Socialism the German experience made it that much easier to put the old enemy, the PPS, into quarantine with the same disease; no longer a particular enemy, but the local representative of the world-wide foe. But Rosa Luxemburg's main battles were still to be fought primarily in Germany, at least until 1903 when the citizens' delegates assembled at the party congress finally saw and heard the last of the lepers routed—or so it seemed. As in all beleaguered fortresses, the need for physical survival had to take precedence over civilized comforts like freedom of speech.

As in every political party freedom to criticize our way of life must have a definite limit. That which is the very basis of our existence, the class struggle, cannot be the subject of 'free criticism'. We cannot commit suicide in the name of freedom to criticize. Opportunism, as Bebel has said, breaks our backbone, nothing less.¹

The Practice of Revisionism

Rosa Luxemburg's analysis of revisionist practice fell into two categories. The first and more important was its relation to class consciousness. This hinged, not on a variable of more class consciousness or less, but on the dichotomy of tending to *proletarian* or *bourgeois* class consciousness. The definition between them was absolute; not of degree but of kind. The second and less important category was concerned with judging the merit of any action by its practical results; the measure of efficiency. This was a polar variable of degree. We shall examine them in turn.

(a) *Tactics and class consciousness.* Almost every discussion of tactics raised by the revisionist controversy was at once traced as a pattern in the magnetic field of class consciousness. In Germany two examples are of particular interest. First, the problem of elections for the *Reichstag* which was to prove the test and breaking-point of the SPD's role as a revolutionary or reformist party.² Participation in elections, particularly with the system of the second ballot existing in Germany, raised the problem of temporary

¹ *LV*, 14 September 1899, quoted in *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 175.

² See below, pp. 451–4, 457–8, 518.

alliances and coalitions on every electoral occasion.¹ This gave tactical considerations a preponderant importance at certain times, and opened the door to a whole 'style' of politics very different from the SPD's traditional negative disdain. Elections were the party's Achilles' heel. Sensing this, Rosa Luxemburg uncompromisingly relegated the process of election—and indeed all activities in the *Reichstag*—to their primeval educational roles. This was the old (i.e. the correct) interpretation, corroded only by recent revisionist practices.

The old tradition of the party is disrupted. Not *mandates* but *education* has hitherto been the main object, and where Social Democrats voted for middle-class candidates in any second ballot it was a question of strengthening opposition. In Bavaria, however, [the pact] helped the most reactionary and dishonest of parties to obtain an absolute majority . . . all manifestations of opportunism have in common *the simple attainment of immediate daily success at any cost*. . . .²

To the many implicit and open challenges against such a restrictive interpretation of Socialist members' freedom of action in the *Reichstag*, she replied head-on that their activities could have no other meaning within the walls of this 'talking shop'. Every speech, every gesture, every vote, had to be aimed at the masses outside. Socialist words spoken in the *Reichstag* must carry through the window—hence the well-established phrase 'durch das Fenster reden'. How alien this was to the reality of institutional common sense which pervaded the growing contingent of Socialist *Reichstag* deputies can most vividly be seen by the reaction of his colleagues to Karl Liebknecht, who tried to carry out this prescription literally. They thought he had gone mad.³

Even before the question became acute on a national scale—and this happened only after 1912 when the SPD became the largest party in the *Reichstag*—it had already arisen as an obstinate local problem in south Germany. Here Social-Democratic participation

¹ Under this electoral system, one or two polls took place in each constituency. If no absolute majority was obtained by any candidate on the first vote, a second or run-off poll was taken a short time afterwards. This naturally gave the parties a chance to make arrangements by which those candidates who had no chance at all stood down in favour of the lesser evil. Thus a Progressive candidate might stand down in favour of a National Liberal in order to keep out the Conservative on the second vote.

² *LV*, 30 August 1899, reporting Rosa Luxemburg's speech in Leipzig on 29 August. My italics.

³ See below, pp. 643–4.

in the work of the state legislatures had always been greater than in the north. There was an established tradition of co-operation and participation by the SPD in communal affairs, with the SPD providing its electoral quota of local government officials. Hence the plea for the recognition of special conditions in the south, which the party was expected to accept, instead of generalizing about revisionism. Again Rosa Luxemburg met the argument head-on. She repeatedly denounced not only Social-Democratic participation as such, but the entire validity of special conditions. In this she was at first almost alone. Even Parvus accepted their existence, though he intended to use them for revolutionary purposes quite different from those of the participants.¹ For Rosa, the very claim for special conditions was already a symptom of opportunism, which could only result in bogging down the party spirit. She was continuously under personal attack from the south for failing to recognize what was plain for all to see; a current of implacable and personal hostility, like that of the PPS, which she never sloughed off.

For, whether justified or not, the famous special conditions did exist in the south. In all the thunder about discipline, unity, and cohesion put out by the executive after 1901, the analytical problem was swept aside, and never settled. On the surface Rosa Luxemburg had the last laugh when in 1910-11 she was able to document the complementary nature of the 'exciting new vistas' after the coming *Reichstag* elections and the old but often condemned practice in the south.² But it was this same laugh which turned sour when the logic of objective complementarity finally imposed itself on universal consciousness at the outbreak of war. For by this time the objective conditions had become much the same in north and south; but instead of leading to a reappraisal of party policy, it led to the acceptance of the situation in practice.

The second example was the long debate over Socialist participation in bourgeois government, brought to the fore by the Millerand case in France. This, too, Rosa Luxemburg treated throughout as a question of first principles.

In any case we are not concerned with judging the special case of the Waldeck-Rousseau cabinet, but with the establishment of broad rules. From this point of view the entry of a Socialist into bourgeois govern-

¹ See above, pp. 218 ff.

² For this, see below, pp. 438-40.

ment must be seen as an experiment that can only harm the class struggle. In bourgeois society Social Democracy is confined by definition to the role of an opposition party; it can only appear as a ruling party on the ruins of that bourgeois society.¹

This led to cross-referencing between France and Germany: since revisionism in Germany (except in the south) had been confined to words and intentions but in France had found startling application in practice, Rosa Luxemburg was led to conclude that France was to that extent behind Germany in the order of historical development.

In Germany we have just defeated—after a thorough difference of opinion—an attempt to destroy the balance between final aims and present movement, at the expense of the final aims. In France, through the union of the radical elements [in Socialism] the balance [between final aims and present purposes] has only just been established for the first time all along the line.²

But this exercise in comparative political sociology led her into a desert of abstract misinterpretations. She who loved France and knew the value of French revolutionary achievements, paradoxically was now obliged to demonstrate at great length the proposition that these achievements were partly mythical, that the French Republic was less 'advanced' than imperial Germany. This in turn meant denigrating the victory against reaction in the Dreyfus affair as ephemeral and meaningless—in direct contradiction to earlier analysis of the 'affair' undertaken before the strait-jacket of revisionism had descended on her perceptions.³

Rosa Luxemburg's writings on France from 1898 to 1901 are among the least creditable and informative of all her work. 'Five years of experiments [such as Jaurès's dickering with the radicals and Millerand's participation in government] and the French working class will have been corrupted to the bone . . . the perfect tool for every bourgeois social revisionist, opportunist, and

¹ 'Eine taktische Frage', *LV*, 6 July 1899, quoted in *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 273.

² 'Die Sozialistische Krise in Frankreich', *NZ*, 1900/1901, Vol. II, pp. 495, 516, 548, 619, 676; quoted in *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 282. The French 'radical union' was the attempted fusion of Vaillant's *Parti Socialiste-révolutionnaire* and Guesde's *Parti Ouvrier français* with Jaurès's *Parti Socialiste français* at Japy in the summer of 1899. The union never got under way; left and right split again almost at once.

³ Cf. 'Die Sozialistische Krise in Frankreich', written in 1900, with the series in *SAZ* in 1898, particularly 9 August, 18 August, 13 September.

(a) Rosa Luxemburg,
Warsaw 1906



(b) Leo Jogiches,
Warsaw 1906



(c) Feliks Dzierżyński,
date unknown



Police Identification Photographs



Henriette Roland-Holst, pencil sketch 1898

all those who flirt with Caesarism', she complained bitterly in 1901.¹ French Socialist attempts to achieve unity met with impossibly rigid demands worthy of Lenin at his most extreme. If Jaurès, on behalf of the much larger group, had accepted the conditions for unity stipulated by Vaillant and Guesde, Socialist unity could have been instantly achieved²—the same shotgun unity which Plekhanov described as 'the way a man desires to be united with a piece of bread, by swallowing it'.³

She carved through the plea of special conditions with the same imperative negation as in the case of the south Germans: 'In vain we [in Germany] continue to look for anything significant to the country of "great experience".'⁴ The revolutionary experience of France was, for present purposes, valueless; the new methods of which Jaurès was so proud were not new but old, and certainly out-dated.

He merely repeats monotonously the great slogans of the halcyon days of the Dreyfus affair . . . Jaurès's melodies remind you of Verdi's good old arias, which flow from the lips of every black-eyed and happy apprentice in sunny Italy . . . but which now grind out in distressing monotony like the lifeless mechanism of a barrel-organ. *T'empi passati!* And the organ-grinder himself looks on, bored and disinterested; it is only the practised hand which turns the handle; his heart is not in it.⁵

The contradictions are easy to see. If Jaurès's new methods were in fact ancient, then revisionism, of which they were a symptom, must be ancient too; in which case the plea for a return to the established and hitherto unchallenged principles of Social Democracy became meaningless. Similarly, if the Dreyfus affair was merely an internecine quarrel in the capitalist camp in which Socialists were not required to participate, then it was impossible to blame Jaurès for inconsistency—for he, too, was interested in

¹ 'Zum französischen Einigungskongress', *NZ*, 1901/1902, Vol. I, p. 202, quoted in *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 355.

² 'Nach dem Kongress', *NZ*, 1901/1902, Vol. I, p. 299, quoted in *Collected Works*, Vol. III, pp. 362-3.

³ Quoted by Bertram D. Wolfe, *Three who made a Revolution*, New York 1948, p. 611.

⁴ 'Der Abschluss der sozialistischen Krise in Frankreich', *NZ*, 1901/1902, Vol. II, pp. 710, 751, quoted in *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 366.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 375. For 'Jaurès's melodies' see his speech (and Guesde's reply) made in Lille in October 1900, reprinted in 'Les deux méthodes', *Œuvres*, Vol. VI, pp. 189-217.

the continuation of his policy and did not consider it superseded merely because the immediacies of the Dreyfus affair had been settled. Occasionally there were flashes of reality in Rosa's analysis: when she admitted, for instance, that the rigid attitudes of the most 'Marxist' group in France, led by Jules Guesde, far from being an ideal, were a distorted compensation for the opportunism of Jaurès and the right wing. This analysis of left-wing rigidity and extremism as an excusable reaction to opportunism was new—and Rosa Luxemburg made a general hypothesis out of it, using it later to explain Bolshevik intransigence as the product of Menshevik opportunism.¹ But these were rare glimpses. On the whole, the elaborate treatment of French affairs, starting with the Dreyfus affair right through the Millerand case to the Amsterdam International congress of 1904, was a sad example of the isolation and unreality induced by the towering earthworks thrown up by German Social Democracy as the result of the revisionist controversy. The same criticism applies equally to her treatment of Belgium.²

Class consciousness thus assumed for Rosa Luxemburg the nature of a special intellectual prison, a glass house in which no stone might be thrown. The notion was so central for her thinking that she built it up into a vast intellectual structure, at once all-embracing and at the same time very fragile. Part of its universality consisted in the demolition of all 'special conditions', of all the unique elements in the history of different societies. Class consciousness, far from being a house with many mansions, became one vast international waiting-room in the best nineteenth-century railway style, from which all trains departed for the same destination. Yet the architecture was unmistakably German. Though Rosa made every effort to make the French feel at home, peripheral visitors like the English were given short shrift. After 1899 Rosa Luxemburg wasted no more time on demolishing the special conditions of the United Kingdom, but wrote off the English as irrelevant. The long effort to save the French, however, seemed well justified when in 1904 the International congress at last prescribed the German style as obligatory for all countries, and for France in particular.

At Amsterdam in 1904 official French and German views confronted each other in a vast public joust, with the contestants

¹ See below, pp. 555–6.

² See below, pp. 243 ff.

stripped down to first principles. Rosa Luxemburg presented the German case in much the same terms as Kautsky.

Jaurès warns us not to lay down general tactical rules, which no one anyhow will keep to . . . but what else can we do? If we don't do this, what point do our congresses have and our international solidarity? . . . If a Socialist minister cannot impose his basic principles in a bourgeois government, he must resign; if a revolutionary must deny his basic principles, honour demands that he must leave the revolutionary movement. . . . I don't want Renaudel's [compromise] unity; the splintering [of the French parties] is regrettable, but it exists. And nothing is more revolutionary than to recognize and declare what *is*, in accordance with the advice of the great Lassalle. . . .¹

Their whole case was based on an implicit refusal to make any concessions to the particular problems of France, or to admit that such problems existed. Jaurès's plea for Social-Democratic participation in the polity was treated exactly as Bernstein's plea had been treated in Germany six years earlier. In fact—and by arrangement—it was Jules Guesde who placed before the International congress a motion which was an exact replica of that adopted by the German party at Dresden the year before—the motion which the congress adopted. 'Social Democracy . . . cannot aim at participation in governmental power within capitalist society. The congress furthermore condemns any attempt to disguise existing class conflict in order to facilitate support of bourgeois parties.'²

Later Rosa Luxemburg summed up the successful work of the congress with a clear reminder of the correlation between all the problems of Socialist unity in France and the role of Social Democracy in society—a correlation called working-class consciousness.

The exaggerated illusions created in the working classes by Jaurès's policy of fine phrases naturally led to an opposite reaction . . . a considerable number of French workers have turned their backs not only on Jaurès, but on parliament and politics as a whole. . . . These are the fruits of Jaurès's attempt to rescue parliamentarianism; an increasing disgust among the people for every parliamentary action, accom-

¹ *Protokoll, Internationaler Sozialistenkongress zu Amsterdam . . . 1904*, p. 73.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

panied by a return to anarchism; in one word, the creation of really great danger for the very *existence* of parliament, and of the republic as a whole. In Germany such deviations of Socialist practice from the basis of the class struggle are, in present conditions, happily unthinkable.¹

But in her satisfaction Rosa Luxemburg once more overreached herself intellectually. In her review of the issues settled at Amsterdam she *condemned* Jaurès's action, not only as leading to bourgeois penetration of the proletariat, but also for the opposite effect, the disgust of the workers with parliament and politics. This was labelled anarchism—but could it not equally suggest that working-class consciousness was stronger than any opportunism on the part of the leaders? Was not 'disgust for every parliamentary action' precisely what Rosa Luxemburg was preaching in Germany as a necessary pre-condition for safe Social-Democrat tactics—in fact the whole point of Socialist agitation against bourgeois institutions? Her problem was balanced on a razor's edge: between contempt for bourgeois institutions on the one hand and participation in things like elections and parliaments on the other. She never advocated total abstinence; it was the *purpose* of participation that governed all. Like Lenin, she found that this balance was too fine for many of her followers. Just as Lenin had to rely on Menshevik support against his own men to overcome the veto on Social-Democrat participation for the first Duma elections in March 1906, so did Rosa Luxemburg struggle in vain against the decision of a majority of the first KPD congress in December 1918 to boycott the National Constituent elections. This optimistic over-extension of the perimeter of her argument created confusion—the confusion of victory. Rosa Luxemburg from the start had not been content merely to postulate class consciousness against opportunism. She chose to meet the opportunists on their own tactical ground—the quantitative measure of performance. This second element in her critique of revisionism grew as the party flexed its muscles against Bernstein's supporters, and was especially useful in her attempt to bring revisionism in other countries under the one newly-built German roof. But far from enhancing the argument of class consciousness, it often contradicted it.

(b) *The practical success of tactics.* Rosa Luxemburg would have her cake and eat it too, and her indictment of revisionist tactics

¹ 'Sozialdemokratie und Parlamentarismus', *SAZ*, 4 and 6 December 1904, quoted in *Collected Works*, Vol. III, pp. 394–5.

was as often due to their lack of immediate success as to their confusion of principle. Her dispute with Parvus over south Germany was in part a simple question of fact: had the alliance with the Liberals succeeded in keeping out the much more reactionary Catholic Centre, or had it helped the Centre to carry off a greater election victory? In the French context, had Jaurès's alliance with the radicals and progressives kept reaction at bay or helped to advance it? But these debates were not empirical, fact-finding sessions. If the dubious 'arrangement' resulted beyond any doubt in a defeat for reaction—why, then, Rosa had a piece of decisive sleight-of-hand all ready: reaction's original threat must have been illusory! Perhaps the most significant example of Rosa Luxemburg's involvement with the practical consequences of tactics was Belgium; the alliance of Belgian Social Democracy with the Liberals to achieve universal suffrage. Here Rosa Luxemburg was at her most eclectic.

At first, judgement was left in suspense, pending the outcome of action. 'The Belgian labour movement now occupies its proper place as the most revolutionary force in a rotting capitalist state. What the morrow will bring we shall see after Philippi.'¹ Having fired off her usual theory-barbed arrows against alliances with bourgeois parties, Rosa Luxemburg for once was willing to let the results speak for themselves without pre-judging the issue. But the Belgian strike effort for suffrage reform failed to achieve the desired results, and Cassandra now wailed more loudly than ever. Here at last was a perfect example to illustrate the dual thesis that wrong tactics not only corrupted class consciousness but always failed to achieve their stated object as well. In a series of articles on the Belgian question Rosa Luxemburg re-created the German progression of revisionist causality; indecision leading to practical failure, treachery leading to corruption.² The reason for the intermediate stage of indecision and error *leading to* the full Bernstein treatment of treason and corruption was necessary since Rosa Luxemburg was dealing here with the official leadership of a substantial Socialist party, not merely with the reformist wing. In France Jaurès represented an important

¹ 'Der dritte Akt', *LV*, 15 April 1902; *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, p. 330.

² 'Steuerlos', *LV*, 21 April 1902; also 'Das belgische Experiment', *NZ*, 1902/1903, Vol. I, p. 105, quoted in *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, p. 337; 'Die Ursache der Niederlage', *LV*, 22 April 1902, quoted in *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, p. 334.

and independent group of Socialists, but Vandervelde was the acknowledged leader of the unitary Belgian party; neither of them could be dealt with like the dissident faction of German Social Democracy. Therefore the proof of ideological corruption, which made both the *Parti Socialiste français* and the Belgian Social-Democratic party the direct equivalent of the German revisionists, could not simply be postulated from theory, but had to be proved in detail, from their policy and actions. Rosa Luxemburg's concern with tactical questions was partly nosiness, but above all a necessary step in creating the required theorem of international opportunist complementarity. What Kautsky merely postulated, Rosa Luxemburg set out to prove.

In the history of twentieth-century Socialism the imputation of evil motives as the opening gambit of political controversy has traditionally been ascribed to the Russians, to Lenin in particular. The harshness of his polemics became settled Bolshevik practice and Stalin's translation of words into corresponding action, physical violence to complement verbal brutality, was no more than reification, a logical end to the process. No doubt it was a manner of argumentation peculiarly suited to Lenin's personality. But it was also an objective necessity to Marxism which was felt as strongly in Germany as in Russia. Those who had Marx's writings before them, who had chosen to accept his analysis of social relations and the intellectual discipline imposed by it, could not be let off with a mere correction of error if they chose to undermine the dialectic in theory or in practice. The whole concept of *éclaircissement* which went with Marxism imposed a peculiar responsibility on the beneficiaries; there could be no contracting out of enlightenment except by deliberate treachery. This was the peculiar legacy of Bernstein. Before 1898 it could be argued that doubtful tactical proposals were due to ignorance and error, and Wilhelm Liebknecht had represented some of Vollmar's agrarian proposals of 1894 in just this light to an apprehensive Engels in London. But once Bernstein had produced his theoretical justification of such tactics and had been refuted on his own grounds by Rosa Luxemburg as well as by eminences like Kautsky and Plekhanov, no excuses were possible any longer. If opportunism was to be dealt with successfully, every one of its manifestations had to be related back to Bernstein—whether the offender was a minor party member in south Germany or the legitimate leader of Belgian

Social Democracy. As a result, Rosa Luxemburg's campaigns against revisionism were highly personal and the tradition of character-assassination was as much an inevitable consequence of the revisionist controversy in Germany as a peculiar method of political debate among Russians. But there was always a distinction between even the harshest imputation of motive deduced from action or ideas, and any attacks based on origin or religion—often a fine distinction but a valid one, observed by Rosa Luxemburg as much as by Lenin. When Rosa Luxemburg spoke disdainfully of her opponents' debating methods but then laid into them in the sharpest terms, this was what she had in mind.¹

The analogy of a besieged fortress is particularly helpful if the consequences of the revisionist debate are to be grasped. Revisionism was not destroyed—rooted in reality, it survived continual condemnation by taking refuge in its grass-root origins. But after 1903 it ceased to be a debatable issue in the SPD as far as party principles or policy were concerned. All that remained was to attack its symptoms.

The decision of the party congresses of 1901 and 1903 and of the International congress of 1904 to condemn the theoretical basis of revisionism was not an automatic consequence of the debate about Bernstein's proposition of 1898. At first the debate about theory had been inconclusive. For two years the SPD executive avoided commitment by encouraging the theoretical aspect of the debate, in which it was not primarily interested. But the issue was not to be confined to a few intellectuals, especially once the latter had connected principles to practice and started their witch-hunt against the reformist practitioners. These were often distinguished and important comrades who stoutly defended their actions and eventually forced the executive to take sides. As we have seen, every disposition of personal friendship and loyalty pulled the executive towards the revisionists, while people like Rosa Luxemburg and Parvus were friendless outsiders. Why then did the executive come down so heavily against Bernstein and his followers?

Certainly it was not only sentimental attachment to the good old principles, but a far more practical and self-interested

¹ See for instance her polemic over Polish anti-Semitism, *Mlot*, 8 October, 15 October, 29 October, 5 November 1910, especially 'Po pogromie' and 'Dyskusja'; also *Vorwärts*, 23 November 1910.

consideration. If Bernstein was right, then the exclusiveness of Social Democracy as a way of life and as an organization could not survive. The party leaders had made their careers out of total opposition to society, their supporters had re-created in the SPD a substitute for the society which had cast them out. Lights had been lit in the darkness. And after 1890 they had reaped their reward. By the end of the century the SPD was a state within a state and its legitimate rulers represented a powerful vested interest in the maintenance of this *status quo*. The accent on separateness went well beyond mere politics or even ideology; it was a profound moral differentiation which made Socialists regard themselves as almost a different species—a view shared, rather uncomplimentarily, by the rest of society. This deliberate, almost generic, distinction became so widely accepted in Germany that the discovery that Socialists had a good many 'normal' German traits, that they too said one thing and often did another, was considered a major sociological breakthrough. It took no less a man than Max Weber to point it out—and sociologists today still use Weber's 'discovery' that Social Democrats were human beings as evidence for showing that class- or caste-divided societies have as much in common as they have apart.¹ Any ambition to influence society directly and at once meant entering it, becoming like any other political party in Germany, a mere interest group without any pretensions to power then or later. The authority of the entire hierarchy must disappear in proportion to the achievement of reformist aims; for it was not only the authority of political leadership but of that acquired in substitution for the normal structure of society. As far as the party was concerned, reformist success was self-liquidating. As Socialist aspirations were fulfilled, so the proliferation of Social-Democratic organization, the position of the leaders as the autonomous government, must be weakened too. Their *raison d'être* was precisely the impossibility of achievement. Their presence filled the vacuum created by the abstention from political participation in society. They had not been elected to articulate policy within society but to create a new society which would take over after the collapse of its predecessor. The party's sole purpose was growth, and growth implied separation from the

¹ See the reference to Max Weber in Reinhard Bendix, 'Public authority in a developing political Community: the case of India', in *European Journal of Sociology*, Vol. IV, No. 1 (1963), p. 51, note 15.

opposing camp. Participation in society could only delay the date of final collapse. In Marxist terms, the party was the bricks-and-mortar structure of alienation. This then was the fortress to be defended.¹

It is obvious that all this did unintentional violence to Marxism—a dynamic and never static theory of social change. That is why ‘Marxists’ like Rosa Luxemburg, Plekhanov, Kautsky, and Mehring, honoured as they were, always thought of themselves as lonely and isolated, and periodically railed against the ignorant obtuseness of those around them. The fact that Kautsky, the most respected of them all, actually came to provide a theoretical validation of a state of affairs which was essentially static in an un-Marxist sense—and all in the name of Marxism—is one of the great ironies of Socialist history. It was not, as we shall see, without a logic of its own; not accidental or treacherous, but implicit and inevitable—and above all unconscious. That was to be why Kautsky remained the Communist bogeyman for many years, long after he had ceased to be important (his world ended when Social Democracy split and his failure to realize it confined him instantly and inexorably to the museum). That too explains why the Communists everywhere thought of themselves as reconnecting directly with Marx rather than taking up from his Social-Democratic heirs.²

What the revisionists proposed was to sign peace with the enemy, open up the fortress to him in return for a limited number of places in society. Where Rosa Luxemburg argued the Socialist case from strength, the executive implicitly agreed with her—from a position of weakness. They doubted their ability to maintain their position and authority in any but siege conditions.³

¹ For a more detailed discussion of the SPD as a state within a state and the implications of its policy of abstention, see J. P. Nettl, ‘The German Social-Democratic Party 1890–1914 as a political model’, *Past and Present*, No. 30, April 1965, pp. 76–86.

² See above, pp. 38–39, note 1. For the treatment of pre-war Social Democracy in Communist analysis, see below, Chapter XVIII.

³ The problem of cohesion among emerging social groups as well as among nations is very similar, and the relationship between the ‘principles’ of the SPD and the nationalism of present-day emergent or developing nations will now appear obvious. Nor is it merely due to the same pressures acting on different groups. In many ways the SPD in particular—and, for Rosa especially, international Socialism in general—was a nation, a fatherland, not merely a class-based political party. That is why the two situations are truly comparable. See also below, Appendix 2. This problem is discussed at length in J. P. Nettl, *Political Mobilization* (forthcoming).

Political exigencies therefore made Rosa Luxemburg the spokesman and ally of an executive whose real motives were vastly different from her own strict teleology. The executive was not interested in revolution but it was interested in the *status quo*—and if this involved a revolutionary postulate, then so be it. The momentary confusion between different motives is evident from the fact that Rosa Luxemburg and Kautsky managed to reach a common identity of views and that the executive used them both indiscriminately to propagate its case. As later events were to show, what the executive needed in effect was a strict separation of theory and practice, with the former merely brandishing its weapons to cover up and gloss over the exigencies of the latter. This was pre-eminently Kautsky's task; he performed it long, unconsciously, and well. His self-interest in the *status quo* was the same as that of the executive; they ruled men while he had his private little empire of theoretical Marxism. Neither would encroach on the other. But it was not good enough for Rosa Luxemburg.

Thus the maintenance of orthodoxy gave both the executive and Kautsky what they wanted. For Rosa Luxemburg, on the other hand, it was a blind alley, and the uncompromising and intransigent character of her opposition to the executive after 1907 was precisely the result of her own efforts in the revisionist debate. After 1907 she was backing up the long road which she had travelled between 1899 and 1904. Her whole later conception of the mass strike, followed by the far broader doctrine of imperialism, was a corrective to the self-satisfied isolation, the apotheosis of the *status quo* and its extrapolation *ad infinitum*, which she herself had so vociferously and ably helped to make possible. But what she saw first as a misunderstanding, then as a difference in policy (norms), and finally as a conflict of *Weltanschauung* (values), had in fact altered the whole nature of the party over whose orientation the battle was to take place. With the emergence of self-sufficient, orthodox abstention in the party after the revisionist controversy, the function of party institutions imperceptibly changed. Ideology, the same old outward-going ideology of revolution, served more and more exclusively as a means of internal cohesion. With the continuation of 'practical' politics at all levels—participation in elections, trade-union activity, attempts to form blocs with bourgeois parties in the *Reichstag*—

the gulf between theory and practice inevitably widened; hence increased ideological assertion became all the more necessary to sublimate the uselessness of practical politics—the uselessness which was all that was permitted. In turn, the lower echelons of party work became a desert in which one served to obtain one's promotion—instead of the grass-roots of a vital struggle; the party congresses ceased to be the law- and policy-making sovereign assembly and became an annual ritual where ideology was enthroned and from which participants dispersed full of moral satisfaction—to illuminate their comrades accordingly. The structure remained unaltered, except for the growth of the executive and its bureaucracy, but its functions, and with them the foci of power, underwent a considerable change.¹

Rosa Luxemburg never admitted her own contribution to this state of affairs, not even in so far as she perceived the change. When the First World War broke out and almost the entire party accepted revisionist prescriptions, the old battle against the revisionists as such seemed more than ever justified; only her allies had suddenly turned traitor. Later Communist history has followed this analysis by postulating simply that on 4 August 1914 the party openly went over to revisionism. They point to the failure to eradicate it in practice (south Germany, Bernstein's and Vollmar's continued membership, etc.). But this is an over-simplification—if not an error. The real influence which led to 4 August 1914 was not revisionism but the hopeless moral proposition of abstention, of maintaining a growing state within a state under modern conditions. The concept of such isolation had become out of date, and all the complicated efforts to relate participation in elections to such abstention from society were based on a total impossibility.

The position of the party as a whole was therefore not revisionist but isolationist. Rosa Luxemburg's significant contribution to Socialist thought was her attack on this isolation after 1907, not her defence of orthodox Marxism. However correct and revolu-

¹ For party congresses and their changing role, especially from 1905 onwards, see below, Chapter VIII, p. 306 and note 1. For a discussion of the theoretical relationship between ideology and political effectiveness and the concepts of pragmatic and expressive ideologies, see R. K. Merton, L. Broom, and L. S. Cottrell (eds.), *Sociology Today, Problems and Prospects*, New York 1959, Chapter I; R. K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, Glencoe (Illinois) 1957, Chapter 1; and Ulf Himmelstrand, 'A theoretical and empirical approach to depoliticization and political involvement', *Acta Sociologica*, 1962, Vol. 6, Nos. 1-2, pp. 91-95.

tionary her analysis of revisionism in *Social Reform or Revolution*, however closely this could be related to her later analysis as a logical progression, the political implications of her writings on revisionism helped to serve not the cause of revolution but the cause of isolation. Her claim on the attention of later Marxists, both Bolshevik and anti-Bolshevik, must be based on the weapons she forged against isolation. In the same way, her split with Kautsky in 1910 has greater historical significance than the entire revisionist debate. Dialectically the future was already contained in the present; for even before 1905 she had already begun to feel acutely uncomfortable in the atmosphere she had herself helped to create.¹ It was, however, the Russian revolution and her participation in it that brought about a complete reversal of the direction of her thrust.

¹ See particularly the letter to H. Roland-Holst in her *Rosa Luxemburg*, pp. 215-16, quoted below, p. 303.

VII

RUSSIANS, JEWS, AND POLES— THE ÉMIGRÉ VIEW OF REVOLUTION

1898–1904

THE last few years of the nineteenth century witnessed one of those mysterious revivals of revolutionary activity in the Russian empire which periodically boiled up out of nowhere and ebbed away just as mysteriously a few years later. All the revolutionary parties benefited: Russian Socialists and Socialist Revolutionaries, the *Bund*, PPS, and SDKPiL. Polish Social Democracy got a special bonus when the Lithuanian Social Democrats under Dzierżyński and Zalewski joined the SDKP in 1899. This brought not only a new organization but several outstanding leaders into the party. Dzierżyński was active in Warsaw on behalf of his new party until the end of 1901, when he was arrested; his efforts resulted in a brief flowering of Social-Democratic activity in Warsaw and other industrial centres in Poland.

The ripples of Socialist activity emanating from the Russian empire pushed the émigré groups to make an effort to unite. In 1897 the Jewish organizations centred on Vilna had formally constituted themselves as the General Union of Jewish Workers, the *Bund*. They were the most active propagandists for all-Russian unity and possessed by far the biggest organization at home as well as the most efficient transport network between their foreign committee and the organization at home. For Plekhanov and the other Russians this was an example to emulate—but also a cause for jealousy and in some cases dislike. Within a year of the formation of the *Bund* the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party (RSDRP) came into being—though only after protracted argument and bargaining.

It had not been easy. Plekhanov and his *Gruppa osvobozhdenie truda* demanded a pre-eminent role in the new party, much greater than that of father-figure and fount of philosophical wisdom, which was all the constituent groups in Russia were

willing to concede.¹ The matter was shelved rather than solved. Right from the start the Russian party was faced by an internal tug-of-war between the local organizations at home and the distinguished but somewhat remote leadership abroad. In addition, there was the status problem of the relationship with the Russian party's two precursors, the *Bund* and the SDKPiL—two snorting steeds whose impatience had helped to put the creaking Russian cart on to the road in the first place. Should there be one all-embracing party, or should they be separate but equal; and if not equal, who should predominate? Having succeeded in extracting substantial concessions from the other participants, Plekhanov asserted the same claim for primacy for the RSDRP over the *Bund* and the Poles. He was suspicious of the *Bund*—a suspicion which was fully reciprocated—and his relationship with Rosa Luxemburg's group had been bad for over seven years.² In addition, Krichevskii, Teplov, and Akimov, who were Rosa Luxemburg's and Leo Jogiches' closest Russian friends, were also Plekhanov's particular enemies. The auguries for Russian unity and friendly collaboration with their natural allies were not good.³

Neither Rosa Luxemburg nor Jogiches took any part in these negotiations and exercised no influence on them at all. They had lost touch with Russian affairs since the London congress of 1896, and when Rosa Luxemburg plunged into the revisionist controversy in Germany she even cut herself off from Polish affairs, not to mention the Russians. The official foundation of the RSDRP hardly made any impact on the Polish leadership—apart from an ironical acknowledgement of the improbable fact that the squabbling Russians had managed it at all. 'What is your impression of the new Russian party? Exactly the same as mine no doubt. None the less the blighters managed to bring themselves to do it. They did not quite get the publicity they hoped for, they chose a bad moment. . . .'⁴ Certainly the earlier enthusiasm for Polish participation in the Russian party had waned, even though the ideological commitment was still asserted. The leading Poles did not care much for the new Russian leadership; besides, Rosa's

¹ V. Akimov, 'Pervii S'ezd RSDRP', *Minuvshie Gody* No. 2, 1908, pp. 129 ff.

² John Mill's letters in *Bund* archives, quoted by H. Shukman, *The Relations between the Jewish Bund and the RSDRP 1897-1903*, Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1960, p. 47.

³ See above, Ch. III, particularly p. 69.

⁴ Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1962, No. 1(17), p. 158.

German affairs were flourishing and the outlook for Russian unity was still very uncertain. The Poles could afford to wait and see. And in fact the first approaches were made by the Russians—the Union of Social Democrats Abroad, to be precise. Their contact man was Buchholz, an SPD member of Russian origin who served the Russians and the Germans as a go-between, and later tried to compete with Rosa Luxemburg—to her great annoyance—as a German expert on Russian questions.¹ Rosa was flattered at being asked to write and to help sell the newborn RSDRP to the Germans; here was a chance to score off the hated Plekhanov. Jogiches, however, was furious and the initiative was anyhow not serious enough to lead to any worth-while collaboration. None the less, Rosa did not want to burn all her Russian bridges with deliberate and studied contempt of all things Russian, and the occasion gave rise to one of her severely rational appeals against Jogiches' strong streak of destructive masochism:

I find your whole attitude towards the Russians uncongenial and exaggerated as I have told you so many times already in Zürich. In the end one has to face up to the fact that constant criticism, demolishing everything but doing nothing oneself to improve matters, is a senseless form of behaviour. I never liked the way you rebuffed every Russian who tried to approach you. You can boycott or banish the odd individual or even a group of people but not a whole movement. Your behaviour befits a sourpuss like Krichevskii but not a strong and noble person [like yourself]. . . . I personally could not care less about the Russians; I merely thought that the contacts I have made might be of some use to you. The whole thing hardly affects me either way; though I don't agree with your views, it is not a big enough matter to bicker about. Your constant complaint that they have not invited you is ridiculous—as you must have realized yourself when you wrote it. You have spat in the face of everyone who has come near you. . . . Forgive me for writing all this; I know some of it is bound to hurt you and even make you angry, but just this once I must tell you the truth. If you think about it you will surely admit that I am right. . . . [Your attitude] does not suit a man of your calibre. I myself prefer to praise everything other people do rather than criticize everything and yet do nothing myself. . . .²

Relations with the *Bund* were if anything rather closer. The foreign representatives of the *Bund* organization, John Mill and

¹ See below, p. 327.

² Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1963, Vol. VI, Nos. 1/2(21-22), pp. 314-15, dated 15 January 1899.

Isaiah Aiznstat (Judin), had maintained regular contact with Jogiches and Rosa Luxemburg in Zürich, and implicitly acknowledged the intellectual standing of the SDKPiL leadership by reprinting Rosa Luxemburg's work in their own paper, *Der Yiddishe Arbeter*.¹

The new upsurge of Socialist strength in Russia was short-lived—and so was the pressure for unity. The first congress of the RSDRP at Minsk in March 1898, at which the party had been effectively founded, had not been representative of all the interested groups. It had only been possible to hold it at all because the *Bund* made its technical facilities available and its leaders contacted the various groups and solicited the presence of their representatives. An attempt to hold a further congress or conference at Smolensk at the end of April 1900 had failed since most of the delegates were arrested on their way to it.² In the course of this year Lenin, Martov, and other important Russian Socialists went into emigration; this strengthened the quality of the leadership abroad but at the same time all the difficulties and disagreements of clandestine activity in Russia were simply transferred abroad—where they grew strong and resilient like weeds. Soon the leadership of the RSDRP polarized into two main factions: Plekhanov, Lenin, and the other young émigrés around *Iskra*, against the older Union of Social Democrats Abroad led by Treplov and Krichevskii—the villainous 'economists' of the very near future. Subsequent conferences in Russia were to represent this deliberate and emphatic alignment.³

Thus the years between 1897 and 1902 were a period of unproductive isolation. Both Russians and Poles were absorbed in their own internal party affairs; contacts between them were precarious and insignificant. In addition to internal difficulties, they suffered from an effective police counter-offensive. Large-scale arrests took place, clearly helped by inside information; those who escaped arrest or custody were forced to flee abroad. By the beginning of

¹ For the relations between Poles and Russians, and Poles and the *Bund*, in the last years of the century, see M. K. Dziewanowski, *The Communist Party of Poland*, pp. 19 ff.; W. Feldman, *Geschichte der politischen Ideen in Polen*, Munich/Berlin 1917, pp. 322 ff. See also *Perepiska G. V. Plekhanova i P. B. Akselroda*, Moscow 1925, Vol. I, pp. 74 ff.

² *Nasha Zarya*, 1913, No. 6, p. 31.

³ For instance the congress or conference at Białystok in March 1902 and the subsequent Pskov conference in November 1902. See *KPSS v rezolyutsiyakh i resheniyakh*, Vol. I, pp. 28–35. For the Union of Social Democrats' version of its activities and negotiations, see *Minuvshie Gody*, 1908, No. 7, pp. 279–96.

the new century the importance and numbers of émigrés had grown considerably, though the organizations at home were once more in a precarious state. In Poland, where police vigilance was sharpened by the fear of a nationalist revival, the SDKPiL was hardly able to maintain effective contact with its groups in various cities. Even the fight against the PPS was flagging. As for the Russian leadership, its primary concern was to rid itself of *Bund* tutelage; concurrently with the attempt to demolish the power of the Union of Social Democrats Abroad, Plekhanov and his new allies prepared an attack on the *Bund*. All this was to be achieved at the coming congress to which Plekhanov, Lenin, and all the others now devoted their energies. It was in connection with this great event that the Poles were to be drawn once again into the orbit of the RSDRP.

For Rosa Luxemburg the period which began with her departure from Zürich to Germany and ended with the outbreak of the Russian revolution of 1905 can be divided into two distinct parts. For the first two years, until Leo Jogiches joined her in Berlin at the beginning of 1900, she was almost as little concerned in Polish affairs as in Russian, and her entire energies were devoted to the new and splendid career in the SPD. She had no mind for Polish events. Leo Jogiches, trying half-heartedly to complete his studies in Zürich, was still for all intents and purposes the boss, but he was more concerned with giving Rosa good advice on how to live and act in Germany than in keeping her up to date with SDKPiL events—such as they were. Rosa Luxemburg did not take kindly to this Polish intrusion into her new and very special German territory.

You are a little ass. Where dozens of publications and hundreds of adult people take part in a discussion, it is quite impossible to have a single 'direction'. In fact I often wanted to write to you about the way you seem to think that it is possible to export the methods of our Russian-Polish stable—in which a glorious total of $7\frac{1}{2}$ people are working—to a million strong party. To you everything depends on 'pushing'; this person has to be persuaded, that one pushed, a third has to be made a bit more active, etc. I held exactly the same view till my last visits to Kautsky and Bebel. Now I see that it is all rubbish. Nothing can be done artificially. One has to concentrate on one's own work, that is the secret and nothing can be done by puppetry behind the scenes.¹

¹ Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1963, Vol. VI, No. 3(23), p. 139, dated 21 April 1899.

At first sight all her expectations of the glorious SPD had been fulfilled, and she was only too eager to adapt herself to the new surroundings. But in fact there was to be no real change in Rosa Luxemburg. It had always been her particular task to 'influence', and right from the start her *milieu* had been the international Socialist movement much more than the manipulation of the membership of the SDKP. She kept a tight, suspicious rein on her enthusiasm for Germany, as we have seen. None the less, the challenge of a million card-carrying minds to influence—instead of seven and a half obstinate arguers—was too exciting to be denied.

The exclusion of Poland did not last very long. By 1900 she was already engaged in a new battle in the PPS in Prussia under the auspices of the SPD—and thus returned with enthusiasm to the familiar Polish problems and methods. From then until 1911 she always engaged in German and Polish activities simultaneously. The only concession to the different methods required was her rigid separation of the two lives; only Jogiches knew the full extent of her activities, and no one in Germany got more than a foot inside her Polish door. This rigid separation was convenient, suitably conspiratorial—Jogiches insisted on conspiracy—and, most important of all, suited Rosa's highly developed sense of privacy. But, as we shall see, the division was not just functional, or even a matter of applying the different methods she had advocated; what was at stake was no less than two different ideologies—or perhaps two entirely different relationships between ideology and practice.¹ For the moment it was useful to keep the two activities in distinct and self-contained compartments. This was why Rosa Luxemburg did not figure as one of the official SDKPiL leaders on documents and proclamations. None the less, from 1900 onwards her Polish work increased in extent and importance once more. Between 1900 and 1904 her role in Polish Social Democracy was crucial.

What kind of a party was the SDKPiL? The accession of the Lithuanian Social Democrats and their leaders had brought new blood to the little group of intellectuals who had first broken loose from the PPS in 1893. By now Rosa Luxemburg had emerged from her quarantine as an international scapegoat; her activities in Germany and her writings on the Polish question had secured her

¹ See below, pp 268–9, 289 ff.

a place among the recognized names of the Second International—if not yet in the front rank with Adler, Liebknecht, and Plekhanov. To a man like Dzierżyński, whose entire experience had been in clandestine agitation and organization, the chance of joining such a leadership abroad was a matter of great pride—and for him the greatest moment came when he met and spoke to Rosa Luxemburg, an event to which he had been particularly looking forward.¹ Even Dzierżyński's friend, Jacob Firstenberg (Hanecki), who had arrived in Germany at much the same time, felt this sense of elation—though such a shrewd and devious conspirator was much less inclined to starry-eyed romanticism.

The SDKPiL leadership—since the fusion of the Polish and Lithuanian parties and the subsequent emigration of its most important local leaders—thus enjoyed an importance and stature out of all proportion to the size of the party at home. It is very difficult to judge the latter accurately. The arrests had made great inroads on the party; and by the beginning of 1902 there was again hardly anyone of importance left in Poland. Even Rosa Luxemburg wrote of the 'last of our Mohicans'.² Then, however sharp the propagandist warfare between Social Democrats and the PPS abroad, no such clear separation existed among the members at home. Distinct SDKPiL groups existed only in the big towns (the most important were Warsaw, Łódź, and Białystok); yet even here the respective spheres of influence and control were often confused. A number of Social Democrats were in close touch with the PPS, and the evidence indicates some drift away from the SDKPiL to the PPS during these years. This seemed especially to apply to those who were arrested; PPS influence with exiles in Siberia must have been particularly strong.³ Though the PPS was not without its dissidents, some of these preferred to form a separate splinter group rather than join the Social Democrats, with their extreme rigidity on the national question.⁴ The picture of things at home varies considerably according to the person reporting it: Dzier-

¹ Feliks Dzierżyński to Cezaryna Wojnarowska, 10 August 1902, reprinted in *SDKPiL dokumenty*, Vol. II, pp. 100–1.

² Rosa Luxemburg to Cezaryna Wojnarowska, 17 January 1902, *SDKPiL dokumenty*, Vol. II, p. 10.

³ See *Czerwony Sztandar*, August 1903, No. 8, pp. 4–5, containing the obituary notice of Ratyński. This ex-student from Switzerland and friend of Rosa Luxemburg, who had been present at the first SDKP congress in 1894, had apparently joined the PPS in exile. (*Historische Skizzen*, p. 388.)

⁴ For instance, the third *Proletariat* group which existed for a few years with headquarters at Zakopane. See above, p. 77

żyński was always optimistic—with success just around the corner; Hanecki much more cynical. This difficulty over an accurate party census was to raise its head during the negotiations for joining the Russian party in 1903. Hanecki was preoccupied with the fear that acceptance of the Russians' conditions and the need to fuse local committees with those of the *Bund* would expose the fictitious claims of SDKPiL strength, whose many local committees existed largely on paper.¹

This situation did not deter the leadership in the least. The first generation of émigrés had now been abroad continuously since the first years of the previous decade. Their interests were international. Almost all were active in parties other than the Polish: Marchlewski in Germany, Warszawski in Munich since 1897 and especially close to the Russians, Cezaryna Wojnarowska closely connected with the French Socialists in Paris. Most important, Rosa Luxemburg had established a reputation in German Socialist circles which, in the eyes of her contemporaries, had dwarfed her Polish importance. Many of her German friends were totally unaware of the fact that on top of her full-time work in the SPD—and on the problem of Polish organization on German soil, in Pomerania and Silesia—she was simultaneously one of the main inspirers and leaders of a Polish party whose centre of gravity lay in the Russian empire. Though her Polish and German activities were kept in rigidly separate compartments, and friends like the Kautskys and Bebel seemed hardly to be aware of her other activities, her growing stature in Germany could not but add prestige to the SDKPiL. When she became involved in a public controversy with Lenin in 1904 she was acting, and considered by all spectators to be acting, as a representative of German Social Democracy rather than as a Pole. This state of affairs was to continue until the 1905 Russian revolution. Even after 1907 she still kept her Polish interests rigidly separated from her German activities and a secret from German collaborators and friends. Only the attempt to translate the lessons of the Russian revolution into German language and action broke down to some extent the dividing wall between her two lives; many Germans saw her as unmistakably Russian for the first time.

Rosa Luxemburg's international stature fitted perfectly into the political concepts of the SDKPiL leadership. Internal party mat-

¹ See below, p. 275.

ters, and organizational problems in Poland itself, had traditionally taken second place to the creation of the party's international image. Then, as now, the public relations effort was beamed more at the leaders of the Second International—'public opinion' in the Socialist world of the Second International—than at the membership at home. Rosa Luxemburg was superbly equipped for just this task. She had the connections and the talent to put the SDKPiL case consistently and uncompromisingly before the intelligent reading public of the Second International. She carefully interspersed her writings on German questions with innocent-sounding articles which 'interpreted' Polish affairs for the benefit of German readers—with an SDKPiL slant.¹ The calculated intention was to bring the immensely powerful SPD down firmly on the side of Polish Social Democracy (with money and votes), to prepare revolution, but above all to achieve the discomfiture of the PPS. This was the main reason why Rosa Luxemburg waged unremitting war on that 'arrogant Jew', Victor Adler, and simply ignored his own denunciation of Bernstein and revisionism; he was still the great protector of Daszyński and the PPS.

The best platform for this struggle was still the International in full session. At the Paris congress in 1900 the PPS made its last official effort to challenge Rosa Luxemburg's right to speak for Poland. Daszyński's task was made easier by the fortuitous fact that Rosa Luxemburg had recently joined the PPS in Prussia for a short period—a subterfuge in her campaign to undermine SPD support for the Polish leaders in Germany.² This gave the PPS at the congress a chance to challenge one of their own mandates in view of the continued onslaught of its holder on the PPS leadership. Since the mandate itself was beyond dispute, all they could do was to call it German—in the contemptuous absence of Rosa Luxemburg herself from the mandate commission and against the spirited opposition of her party friends Wojnarowska and Zalewski.³ Though the commission accepted the empty gesture of labelling her mandate German, Daszyński was not satisfied and made a public protest in open congress against the machinations

¹ See *Vorwärts*, 1 January and 14 January 1902.

² See above, pp. 175, 181.

³ See protocol of the discussion kept by the secretary of the Polish delegation, Płochocki (Wasilewski), original in ZHP, 305/II-39, reprinted in *SDKPiL dokumenty*, Vol. I, Part 2, pp. 260-77.

of the SDKPiL. But he now met with the disapproval of the delegates, who had had enough of Polish quarrels and wanted to discuss more profitable matters of universal interest. His protest none the less enabled Rosa Luxemburg to make a dignified riposte:

These discords can only degrade Polish Socialism . . . it is not a matter of validity or invalidity of mandates, but of two separate political currents; one of Polish democratic Socialists who stretch out their hand to the Socialist International, the other [her dignity rapidly began to ebb]—a national Socialism which follows the fantasy of a reconstitution of Poland. . . . The proletariat isn't there to change the political geography of capitalist states, but to organize itself according to the geographical and political bases created by history in order to come to power by creating a social republic.

Of course this was more than just a protest against unexpected attack; it was a minor broadside into the national question. Daszyński, with the full support of Victor Adler, indignantly refuted the imputation of nationalism but it was too late; Rosa Luxemburg had had the better of the exchanges and the PPS did not raise the matter again at an International congress, either *ad feminam* or in substance.¹

Rosa Luxemburg's success can most startlingly be measured by comparing the last three consecutive meetings of the International. In 1893 at Zürich she had hardly been able to obtain any hearing and had forced herself on to a reluctant and indignant congress—the only admirable thing had been her personal courage in daring to do so. By 1896 the question of Polish independence had been placed on the agenda of the congress. Though the International had resolved in favour of national self-determination as a general principle, it had not adopted the PPS resolution committing the congress specifically to the re-establishment of an independent Poland. Now, in 1900, the International had finally lost patience with the Poles—but the disturbers were now the PPS with their blind hatred and persecution of the Social Democrats. The congress was not willing to reopen the question—and the SDKPiL delegation had not asked them to—but there could equally be no

¹ *Cinquième Congrès Socialiste International, Compte rendu analytique*, Paris 1901, pp. 31–32. I have followed the French protocol rather than the German on this occasion as it is fuller.

question of unseating the SDKPiL delegation or challenging that party's right to come to the congress and represent its particular views. Personal dignity and intellectual respectability—the twin axes of success in the Second International—had now been achieved by the SDKPiL, who appeared as injured defenders against the unworthy challengers and slanderers of a frustrated PPS. It was largely Rosa Luxemburg's doing. For once she could justifiably adopt the role of a conservative.

Her success had wider repercussions in Polish Socialism. By emphasizing over and over again the peculiar commitment of the SDKPiL to international Socialism—with a complementary imputation of 'mere' nationalism to its opponents—Rosa Luxemburg helped to bring to the surface those very tendencies in the PPS with which she had lambasted her opponents. It was a war on several fronts: in the International, in Germany, and also in the context of the Russian empire where it was most damaging. In the International she emphasized her own party's commitment to international Socialism and managed to combine this commendable broad-mindedness with an emphatic denial of a national solution—a major piece of dialectic sleight-of-hand. In Germany and Russia her devotion to ideological and organizational identification with the 'home' parties almost forced a section of the PPS leadership to react with a more specifically Polish orientation. Watching Rosa Luxemburg establishing herself as the foremost spokesman on all Polish matters, unable to prevent the ponderous but massive German party machine swinging into line behind her campaign against the PPS in Prussia, fearful of a similar alignment by the Russian party, Piłsudski placed more open emphasis on armed insurrection and 'short cuts'; the enemy was Russia and specifically the Russian autocracy. By the time the revolution broke out in 1905 the nationalistic element in the PPS was daring and frustrated enough to come out openly in favour of national priorities—and split the PPS in the process.¹

The leadership of the SDKPiL naturally reflected these priorities of purpose; influence before power, intellectual standing before size. It was more of a pressure group in international Socialism than a political party—and its organization and methods faithfully reflected the fact. Though a formal hierarchy and respectable party statutes had been established at the very first congress of 1894, this

¹ See below, p. 343.

evidence of outward respectability—borrowed as it was largely from the German model, in particular the Erfurt programme, with some concession to Russian circumstances—in practice remained words on paper.¹ This myth naturally produced tensions of its own. When they functioned, the committees in Poland occasionally protested against the unilateral decisions of the Foreign Committee—but these protests were more formal than real. It was a situation that was understood to be inevitable, chronic, and part of the penalty for having such distinguished leaders.² Not yet familiar with the informal manner in which the SDKPiL was really run behind a façade of formal rules, Dzierżyński began his career as an émigré in 1902 by agitating for conferences to put things right—‘weed-pulling conferences . . . to tighten organizational procedure’, as he called them.³ But though one of his conferences did in fact take place, it brought about no significant change; it merely provided an opportunity for some harmless ventilation of steam.

The system also had its advantages. Central control was loose enough to permit those whose ideas on organization differed from the élite consensus to do what they pleased in their particular

¹ For the party statutes, see *SDKPiL dokumenty*, Vol. I, Part 1, pp. 174–96, 225–30. The ideas and principles came largely from Germany but the formation of a Foreign Committee (*Komitet Zagraniczny SDKPiL*), as liaison and occasional life belt for the Central Committee (*Zarząd Główny*), was borrowed from previous bitter Russian and Polish experience. The Central Committee, equivalent to the later Russian Central Committee, was the over-all authority in the party between congresses; the Foreign Committee a permanent body to represent the exiled leadership and to deal with all questions affecting foreign parties. In the SDKPiL, with its special emphasis on international relations, the Foreign Committee largely dominated the Central Committee from the start. Most of the time a nucleus of the same people served on both. Thus the Central Committee established at the third SDKPiL congress in 1901 was for all intents and purposes soon declared moribund owing to arrests at home; at a meeting of the Foreign Committee in December 1902 new informal rules for managing the party were drawn up. (See IML (M) Fund 163, No. 47, enclosed with a letter from Dalski to unknown party members.)

Compare this with the long struggle in the Russian party to overcome the predominance of the foreign organizations and to weld the leadership into a proportionate representation of foreign and local organizations in Russia. (See above, pp. 252 ff; below, Ch. XIII.)

² Apart from a number of manuscript letters on this subject in ZHP, there is an interesting reference to this state of affairs and its apparent normality in a letter from Cezaryna Wojnarowska, perhaps the most outspoken member of the leading Polish élite, to Hanecki, dated 12 August 1903: ‘No doubt [my criticisms] will bring on my head the usual accusations of being an idiot for a start, to be followed by my being told that I am an opportunist.’ She also refers to the ‘standard’ reply of Jogiches to all criticism from Poland: ‘We also were not born yesterday and have worked our share for the party.’ This extract is requoted in Russian by the writer and had clearly become a set phrase in the party. The letter is in IML (M), Fund 163, No. 65.

³ *SDKPiL dokumenty*, Vol. II, p. 100.

territory. When Dzierżyński returned to Cracow at the beginning of 1903 to manage and distribute the party's paper *Czerwony Sztandar*, he took the opportunity of creating what he proudly called 'a new type of organization with no rights but to work, to carry out the instructions of the Foreign Committee, to educate itself, to distribute literature, etc. This section shall have no voice at all or any right of representation in the party; its aim simply is to become Social-Democratic and to be at the beck and call [*usługa*] of the Foreign Committee.'¹

It could hardly be otherwise. The Polish leadership of the SDKPiL was always scattered geographically. Rosa Luxemburg was in Berlin with only short interruptions from 1898 onwards. Jogiches, the main organizer, remained in Zürich until the end of August 1900 and then went for some months to Algeria to visit his brother who was in a TB sanatorium there. Such organizational problems as arose as a result of his absence were simply settled in correspondence between them. When he returned, Jogiches joined Rosa Luxemburg in Berlin. After his eviction from Dresden, Marchlewski finally settled in Munich where he remained until he returned to Poland in 1905, running a precarious publishing venture with Parvus which finally went bankrupt because the latter's hand was firmly ensconced in the till. Warszawski remained in Paris only until 1897 when he too established himself in Munich, close to the new Russian leadership after 1900. Wojnarowska was based in Paris throughout. It was largely her fortuitous residence in that city which won her the job of representing the Polish party in the International Bureau in Brussels until Rosa Luxemburg took over in 1904. The other members were highly peripatetic. Such dispersion made for informality, for letters of persuasion and opinion rather than resolute instructions. To a large extent each member of the élite acted on his own initiative and in accordance with his own predilections and habits. Orders were rare indeed; apart from exceptional cases like the Russian negotiations of 1903, communication was a matter of dispensing rabbinical shades of opinion. Dzierżyński was horrified at this laxity and saw it as evidence of deterioration. 'No policy, no direction, no mutual assistance . . . everybody has to cope on his

¹ Feliks Dzierżyński to Cezaryna Wojnarowska, 13 February 1903, IML (M), Fund 76, No. 25. The letter and the whole concept is very typical of Dzierżyński and his 'revolutionary self-denial'.

own.¹ In these circumstances success depended on personal initiative and ability—and of course it was here that Rosa Luxemburg excelled. 'Only Rosa Luxemburg has energy and brilliance which is wholly admirable—she works enormously for us.'² What Dzierżyński failed to realize was that this condition was not an accident but provided precisely the *milieu* in which Rosa Luxemburg's peculiar genius could flourish. The type of party organization he had in mind would have been unacceptable to most of the Polish leaders. Bolshevism, then or later, was unthinkable.

After members, the scarcest commodity was money. Here again a comparison with Lenin is interesting. Little specific effort to raise funds was made; it was up to each individual to find a means of earning as good a living as possible (mostly by his pen). He was then expected to finance his local party activities from his own earnings. The party treasury was almost always empty. As a result, the most successful groups were those run by people with earning power—and this again meant Rosa Luxemburg with her writings and Jogiches with what little remained of his private funds. Closely connected with this was naturally the problem of transporting literature to Poland. Over and above the organized transport facilities, which never reached the efficiency of Lenin's, Jogiches and Rosa Luxemburg utilized private contacts for this purpose. 'Kasprzak is supposed to have a friend engaged in smuggling alcohol, etc. Officially [this friend] is in the fruit business. He will require 45 roubles per *pud* in advance because he is a business man and does not want to risk his own capital (though he is making some contribution). Let us try it once and see how it goes.'³ But these extra activities of Kasprzak, however useful, did not meet with high-minded Rosa Luxemburg's approval: 'A nice lot these smugglers, I must say!'⁴

Far from being an accidental lacuna in the party's administration, this haphazard informality was deliberate and jealously guarded. Some of the leaders very much disliked having to deal with money and organizational routine at all; it kept them from their writing. 'I have no wish to concern myself with money

¹ Feliks Dzierżyński to Cezaryna Wojnarowska, about 15 June 1903, IML (M), Fund 76, No. 26.

² Ibid.

³ Jogiches letters, 19 May 1903, IML (M). Not even a close party friend like Kasprzak could be forced or instructed!

⁴ Ibid.

matters. . . . You must approach Władek [Olszewski], the cashier, in such matters', Marchlewski wrote indignantly to Cezaryna Wojnarowska in 1902.¹ The same applied even more strongly to Rosa Luxemburg. At some stage a formal party decision was reached that she should not concern herself with organizational matters at all, that she should not participate in any of the official conferences or congresses; in public, at least, Rosa Luxemburg ceased from 1901 to have any official standing in the party at all!² Not that she relinquished for one moment her say in matters of importance. On the contrary, she continued to formulate the party's strategy and much of its tactics, and it was her pen that provided the vivid and uncompromising presentation of its case. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that the primary preoccupations of the SDKPiL between 1901 and 1904 were those dictated by Rosa Luxemburg's particular interests—the destruction of PPS influence in Germany and the International, and the attempt to force the PPS into openly anti-Russian attitudes by testing the arguments about the general principle of self-determination in the specific crucible of relations with the Russian party. The SDKPiL's situation was unique, unimaginable either in the Russian party or in the SPD—or in any other Socialist party for that matter. Only in this context was it possible for the outstanding personality of the party to have no official function at all. And nothing shows more clearly the orientation of the SDKPiL as a pressure group, exercising influence on other parties rather than power in its own back-yard. Where both the Germans and the Russians automatically referred to their 'party', members of the Polish élite preferred to call themselves a 'society' (*Stowarzyszenie*)—at least in private communication to each other.

¹ Julian Marchlewski to Cezaryna Wojnarowska, quoted in *SDKPiL dokumenty*, Vol. II, p. 15.

² I have been able to find no formal resolution to this effect. However, her correspondence repeatedly refers to such a decision whenever anyone asked her for information, or solicited her views on problems of organization. 'Others will communicate with you regarding the conference. . . . Naturally I did not take part in it because as you know it has been established as a principle once and for all—at least in our Russian/Polish organization—that I do not participate in congresses. . . . None the less I am up to the ears in [private] meetings.' Rosa Luxemburg to Cezaryna Wojnarowska, 18 August 1902, IML (M), Fund 209, No. 925. For the conference, see minutes of the SDKPiL conference in Berlin, 14–17 August 1902, in O. B. Szmidt, *Materiały i dokumenty 1893–1904*, Moscow 1934, Vol. I, pp. 295–311. Rosa Luxemburg was indeed not present at this conference, though it resolved to produce a whole new series of pamphlets to be written by her.

The personal element predominated in the relationships between the different leaders scattered about western Europe. Likes and dislikes emerged strongly—more so among the older groups than among the newcomers who found this refusal to stifle personal feelings very strange. Thus relations between Rosa Luxemburg and Julian Marchlewski had never been very close and she continued to treat him in some ways as an outsider, though his status as a founder-member of the SDKPiL was never challenged. 'He never knows anything about our affairs and there is not the slightest point in relying on his common sense or sense of duty; it is like banging one's head against a wall [*rzucać groch o ścianę*]. . . . Now with Adolf you can always get somewhere.'¹ Nor was this peculiar to Rosa Luxemburg. Cezaryna Wojnarowska did not feel impelled to hide her criticism of colleagues, even though it sometimes touched upon sensitive subjects like the national question which were fundamental to the party as a whole. Both she and Ettinger-Dalski criticized the Berlin leadership's narrow-minded preoccupation with this problem. 'As a result of merging with Russian Social Democracy into a broader movement our party might perhaps cease to be nothing more than a negation of the PPS . . . but turn instead into a party developing a broader and more universal activity.'² The steadiest opponent of the extreme anti-nationalist orientation was Trusiewicz-Zalewski; it was his arrest in 1902, and his escape and reappearance in Berlin only after the negotiations with the Russians in the summer of 1903 had failed, that prevented this stormy petrel of the Polish party from counselling moderation. The only iron rule about these criticisms was that they should remain within the charmed circle.³

¹ Rosa Luxemburg to Cezaryna Wojnarowska, 17 January 1902, IML (M), Fund 209, No. 922.

² Quoted in K. Grünberg and Czesław Kozłowski, *Historia polskiego ruchu robotniczego 1864-1918*, Warsaw 1962, p. 161.

³ Cezaryna Wojnarowska in 1903 and Stanisław Trusiewicz-Zalewski in 1910 got into hot water, not for criticizing but for threatening to publish—or publishing—their criticisms throughout the party. By 1908 the informal consensus was disappearing, to be replaced by Jogiches' attempt to exercise a Leninist supremacy—without the loyalty of a cohesive group like the inner Bolsheviks.

A distinction must also be made between the type of personal antagonism in a highly bureaucratic party like the SPD and that in the SDKPiL. In the former case it was a personal reaction—a sort of safety valve—of people welded together willy-nilly in a formal and fairly rigid structure. Compare the fierce hatreds among the post-revolutionary Bolsheviks down to the present-day Communist parties; also the difference until recently between the public air of casual good-fellowship in the Conservative Party, where leaders traditionally

Where the committee men in Poland, like their Russian and *Bund* colleagues, used formal means of disagreement and protest—and were answered by the equally formal procedure of careful, packed conferences and committees—the SDKPiL leaders preferred to express their views informally to each other. Party cohesion was not a matter of discipline or any self-conscious act of will. It was rather the product of a consensus about certain important questions, which went beyond mere agreement on tactics and strategy—almost a common way of life. Yet these people were in no sense merely a group of self-sufficient Bohemian *litterati*. Theirs was not so much a deliberate blindness to the necessities of organization as the patient self-assurance of prophets waiting for pre-ordained events in the dialectic calendar to fall due. As these events approached, they would surely settle the relatively minor problems of mass membership and organization. Though no one expressed themselves in such Messianic terms, it is very clear that what was at stake was a philosophy of life; once discovered, it imposed itself obligatorily on the chosen few who would in turn become the chosen many when the time was ripe. Far better to hasten on these events by clear and public thinking—they all had enormous faith in the power of the written word—than to grub about in sectarian cells and pretend that such artificial creations could be a substitute for or even help to bring about the coming social upheaval. It is here that we find the great difference between these Poles and Lenin's Bolsheviks, and the background to the dispute between Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg in 1904. Though technically she confronted Lenin in German, the cognitive experience had a strong Polish accent—as did all Rosa's work.

It is difficult to find the right word with which to capture the special flavour of this party. We have used the word 'élite' but this has become loaded with a political and power context and in any case has lost its precision; an élite rules—those who rule are an élite. Perhaps the sociological concept of the peer group is the best description—a unity resulting not so much from people with a common background, bound together in one organization, but from the more spontaneous co-operation of a generation who somehow see themselves as equal and no one else as equal to

emerged, and the personal backbiting in the more highly structured and democratic Labour Party where leaders are elected. The point about the SDKPiL was that feelings were autonomous and idiosyncratic, not induced or reactive.

quite the same extent—a matter of belief more than knowledge; co-operation, moreover, for certain purposes only; a group that makes no demands on its membership greater than are willingly accepted. However much they might differ internally and bicker with each other—and the bickering was to get worse after 1907—the SDKPiL leaders were always willing to jump to each other's defence if attacked from the outside—Marchlewski to Rosa Luxemburg's, and both even to the reprehensible Karl Radek's. The Leninist tactic of bringing in outsiders, and often opponents, for the sake of forming a temporary majority within his own ranks, was distasteful and unthinkable to the Poles.

As a model of organization, the SDKPiL has left no direct heirs. It was swamped on the one hand by the Bolshevik imperative which pre-empted attention after the October revolution and on the other by the combination of formal democracy and oligarchy which Social Democracy adopted as a necessary condition for participating in bourgeois parliamentary life. In Poland particularly these ideas left no roots; they had been developed by Poles but not on Polish soil. But they did greatly influence the development of the future German Left under Rosa Luxemburg's direction. As we shall see, a similar élite or peer group was to emerge after 1914 out of the atomized opposition. In many ways the personal relationships, attitudes, and ideas about life and work, which evolved in the *Spartakusbund*, were all directly, if unconsciously, modelled on the SDKPiL. In Germany they were to create a tradition which Russian Bolshevism and its German supporters like Ruth Fischer and Thälmann had to work hard to eliminate.¹ In Germany, too, the basic orientation was to be that of a pressure group which required the existence of a larger party or parties on which to operate—organizationally a parasite, but intellectually supreme. In the *Spartakusbund* as in the SDKPiL there was great reluctance to squander effort on organization: let others create the infra-structure for the apostles to 'capture'. The analogy extends even to personal relations: a group of leaders who co-operated through informal contact, united against outsiders but retaining all the personal liberties and quirks of distinct and highly individualistic intellectuals. Below them, in the SDKPiL as much as the *Spartakusbund*, was a group of less privileged activists whose job it was to collect money, distribute literature, and generally be

¹ For this, see below, Chapter XVIII, pp. 798–820.

of service to the leadership—without the glitter. No one contributed more decisively to creating this political environment than Rosa Luxemburg, with her curious combination of an essentially public orientation for her activities with a jealous autonomy in her private life and views.¹

The overriding political purpose of the SDKPiL was to isolate the PPS, weave contradictions around it and make it look ridiculous. Between 1900 and 1903 Rosa Luxemburg personally managed the grass-root struggle in Germany, under the cold and curious eye of the SPD.² But she also contributed substantially to the literary warfare against the PPS on Polish-Russian questions. In 1902 the SDKPiL established its popular journal *Czerwony Sztandar* (Red Flag), published first in Zürich by Gutt and a few months later transferred to Cracow under the aegis of Dzierżyński and his group of activists. The object of the paper was the same as *Iskra*'s—a rallying point for political opinion and a means of making known the party's platform, though, unlike *Iskra*, it never had to serve as a magnet in a divided party. For the first three years Rosa Luxemburg was only an occasional contributor; popular appeal only became mandatory after the outbreak of the revolution, and even then Rosa never enjoyed this kind of work. The paper continued in its original form right through to 1918 and later served the illegal Polish Communist Party intermittently, as a central organ, right up to the time of its dissolution by Moscow in 1938. More important from Rosa Luxemburg's point of view was the establishment of *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny* (Social-Democratic Review). The venture was peculiarly Rosa Luxemburg's; she had campaigned for its foundation and had written to each of the Polish leaders in order to obtain their support. The review, published intermittently at various places before the 1905 revolution and regularly in Cracow from 1908 to 1910, was to be the theoretical organ of the party—to give adequate expression to

¹ The respective roles of Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches in the SDKPiL in many respects follow the pattern of leadership emergence in small groups in accordance with the theories of modern social psychology. 'Thus optimally 'a solidarity and group morale leader and a [different] task leader' appear; a general definition which fits the different roles of the two leaders very well. See P. E. Slater, 'Role differentiation in small groups' in A. P. Hare, E. F. Borgatta, and R. F. Bales (eds.), *Small Groups*, New York 1955, pp. 498-515. See also bibliography in Josephine Klein, *Working with Groups* (2nd ed.), London 1963, pp. 116-18.

² See above, pp. 173-84.

its sophisticated intellectual requirements. It was modelled largely on *Neue Zeit*. Like the latter it published the writings of leading foreign Socialists, and Rosa Luxemburg was able to use her connections to obtain regular contributions from prominent Germans.¹

The main political purpose of *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny* was naturally to underpin the theoretical foundations for the running battle with the PPS, and Rosa Luxemburg's contributions concentrated on this aspect. After ten years' debate there was little new to add to the national question, and most of the material was stale beer in gaudy bottles, enlivened only by the intense venom of the participants. Rosa Luxemburg's victory over the PPS organization in Germany provided useful dum-dum ammunition which expanded in the intellectual wound, and she did not fail to make the most of it. The lessons of Germany could equally well be applied to the situation in Russia:

The marriage of a utopian pipe-dream for the restoration of Poland with the struggle for Socialism leads the working class astray into the blind alley of nationalism . . . weakens Socialist action, causes internal dissension and frustration, demoralizes the workers' organizations, reduces the moral authority of Socialism, and finally condemns Socialist agitation to complete sterility.²

Once more capitalism was the sole genuine enemy and the struggle against it could only be pursued on a class basis within the framework of existing political entities and not by raising the lurid ghost of national self-determination. The only practical way to implement this belief was integration with the Socialist movements in Germany and in Russia. Socialist revolution in Russian Poland could only succeed, indeed take place at all, if sustained by revolution in the Tsarist empire. Any lone Polish effort wedged in between the forces of Russia and Prussia must end in a disaster like that of 1863. In attacking the PPS conceit of being the vanguard of revolutionary Socialism, Rosa went as far as denying the validity of armed uprisings altogether; Piłsudski's growing obsession with this '*putschist*' form of self-help meant that the daily

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 70, letter dated 6 June 1903; p. 137, letter dated Easter 1907.

² 'Quousque tandem', *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, 1903, No. 7, p. 251. This was published as a separate pamphlet in 1903. The title is a quotation from Cicero's speech against Catiline beginning: 'How much longer will you abuse our patience?' These same words were to be thrown back at Rosa Luxemburg during the split in the Polish party in 1911 (see below, pp. 582, note, and 585).

struggle for political and economic concessions—the very heart of Socialist class consciousness—would be abandoned altogether.¹ She compared this concept to the description by her favourite Polish author, Adam Mickiewicz, of the romantic hero in 'Pan Tadeusz':

At the sounding of a call [to arms] every eager activist rises up from his place, dashes off into the general confusion—some to the Saxon, some into the forest; these to the left, others to the right, and the more each one acts on his own initiative, caring the devil about how to get there, the sooner will the Tsar and his government—that colossus with feet of clay—collapse!²

But if not an armed uprising, based on training, sufficient weapons, and lots of guts, then what? The argument had become more practical: how to avoid the accusation of preaching history while others make it? In particular, how to translate the ideological unity with the Russian proletariat into concrete organizational and policy terms? The emphasis on the all-Russian quality of the revolution thus brought the SDKPiL face to face with the practical question of its relationship with the Russian party. Since the beginning of 1902 the new Russian leadership in exile had been making strenuous efforts to call a general congress which would finally create the real unity which had hitherto been lamentably lacking. After the foundation of *Iskra* in 1900, the editors constituted themselves as an organizational nucleus for the coming congress and an Organizing Committee was formed to negotiate with the various factions inside and on the fringe of the Russian party. These managers were new people, unknown to the Poles; there is no evidence that anyone had already picked out Lenin as the coming man. If one man emerged as the architect of the impending congress in Polish eyes, it was Yurii Martov. But what particularly attracted the Poles was the new look in the Russian party, and the apparent relegation of Plekhanov to being merely *primus inter pares*. From the beginning of 1903 Warszawski in Munich was officially delegated by the Polish Foreign Committee to negotiate with the Russian Organizing Committee about Polish participation in the congress and SDKPiL adhesion to the Russian

¹ See Rosa Luxemburg's introduction to *Kwestia polska a ruch socjalistyczny* (The Polish question and the Socialist movement), Cracow 1905.

² Ibid., p. 156. The reference to Saxon relates to the rule of King Augustus II (the Saxon) when the nation was divided between his supporters and guerrilla opponents who lived in the forest.

party. The Poles were not interested in or familiar with the complicated manœuvres of the *Iskraists* within the Russian party; there is no evidence that anyone read Lenin's *What is to be done?* and certainly no comment on it was made by the Poles. As far as the SDKPiL was concerned the main object of the congress was to deal with the baleful dominance of the *Bund* and if possible relegate that organization to its proper place as an autonomous sub-group. The Polish party's relationship with the *Bund* was crystallizing into hostility, much like the Russians, even though the *Bund* itself was on far better terms with the SDKPiL than with the PPS, who advocated complete Jewish integration in Polish society and would not admit the need for any separate organization at all.¹ At the *Bund's* third and fourth congresses the pursuit of Polish independence was roundly condemned and with it its chief supporters, the PPS.² None the less, the SDKPiL, though admitting the *Bund's* right of autonomous organization with limited powers, gradually convinced itself of the latent nationalism of the Jewish party. 'There is no doubt that the *Bund* definitely holds up the progress of Social Democracy . . . with its everlasting and ubiquitous stress on its Jewishness.'³

This apprehension was not unmixed with jealousy: 'The *Bund* has a better organization than anyone, good propaganda and much revolutionary enthusiasm . . . but a regrettably nationalist tendency and these obstinately separatist ideas in matters of organization.'⁴ The Poles realized full well that *Iskra's* intention was to isolate the *Bund* at the coming congress and to make its adhesion to the Russian party impossible—unless the *Bund* accepted conditions of organizational integration which were both destructive and humiliating. Hence the Russian emphasis on the coming con-

¹ Though the SDKPiL would not think of using this as an argument, for obvious reasons, the PPS attitude to the *Bund* is perhaps the best 'proof' of the former's latent nationalism—far more conclusive than some of Rosa Luxemburg's Procrustean arguments. For one of the features of nationalism is that it is simultaneously assertive—of its own national identity—and denying—of the identity of sub-groups; the more it asserts the more it denies. Examples are legion. Compare Bavarian nationalism with the denial of a Franconian identity within it, and the present attitude of Ceylon to the Tamils and the Sudan to its black, Christian, south. The PPS in fact suggested that there was no racial discrimination in Poland except in so far as it had been 'imported' by the Russians.

² M. Rafes, *Ocherki po istorii 'Bunda'*, Moscow 1923, p. 45.

³ Feliks Dzierżyński to Cezaryna Wojnarowska, June 1903, *SDKPiL dokumenty*, Vol. II, p. 324.

⁴ Adolf Warszawski to Karl Kautsky, 20 May 1903, IISH Archives, D XXIII, 63.

gress not as a constituent assembly but merely as the second in a consecutive series. Although it was clear to all concerned that a 'new' party must in fact emerge, the insistence that the congress was the second in an orderly series, that the party was being re-organized rather than created, thus gained genuine constitutional significance: 'The *Bund* will not be able to appear as a separate constituent group helping to create a federal relationship.'¹

The recognition of these tactics was not due to Warszawski's particular perception; the Organizing Committee made its position very clear and hoped to have Polish support for its ultimatum to the *Bund*. '*Iskra* admits that the Poles have a special common interest with it as regards the *Bund*.'² Rosa Luxemburg and the other leaders agreed by silence and implication; they were not apparently concerned by the obvious fact that all the arguments used against the *Bund* could equally well be applied to the Poles. In their self-satisfaction the Poles probably thought they were the acknowledged exception to the Russian rule about federation—or else that all this talk of general principles was only intended for particular application to the *Bund*; when they had announced their plans for a Russian Social-Democratic party reconstructed on federal lines two years earlier, *Iskra* had published the Polish proposals in full—without comment!³ Probably a number of Russians were willing at first to grant the Poles—this distinguished group formed as long ago as 1893, and with some claim to have been pace-setters—the right to claim a special interest; though, as we shall see, the Polish notion of their 'special interest' differed radically from what *Iskra* supposed. But for the moment all seemed straightforward enough. Dzierżyński, who never believed in half measures, told Liber, one of the leading *Bundists* and at the time Dzierżyński's brother-in-law, that the Poles had formally committed themselves to supporting *Iskra* against the *Bund*.⁴

The actual negotiations in the early summer of 1903 between Russians and Poles were delicate and protracted. The Poles

¹ Adolf Warszawski to the SDKPiL Foreign Committee, mid-June 1903, *Z Pola Walki*, 1929, Nos. 7/8, p. 171. The Russians hammered this point home to such an extent that Warszawski willy-nilly incorporated the word *kolejne* (consecutive) every time he wrote to Berlin about the congress.

² Ibid.

³ At the Polish third congress in the summer of 1901 (Protocol in IML (M), Fund 164, No. 2). See *Iskra*, August 1901, No. 7, pp. 5 ff.; *Przegląd Socjal-demokratyczny*, March 1902, No. 1, p. 7.

⁴ See report of conversation in Kirshnits, 'Bund un RSDRP', *Visnshaftlikher Iohrbikher*, Vol. I, p. 72.

pressed for a formal and unconditional invitation to the congress while the Organizing Committee claimed that it did not have the necessary power; only the congress as a whole could issue an invitation. However, it was clearly intimated to Warszawski that if the Poles met *Iskra*'s conditions an invitation could be informally guaranteed. Thus the SDKPiL must acknowledge itself as a member of the RSDRP: 'Our letter giving this adherence to the general party would *not* however be published but only submitted to the relevant authorities in the Russian party.'¹ But the Poles refused to accept these conditions and stalled for time on the excuse that the comrades in Poland had to be consulted. In fact, Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches wanted more time to think and above all to call their own Polish congress to discuss the matter in more detail. In the end Jogiches sent a letter to the editorial board of *Iskra* in which he admitted that the Poles considered themselves 'ideologically and politically belonging to one party with the Russians though temporarily not incorporated in one single organization—a situation similar to that appertaining to all the other Russian Social-Democratic groups'—a typically brittle and artificial Jogiches formulation.² Words were being stretched to disguise meanings, but there was goodwill on both sides.

The hurriedly assembled Polish congress took place in Berlin between 24 and 29 July 1903.³ The congress decided that negotiations with a view to Polish membership of the new Russian party were desirable and appointed two delegates for this purpose, giving them the right to negotiate with 'carte blanche within the framework of the congress resolution'.⁴ The outline of the negotiators' instructions was almost certainly penned by Rosa Luxemburg herself—though she did not personally attend the

¹ Warszawski to SDKPiL Foreign Committee, *SDKPiL dokumenty*, Vol. II, p. 319.

² Declaration of SDKPiL to the editorial board of *Iskra* for the Organizing Committee, 26 June 1903; *Z Pola Walki*, 1929, Nos. 7/8, p. 174. Jogiches' authorship is established in *SDKPiL dokumenty*, p. 321, note 1.

³ The official report of the congress is printed in *SDKPiL dokumenty*, Vol. II, pp. 351–62. No record of the speeches was preserved. Only two commentaries on the congress were published. One was by Rosa Luxemburg, *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, August 1903, No. 8, pp. 284–96, in which she defended Polish intransigence at the Russian congress by stressing the superiority of the Polish organizational concept over the Russian (p. 293). The other was Hanecki's and appeared 30 years later when not to have been a Bolshevik in 1903 was a grave demerit. See J. Hanecki, 'The SDKPiL Delegation at the Second RSDRP Congress', *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya*, No. 2 (1933), pp. 187–200.

⁴ *Sprawozdanie ze Zjazdu IV SDKPiL*, 24–29 July 1903, 2nd day, p. 4, loc. cit.

congress—and was accepted by the meeting ‘without much discussion’.¹ The delegates were to be Hanecki and Warszawski. From the Polish point of view, the difficulty of joining hinged largely on the form of organization demanded by the Organizing Committee of the Russian party: a firm Russian refusal of federation and instead, some kind of limited autonomy, which would make the Central Committee of the RSDRP the ultimate governing body of the Polish party as well. Most of the SDKPiL leaders preferred federation in substance if not in name; they were reluctant to forgo the cohesion and autonomy of the Polish leadership and let the Russian Central Committee deal directly with their own local organizations in Poland. This was partly an unwillingness to dismantle the existing organization and to diminish a leadership which considered itself at least as distinguished, if not more so, as any Russians; in addition, there was the real fear that the Russians would soon discover that the SDKPiL was in fact like a South American army—all generals and few soldiers.² These questions had loomed unspoken behind the earlier correspondence between the Organizing Committee and the Foreign Committee of the SDKPiL, but had been obscured by the phraseology about the right to attend at all.

On Monday 3 August the two Polish delegates arrived at the Russian congress in Brussels hotfoot from their own congress. Two days earlier, on Saturday 1 August, the Russians had formally invited two Polish delegates to come to Brussels with the right to speak but not to vote. Even this had produced considerable discussion, and had been voted against the wishes of Lenin, Martov, and the other *Iskraists*, who maintained that the Poles had missed their chance.³ Warszawski led off with a prepared speech which combined the general Polish desire to join with the particular Polish conditions for joining. The speech had been written in Berlin, once again almost certainly in close collaboration with Rosa herself.⁴ After some perfunctory applause, negotiations

¹ Hanecki, *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya*, p. 189.

² See particularly *Z Pola Walki*, 1929, Nos. 7/8, pp. 180–2, letter from Hanecki to Dzierżyński. For the Polish claim of superiority, based on German organizational methods and experience, see Rosa Luxemburg, ‘The IV SDKPiL Congress’, *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, August 1903, No. 8, pp. 292 ff. The article was of course written after, and in justification of, Polish withdrawal from the Russian congress.

³ *Protokoly, vtoroi ocherednoi s’ezd RSDRP, izdanie tsentralnogo komiteta*, Geneva 1903, pp. 47–54, 375.

⁴ Hanecki, *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya*, p. 191. Against too definite an

began at once on the Polish minimal conditions: the SDKPiL to be the exclusive representative of Polish Social Democracy in the Russian party, and to maintain its organizational and control structure intact. In addition, the Poles asked for stricter definition and clarification of paragraph 7 of the provisional Russian statutes, which dealt with the national question, and also for clear condemnation of the 'Polish social-patriotism of the PPS'—though these were *not* part of the bed-rock conditions. The managers of the Russian congress, and the *Iskraists* in particular, were anxious not to fall out with the Poles now that they were there; their main fire was reserved for the *Bund*. The Polish negotiations were accordingly removed to a special commission out of the glare and heat of full congress discussion. Here, in relative privacy, the Poles were first asked whether they insisted on autonomy or federation and were told that only the first could be considered. They were then asked to define autonomy. The discussion continued inconclusively for some days.¹

Whether the Polish conditions would have been met and an autonomy that was really federation achieved can now only be a matter of guesswork. Probably not; the Polish demands ran counter even to the basic concepts of organization which were shared by Lenin and Martov and which a large majority of the congress insisted on imposing on the *Bund*—who in due course gave up and packed up. Like the *Bund*, the Poles were not willing to make many concessions in this field, even if a new and quite unexpected issue had not suddenly arisen at the end of July which put all other questions in the shade.

The July number of *Iskra* carried an article by Lenin on the subject of the Russian attitude to the national question. In this he asserted once again the need for the Russian party to support self-determination for subject peoples as both theoretically just and tactically necessary. The RSDRP programme, accordingly,

assignment of responsibility to Rosa, it must be stated that by 1933 all the surviving Polish participants were finding it convenient to lay as much at Rosa's door as possible.

¹ The Polish report of the proceedings is given at length in the documents printed in *Z Pola Walki*, 1929, Nos. 7/8; particularly Hanecki's letter to Dzierżyński quoted above. See also the Russian congress protocol, pp. 135 ff. The Polish case was later published by Warszawski himself in 'The Polish Delegation to the Second Congress of the RSDRP' in *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, 1904, No. 1, pp. 25-41. Some of the relevant Polish material is reprinted by S. Krzhizhanovskii, 'The Polish Social Democracy and the Second Russian Congress' in *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya*, No. 2 (1933), pp. 111 ff.

'in no way prevented the Polish proletariat from making a separate and independent Poland their slogan, even though there might be little or no chance of realizing such a thing before the coming of Socialism itself'.¹ The article was not meant to raise difficulties or to annoy the Poles. Lenin had nothing very new or startling to say on the national question; self-determination was an integral part of the RSDRP programme—there for all to see—and Lenin went out of his way to explain that this was in no sense to be interpreted as support for nationalism in general or the PPS in particular. Mostly he cited Marx and Kautsky—the same authorities Rosa Luxemburg was to use in her 1905 reader on the Polish question.² But the effect in Berlin was of a bombshell. Although the Poles knew from the draft statutes worked out by *Iskra* that national self-determination was part of the Russian programme, they had considered this merely as a formal catechism. Their interpretation of Russian attitudes was based on a previous article in *Iskra* by Martov, which put much less emphasis on self-determination; a statement of the position to which they could at a pinch subscribe.³ Suddenly the official Russian attitude appeared quite different—just when the tricky organizational problems were under negotiation. Suspicious by nature and experience, frightened perhaps at the thought of being played like salmon, Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches reacted violently. The delegates were summarily instructed to tell the Russians forthwith that in view of the *Iskra* article the negotiations 'now hung by a thread [*na ostrzu noża*]. . . . It is very advisable that you tell the Russians that following this article the moral value of joining the Russians [as a weapon against the PPS] practically disappears and it was only the moral aspect that interested us in the first place. If they are not willing to alter paragraph 7 [of the statutes, which embodied the right to self-determination emphasized in the *Iskra* article] we will have to break off the [intended] affiliation. Tell Zasulich that after the *Iskra* article I [Rosa] am not in the least bit interested

¹ Lenin, 'The National Question in our Programme', *Iskra*, No. 44, reprinted in *Sochineniya*, Vol. V, p. 346.

² See below, pp. 321–2.

³ Yu. Martov, 'Za sorok let', *Iskra*, No. 33, p. 1. Warszawski in his correspondence with the Polish leaders had repeatedly referred to this article as an indication of Russian attitudes. The Russians had also supported Rosa Luxemburg's anti-PPS efforts at integrating the German Poles into the SPD during 1902–1903. See 'Organization and Nationality', *Iskra*, 1 April 1903, No. 37, pp. 3 ff.

in affiliation and that I have advised that no further concessions be made.¹

Warszawski had asked for instructions on the organizational question as well, and though Rosa Luxemburg was mainly interested in the national question, detailed orders and comments on all the problems under negotiation were now supplied. To the demand that the Russians should have representatives in the Polish Central Committee, Rosa Luxemburg replied negatively. To the demand that the Poles should form joint committees with the *Bund*, she said yes, but not for the moment. And so on. In each case Warszawski was given his answer, and had his diplomacy predigested as well. Rosa Luxemburg not only gave the leadership's decision but also supplied detailed argumentation with which to defend it. Finally, she came back to the national question again.

If they try to persuade you that in view of their willingness to maintain our point 3 [that no other Polish organization can belong to the general Russian party] the *Iskra* article has no real practical significance for us and the PPS is anyhow kept the other side of the door, then you must reply that for us the whole problem of affiliation has less practical than moral importance as a permanent demonstration against nationalism.²

Warszawski conveyed all this to the committee but was obliged to report to Berlin that the congress would not budge on paragraph 7; they intended to confirm it and its recent interpretation by Lenin.³ Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches now made a last attempt to strengthen their delegates' hands. In a telegram—probably on 6 August—they emphatically repeated their point of view and insisted that a refusal to eradicate the right of self-determination from the Russian programme meant nothing less than the abandonment of the class struggle in Poland and the alienation of the Polish working classes. It was the sort of fanfare that was clearly meant to be trumpeted under Russian noses. Warszawski now had no choice but to add the question of self-determination to the list of Polish minimum demands—it had not figured there before the appearance of the *Iskra* article. The

¹ Original letter in IML (M), Fund 209, No. 435, reprinted in *SDKPiL dokumenty*, Vol. II, pp. 368–73. Also Krzhizhanovskii, op. cit., p. 121. Rosa Luxemburg to Adolf Warszawski, probably 5 August 1903.

² *SDKPiL dokumenty*, p. 372.

³ *Z Pola Walki*, 1929, Nos. 7/8, p. 189.

Russians naturally refused to accept the demands of the Polish ultimatum on the spot; indeed the commission had no power to do so. Lenin held out little hope to Hanecki. As instructed, the Polish delegates thereupon deposited a declaration of their position with the committee and withdrew. By the next day, 7 August, it was all over. The congress itself hurriedly left Brussels to escape the over-anxious Belgian police and moved *en bloc* to London. There the *Bund* withdrew as well—as had been planned; in due course Lenin and Martov fell out over their respective drafts of paragraph 1 of the party statutes and the congress aligned itself into the now famous Bolshevik and Menshevik factions and ended up more divided than ever. The Poles, however, did not participate in any of this; their delegates had forlornly remained in Brussels when the Russians scurried away.¹

Officially the ball was still with the Russians. The Poles maintained that having left a statement it was now up to the Russians to reply and reopen negotiations. They themselves felt that they had shot their bolt; they were not willing to reappoint delegates or reopen negotiations on their own. But the Russians, beset by greater troubles, also made no further moves. The negotiations therefore lapsed and the Polish attempt to join the Russian party was put off with murmurs of resentment and sighs of exhaustion for another three years. When the Russians next called a congress in 1905 the Poles were not even invited, and Rosa Luxemburg claimed that she couldn't care less.²

The end of the negotiations and the manner of their ending none the less caused a minor flurry in the Polish party. No one bothered to inform the Polish membership officially about the negotiations or why they had failed; even some of the leaders, particularly Julian Marchlewski and Cezaryna Wojnarowska, had to rely on information from the Russians or gossip from Polish visitors to find out what had happened. There was the blatant discrepancy between formal SDKPiL thinking on organizational problems, allegedly the main purpose of the negotiations in the

¹ The quirk of timing thus kept the Poles from any commitment in the original Bolshevik/Menshevik alignment. Consequently, they escaped being classified for ever by later Communist history—a fate that befell all those who happened to be present and participated in the voting. No one has ever 'solved' the question whether the SDKPiL were initially Bolshevik or Menshevik in accordance with the imperative of later Communist history—though not for want of trying. For later SDKPiL attitudes, see below, pp. 351 ff. and Ch. XIII.

² See below, p. 352.

first place, and Rosa Luxemburg's private assessment that the main purposes of joining had been for moral aid and comfort against the PPS. All the business about organization now appeared as so much stuff and nonsense. Rosa and Leo Jogiches had apparently decided the issue off their own bat and had laid down fundamental priorities which might indeed be theirs but were not necessarily anyone else's. Some members were unaware of her reasoning and continued to see in the organizational questions the insurmountable obstacle. Others considered even these as an insufficient ground for failing to achieve that unity with the Russians which Rosa herself had preached for so long. Nothing shows more clearly than these negotiations and their failure to what extent an unofficial leadership dominated the official structure and procedures of the SDKPiL and how much of the policy of that leadership was made by Rosa Luxemburg herself.

Surprisingly, it was Cezaryna Wojnarowska who openly took issue with Berlin. She used the breakdown of the Russian negotiations as an excuse for expressing a generally critical view of SDKPiL policy. There was the formal discrepancy between the instructions of the fourth party congress to their delegates and their actual stand. There was further the domination of policy by the Foreign Committee—euphemism for Jogiches and Luxemburg. Finally, and most important, there was the everlasting and obsessive preoccupation with the PPS which in fact made Polish Social Democracy into a purely negative anti-PPS organization with little positive contribution of its own. Even so, Rosa Luxemburg's position was such that in spite of these severe and well-documented criticisms, Cezaryna Wojnarowska did not for one moment single her out for blame.¹ But she threatened to make the issue public. The Foreign Committee distributed her letter to its members and solicited replies. The result was a general drawing together; all the members agreed that the criticism was unjustified and that the Poles had no cause to 'capitulate' before the Russians. They refused to call a conference to deal with the problem

¹ See letter from Cezaryna Wojnarowska to the members of the Foreign Committee of SDKPiL between 29 September and 3 October 1903, IML (M), Fund 163, No. 65, reprinted in *SDKPiL dokumenty*, pp. 423–31. The only person Wojnarowska did go for was Dzierżyński whom she now accused of being hysterical. He had refused to pass her previous letters of criticism on to the Foreign Committee; indeed, he insisted that in his capacity as secretary to that Committee he would always refuse to pass on any communications which did not fit in with his particular idea of uncritical party discipline.

—‘for technical and financial reasons and on account of the pressure of party work’—and also refused to nominate new representatives to continue the efforts to join the Russian party.¹ Hurriedly a new organizational statute for the Foreign Committee was worked out and submitted to the members (and only the members); all wrote in to give their agreement. Cezaryna Wojnarowska, feeling herself censured, resigned her post as the representative of the SDKPiL in the International Socialist Bureau and from then until her death in 1911 played only a minor role in the party. Her place on the Bureau was taken by the obvious candidate—Rosa Luxemburg.

But even though the peer group had managed to draw together against the attack of one of its members and had prevented her from carrying out her threat to take her issue into the party, the whole thing could not be entirely hushed up. No attempt had been made to remove the genuine confusion in the party about the real reasons for starting and subsequently breaking off the negotiations. The SDKPiL committee in Warsaw took the opportunity at its next conference to issue a resolution calling for an early re-establishment of a Central Committee, to be based on Poland rather than abroad, and censured the Foreign Committee for calling the fourth congress ‘without adequate local representation’.² Even the publication of an official commentary on these events by Warszawski and Rosa Luxemburg herself did not settle the problem entirely; as Warszawski ingenuously admitted, his article was necessitated only by the publication of the official Russian minutes of the congress.³

Only Rosa Luxemburg’s pre-eminent position had prevented her being named as primarily responsible—at least within the SDKPiL. Warszawski, in subsequent explanations, was careful not to point to her specific role; though there was no unanimity as to the grounds of failure, everyone agreed not to capitulate before the Russians. The orientation of the SDKPiL as a spearhead against the PPS was maintained—even though some members agreed with Cezaryna Wojnarowska that too much emphasis was

¹ See draft of a resolution of the Foreign Committee, 22 October 1903, IML (M), Fund 163, No. 65. These decisions were communicated to Cezaryna Wojnarowska with some glee by Dzierżyński on 5 November 1903.

² See resolution of conference of SDKPiL activists in Warsaw on 27 December 1903, *SDKPiL dokumenty*, Vol. II, p. 537.

³ A. Warszawski, ‘The Polish Delegation to the Second Congress of the RSDRP’, *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, 1904, No. 1, p. 25.

placed on this aspect. Rosa Luxemburg emerged triumphant—and the attacks on the PPS grew in intensity. While Warszawski was left to defend the honour of the delegates in their negotiations at the Russian conference, it was Rosa Luxemburg who interpreted these events in the light of the prevailing battle with the PPS. Only she had the ability to turn a failure into a triumph—though on this occasion even Rosa Luxemburg had to struggle hard. It was all the more important since the PPS had seized the opportunity of pointing out to the world that those very Russians before whom their Social-Democrat opponents beat their heads upon the ground had taken much the same view about Polish independence as the PPS itself.¹ Rosa Luxemburg set out to distinguish between the Russian attitude and that of the PPS; the former admitted the tactical value of the national struggle but subordinated it to the overriding class conflict, while the PPS shamelessly made them equal. There could be no comfort for the PPS in any analogy between themselves and the Russians. Rosa Luxemburg was easily able to recall the contempt in which the PPS held the Russians—Social Democracy as much as Tsarism. By emphasizing that their hatred of Russia was as much national as their love for Poland, the PPS obliterated the Socialist issue of the class struggle completely. She characterized the PPS preoccupation with Socialism as the gesture of a dying liberalism; whenever bourgeois liberals came to the end of the road they made a final flickering attempt to save themselves by flirting with Socialism. Thus Socialism was nothing but a temporary ally to make nationalism respectable, and the whole Socialist phraseology of the PPS no more than a thin cloak with which to disguise its nationalism. It was an old story, but Rosa Luxemburg succeeded once again in arguing herself to apparent victory. In the process, however, Lenin's *Iskra* article, which she had previously characterized as destructive and unacceptable, now turned out on closer examination to provide useful ammunition against the PPS after all. Rosa Luxemburg could truly turn sophistry to good account as well as anyone.²

For Rosa Luxemburg the next year was one long open season in

¹ See 'Iskra and the Polish Question', *Przedświt*, September 1903, No. 9, pp. 362 ff.

² *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, October 1903, No. 10, pp. 366–83. The SDKPiL leadership, including Rosa Luxemburg, were almost certainly unaware that Lenin, trying to solicit support for the congress, had approached the PPS

the enjoyable pursuit of the PPS. Much time and effort were devoted to a publishing venture in Poznań, support for which had finally been screwed out of the German executive. It was to reconcile the Poles to SPD organization, a policy which its PPS predecessor had so significantly failed to advocate. But in spite of Rosa Luxemburg's efforts and contributions, the *Gazeta Ludowa* never really got off the ground; Poznań—largely an agricultural district—was even more of a political desert than Upper Silesia. By 1905 Ledebour and her other opponents in this matter in the SPD had demonstrated to the German executive that, in spite of German money and Rosa Luxemburg's impassioned pen, the paper had made even less impact in terms of circulation and influence than that of the PPS.¹

For all practical purposes Rosa forgot about Russian Social Democracy for the moment. But there was no forgetting Russia—on the contrary, new and exciting possibilities were appearing on the eastern horizon. The Russo-Japanese War had broken out and, like the RSDRP, the Polish Social Democrats speculated on the possible revolutionary consequences. But to start with, these were abstract and general rather than particular and immediate; certainly there was no prediction of any revolutionary outbreaks. Rosa Luxemburg confined herself to general remarks about the internal weakness of Tsarism which did not differ substantially from the standard analysis of the preceding years.² When it came, the revolution of 1905 took the Poles as much by surprise as it did their Russian colleagues. And then the reaction was not for Socialist unity but entirely the opposite—even sharper differentiation from the PPS. For Rosa Luxemburg, unity among the squabbling Russians was one thing—there was nothing of substance to quarrel about, beyond personal intransigence; in Poland, on the other hand, the division was fundamental, between Socialists and pseudo-Socialists. Unity could come only if the PPS capitulated and went out of existence. No one in the SDKPiL seriously disagreed with her. The Luxemburg tradition was firmly embedded.

at the same time as he was negotiating with the SDKPiL (*Leninskii Sbornik*, Vol. VIII, pp. 340, 356). In spite of Lenin's specific instructions to play it soft with the PPS negotiators, the latter had shied off early at the thought of any formal links with the Russian party, particularly with the new *Iskra* group of Lenin and Martov.

¹ For the details of these efforts at Poznań, see above, pp. 178–81.

² 'War', *Czerwony Sztandar*, February 1904, No. 14.

The failure of the Russian negotiations not only indicated how strong Rosa Luxemburg's position in the SDKPiL really was but actually strengthened it further. In 1904 she was at the apex of influence in the Polish party. For most outsiders she *was* the SDKPiL—the party was the institutional means of giving expression to her ideas. Although the Poles had now officially left the Russian stage, Rosa made a sudden, quick-change reappearance as umpire between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks—in German clothes. The touchy applicant for joining the all-Russian party of 1903 became the distinguished foreign arbiter of 1904.

The break-up of the second Russian congress and the subsequent hair-raising polemics echoed unsympathetically in the German party. The SPD leaders were not interested in or familiar with Russian questions but the tradition established by Wilhelm Liebknecht of solving other people's problems made recourse to their judgement and good offices almost inevitable. Both Mensheviks and Bolsheviks made every effort to draw authoritative German opinion into the dispute on their own side. The Mensheviks were better known and better connected—especially once Plekhanov had aligned himself with Lenin's opponents. Accordingly, throughout 1904, Martov, Akselrod, Potresov, and Dan solicited their German acquaintances for their views—and above all for contributions to *Iskra* which they now controlled. 'The question is how to beat Lenin. . . . Most important of all, we must incite authorities like Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg, and Parvus against him.'¹ Contributions were readily forthcoming. When Lenin attempted to counter this critical support for the Mensheviks by sending Lyadov to explain the Bolshevik case, Kautsky told him frankly: 'Look, we do not *know* your Lenin. He is an unknown quantity for us, but we do know Plekhanov and Akselrod very well. It is only thanks to them that we have been able to obtain any light on the situation in Russia. We simply cannot just accept your contention that Plekhanov and Akselrod have turned into opportunists all of a sudden.'²

Thus Bebel, Kautsky, and the others were naturally predisposed to support those whom they had known so long rather than

¹ *Sotsial-demokraticheskoe dvizhenie v Rossii, Materialy* (edited by Potresov and Nikolaevskii), Moscow/Leningrad, 1928, p. 124.

² M. Lyadov, *Iz zhizni partii v 1903–1907 godakh (Vospominaniya)*, Moscow 1956, p. 16; also O. Pyatnitskii, *Zapiski bolshevikov*, Moscow 1956.

a new upstart recently arrived from Russia. They were primarily concerned with healing a split which they did not really understand; as in the dispute among French Socialists a few years earlier, the Germans reluctantly heaved themselves into action through the formal procedures of the International Socialist Bureau. In private they had nothing but contempt for such squabbles. '[These differences] are all bunk when one considers what is involved in practice and how much [really important] work remains to be done.'¹

Only two people in Germany really knew some of the issues involved—Parvus and Rosa Luxemburg. She for one was well aware that Kautsky's contribution to Russian problems would at best be general and theoretical—he knew nothing of the particulars. 'Karl does not understand these things in detail. His attitudes are largely based on my attitudes. If people start talking to him he may easily lose the firm ground under his feet and . . . get himself all tangled up.'² The Mensheviks thus knew very well what they were doing in concentrating their solicitations on Parvus and Rosa Luxemburg.

Parvus did not want to be drawn into taking a definite stand. His position in the German party was precarious. He thought the Russian quarrel unnecessary and exaggerated and in his private letters criticized and advised moderation to both sides. The Mensheviks were closer to him as individuals but his temperament made him realize early on that a mirror of his own revolutionary temperament was not really to be found among them. Characteristically, he told them: 'You are behaving like a shoal of orthodox carp, who think that every little fish swimming about in the muddy waters of ideology is a pike which will gobble you up. Go and take a look at a river when it is in spring flood. . . .'³

Rosa Luxemburg on the other hand was more easily mobilized for a firm commitment. The Menshevik leaders were no close friends of hers, quite the contrary; but she had a more recent

¹ August Bebel to Victor Adler, 28 December 1904, in V. Adler, *Briefwechsel*, p. 446. For a discussion of German attitudes to the split in the Russian party, see D. Geyer, 'The attitude of German Social Democracy to the split in the Russian party', *International Review of Social History* (1958), Vol. III, pp. 195-219, 418-44.

² Jogiches letters, IML (M), mid-October 1905. Kautsky in fact contributed to the current controversy on 15 May 1904 in *Iskra*, No. 66: 'A sermon on the virtues of tolerance and the need to respect one's leaders'. (J. L. H. Keep, *The Rise of Social Democracy in Russia*, London 1963, p. 145.)

³ *Sotsial-demokraticheskoe dvizhenie v Rossii*, p. 139.

score to settle with Lenin on account of the national question. More important still was the fact that she had taken Cezaryna Wojnarowska's place in the International Bureau and this institution had now formally been saddled with the difficult question of re-uniting the Russians. She was the German party's main expert on Russian, as much as on Polish, questions. Consequently at the beginning of 1904 she took the somewhat belated opportunity of looking into the issues that had been raised after the Polish departure from the second Russian congress, and so happened inevitably upon Lenin's *What is to be done?* Her own negative reaction to Lenin's organizational propositions thus coincided with Potresov's request for an article in *Iskra*; she killed two birds with one stone by writing a long article for *Neue Zeit* which she offered the Russians for translation. Its previous appearance in a German paper was due mainly to the importance she attached to this question—and to the opportunity of writing a major piece for as wide an audience as possible. To Potresov she pleaded with unjustified modesty that her Russian was anyhow not good enough for an original contribution in that language.¹

In her article Rosa Luxemburg took issue not so much with Lenin's detailed prescriptions but with the underlying philosophy. She seized on his characterization of Social Democracy—'Jacobins joined to a proletariat which has become conscious of its class interest'. The notion of Jacobins led directly to the notions of Blanqui and Nechaev—both highly sectarian bogey-men to the adults of the Second International and their mass concepts. 'Social Democracy is not joined to the organization of the proletariat. It is itself the proletariat . . . it is the rule of the majority within its own party.' Instead of an all-powerful central committee whose writ ran 'from Geneva to Liège and from Tomsk to Irkutsk, the role of the director must go to the collective ego of the working

¹ Rosa Luxemburg, 'Organizational Questions in Russian Social Democracy', *NZ*, 1903/1904, Vol. II, pp. 484-92, 529-35; also 'Organizatsionnye voprosy russkoi sotsialdemokratii', *Iskra*, 10 July 1904, No. 69, pp. 2-7. It has been suggested that the use of the word 'russkii' (ethnic) rather than 'rossiiskii' (geographical), which was in the official title of the RSDRP, was a derogatory hint at Polish-Russian discord, thus calling in question the all-Russianness claimed by the RSDRP (E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-23*, London 1950, Vol. 1, p. 36). One wonders, however, whether this inflection, if deliberate, was Rosa Luxemburg's or Potresov's. Quotations are taken from *Leninism or Marxism?* (edited by Bertram D. Wolfe), Ann Arbor (Michigan) 1961. For Rosa Luxemburg's comments to Potresov, see *Sotsial-demokraticheskoe dvizhenie v Rossii*, pp. 129 ff.

class. . . . The working class demands the right to make its mistakes and learn in the dialectic of history. Let us speak plainly. Historically, the errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee.¹

Lenin's analogy of factory discipline as being a useful school for a revolutionary party caused Rosa Luxemburg not only to attack this particular—and perhaps unfortunate—simile but to attack Lenin's preoccupation with discipline as a whole. The sort of leadership that could create and direct a disciplined party was much more likely to hold the working class back than to push it forward:

The tendency is for the directing organs . . . to play a conservative role. The present tactical policy of German Social Democracy is useful precisely because it is supple as well as firm. This is a sign of the fine adaptation of the party, in the smallest detail of its everyday activity, to the conditions of a parliamentary régime. The party knows how to utilize all the resources of the terrain without modifying its principles. If there was inertia and over-emphasis of parliamentary tactics in Germany, this was the result of too much direction rather than too little, and the adoption of Lenin's formula would only increase rather than thaw out such conservative inertia. How much worse would be such a strait-jacket for nascent Russian Social Democracy on the eve of its battles against Tsarism.²

Opportunism—against which, according to Lenin, a centralized organization would serve as a bulwark—was not an alien ingredient blown into the Russian party by western bourgeois democracy, by debased intellectuals looking for careers in Social Democracy. (Did Rosa take this as a reflection on herself?) It was due in the Russian context to the 'backward political condition of Russian society'—a natural and inevitable condition which only time, work, and experience could heal.

But the debate should not be seen—though it usually is—as a collision between two fundamentally irreconcilable concepts of organization, or even revolution.³ First, Rosa Luxemburg's knowledge of Russian conditions was in fact more limited than might

¹ *Leninism or Marxism?*, pp. 84, 89, 108.

² *Ibid.*, p. 93.

³ Western liberal and socialist tradition has coupled Rosa Luxemburg's article with her later comment on the October revolution, and it is significant that the American editor of her work has published these two articles in a separate book as indicative of a consistent and fundamental critique of Bolshevism (see above, Chapter I, p. 1).

appear; her competence was substantial only by comparison with other people in Germany. During the Polish negotiations at the second congress, the organizational problem had not been an issue—at least not in this form—and there is no evidence that Rosa Luxemburg had read *What is to be done?* before the end of 1903. She was arguing from the German experience to the Russian. Because of her status as an international authority on Marxist theory, she had been called in to sit in judgement on the Russian quarrels. In the circumstances she could hardly help writing with some glee. She extolled the German virtues rather more forcefully than her belief in them warranted—or than she would have done in any context but the Russian. Certainly she never made such a contrast between Polish and German conditions, though it would have been just as valid. Moreover, as we have noted, her own attitudes in the Polish party hardly bore out such demands for more ‘democracy’; instead of controlling local organizations, she simply ignored them altogether. Jogiches, on the other hand, later tried to institute a system of control as tight as Lenin’s, even if he did not choose to expound a philosophy of centralization. We must always make allowances for the fact that the angles of the argument were made more acute by the particular polemic—just as we must for Lenin. In this particular instance, moreover, Lenin took the unusual step of admitting this openly.

We all know now that the Economists bent the stick to one side. To make it straight again it had to be bent to the other, and that is what I did. I am sure that Russian Social Democracy will always be able to straighten the stick whenever it has been bent by any kind of opportunism and that our stick will consequently be always at its straightest and entirely ready for action.¹

Rosa Luxemburg, too, was usually willing to make allowances for excessive rigidity where genuine revolutionaries were concerned—as in Guesde’s case—but she would make no such concessions to Lenin; indeed, she was careful to give her article as unpolemical as appearance as possible, as though her statements represented the minimum that was reasonable.

There is no escaping the conclusion: throughout the Russian negotiations and in her argument with Lenin Rosa Luxemburg showed a deviousness, a sophistry, which in her German context

¹ *Vtoroi s’ezd RSDRP, Protokoly*, Moscow 1959, p. 136; also *Leninskii Sbornik*, Vol. VI, pp. 220–49.

she would have stigmatized as beneath contempt. There are traces of it in much of Polish-Russian life, particularly where the PPS was concerned. It is almost as though we were dealing with two different people. The careful, secretive compartmenting was not merely convenience, a difference in procedures and methods according to the kind of people with whom she had to deal, but a substantive clash of attitudes, mutually incompatible, which had to be kept separate. To some extent Rosa was always aware of this; she lectured Jogiches about it but without realizing the extent of her own schizophrenia. Her own objective evaluation of the needs of her two different worlds, and the responses they called for, was perceptive enough, but there is a more fundamental issue here which goes beyond national differences. The difficult relationship between ideology and pragmatic action has been identified as a continuing problem for all political parties, *irrespective* of their ideology—but the more intense the ideology, the greater the difficulty. Where does the relevance of ideological assertions for practical politics end, and mere functional symbolism or ritual for the purpose of ensuring unity or legitimacy begin? The problem becomes acute in any assessment of Lenin's political actions and programmes—and is still the most difficult question in dealing with the Soviet Union or China today. In Rosa Luxemburg's case, how much of the famous unity with the Russian proletariat, of the democratic criticism of Lenin, was genuine ideological commitment and how much symbolic rhetoric?¹ Most important of all, was it the recognition that dissonance between preaching and practice was the prevailing style in the SPD that made her reconcile her own tactics almost puritanically to her expressed ideology, while she was unaware of such unconscious sophistry among Poles and Russians, or at least pilloried it in others as deliberate prevarication? Probably so, in which case her (and Lenin's) highly personal polemics were an unconscious concession to the primitive, still highly personal, politics of the East. There the need to assert ideological unity was still foremost, while in Germany a higher stage had been reached: choices of policy and of the means to implement them.

Yet it was also more than just a mixture of pique and tactics, or

¹ In sociological terms, the difference is between the *pragmatic* and the *expressive* function of ideologies. For an analysis of the Soviet Union in such terms, see Z. Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc—Unity and Conflict*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1960.

even subconscious unreason. Rosa Luxemburg was never one to polemicize to order or to express any view that was not sincerely held. She pointed out to Potresov that she hoped he would be pleased with her article since it corresponded with what she understood to be the Menshevik position in this question—a happy coincidence.¹ Her call for broad popular participation in Social-Democratic activity was partly due to an excessive transplantation of idealized German conditions into the Russian context, just as Lenin's conditions were far too narrowly Russian to have general validity. Underlying this, however, was a more fundamental question. This concerned, not organization at all, but class consciousness—its nature and growth. Lenin believed that without the active tugging of a revolutionary élite, working-class consciousness was doomed to a vicious circle of impotence, that it could never rise above the economic level of trade-union activity. This had been the stuff of his battle with the 'Economists' (who in fact would have agreed with many of his propositions; as so often, Lenin's analysis was sharpened by attributing an extreme view to his opponents which bore little relation to reality). But he really did see the growth of class consciousness in terms of a critical minimum effort not unlike that of modern economists with regard to growth 'take off'; a volume of effort injected into the system greater than it would normally be capable of generating itself. Rosa Luxemburg, on the other hand, believed class consciousness to be essentially a problem of friction between Social Democracy and society. Friction was thus the main function of class consciousness. The more closely Social Democracy was engaged with bourgeois society on all fronts—economic as well as political, industrial as well as social, mental as well as physical—the greater and more rapid the growth of class consciousness. It was not a tangent but a continuum. Her solution was always more friction, more close engagement; a confrontation of eye to eye and fist to fist—rather than any specific and peculiar injection of energy from some élite. She proved from her own experience and way of life that élites were necessary; but that they should be allocated a specific function in Marxist theory or strategy was another matter altogether. She was neither analyst nor practitioner of power but of influence; instead of a dynamo which drove the whole Socialist works, an élite should be a magnet with a powerful field of influence over existing structures—a

¹ *Sotsial-demokraticheskoe dvizhenie v Rossii, Materialy*, pp. 129, 131.

magnet, moreover, whose effective intensity grew as more friction stepped up the electric current. Friction once more was the source of all revolutionary energy—an analysis already indicated in her pamphlet *Social Reform or Revolution* and elaborated, as will be seen, with great sophistication after 1910.

The fact that this problem never directly emerged in her polemic with Lenin is no doubt due to the given organizational context of the argument (see only the title of her article), and the polemical rather than exploratory orientation. Like Lenin, she saw the dispute as a contest between opportunism and the application of consistent principles; they differed only over which was which. Given these terms of reference, the argument was merely a particular local variant of German revisionism, about which she had been writing continuously since 1898. When dealing with Lenin's concept of opportunism she immediately put on her German spectacles—and promptly the peculiar Russian circumstances which had produced his concept in the first place were blotted out; all Rosa saw was the familiar Bernstein version which she had already dealt with in *Social Reform or Revolution*.

We thus have three separate factors to consider. First, the Polish-Russian background and style of the debate, the use of Russian rather than German *techniques* on both sides. Second, the real philosophic difference between Lenin's élite effort and Rosa's élite influence—due to a difference in the cognitive appraisal of class consciousness. Third, the conscious and unconscious evocations of *experience* on both sides which simply do not match: the centrifugal Russian individualism and indiscipline which Lenin knew, and Rosa's defence against a German assault on the validity and meaningfulness of Marxist theory in favour of reformist pragmatism. These three factors are different in kind but are exceedingly hard to separate. Yet, having identified them, it is possible to see them quite dramatically separate in action. Thus the following passage shows the tension between the pressure of the philosophy of class consciousness and the partly restrictive framework of the Bernstein context, with its dichotomy of means and ends. The kink in the argument is quite clear. First, class consciousness:

For the first time in the history of civilization the people are expressing their will consciously and in opposition to all ruling classes. But this will can only [in the end] be satisfied beyond the limits of the existing

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

Then, instead of directing this argument specifically against the Leninist concept of class consciousness, Rosa Luxemburg suddenly returned to the 'German' relationship between end and means, between revolution and reform, which really had no place in the present polemic.

On the one hand we have the mass; on the other its historic goal, located outside existing society. On the one hand we have the day-to-day struggle; on the other the social revolution. . . . It follows that this movement can best be advanced by tacking betwixt and between *the two dangers by which it is constantly being threatened*. One is the loss of its mass character, the other the abandonment of its goal. One is the danger of sinking back to the condition of a sect, the other the danger of becoming a movement of bourgeois social reform.¹

Lenin's thesis was fitted into the German revisionist debate by very procrustean means; he simply became the opposite extreme to the Bernstein evil—sectarianism instead of reformism, and both leading to the divorce of social revolution from day-to-day activities. The argument is ultimately circular. Both extremes lead to failure; only the central and correct position leads to success. The real issue—essentially one of means, since Lenin was not one whit less revolutionary than Rosa Luxemburg—was forgotten.

Confronting two sets of ideas is never an easy problem, even when they are causally related in a specific polemic. The same obscure dissonances recur in the other, later, Lenin-Luxemburg disputes, the national question, the October Revolution, imperialism—and not only with Lenin, of course. The present elaboration will warn the reader against facile and over-simplified confrontations. There is more at stake than democracy versus authoritarianism. And then there is the whole host of latent *agreements* which do not even surface through this polemic; the most important of them is the joint commitment to revolutionary action, as the events of 1905–1906 were to show. The distinction between doing rather than talking, which ultimately brought Luxemburg and Lenin together on the same side, did

¹ *Leninism or Marxism?*, p. 105. My italics; the reference is directly to *Social Reform or Revolution*.

not even appear to exist in 1904. Nor did the accusation of spontaneity, with its assumption that if you promote the importance of mass action you proportionately demote the function of leadership. In analysing the clash of ideas, historical hindsight is fine—provided it is declared at the border, and not smuggled in with the pretence that it has a right to belong and can justly be required of the original participants.

Of all the foreign contributions to the Menshevik cause, only Rosa Luxemburg's really went home—even though Martov had expected the great Kautsky's intervention to be their most effective deterrent. Lenin was stung by her article into a curious and typical reply which he offered to *Neue Zeit*, but Kautsky refused to publish it; in fact Rosa Luxemburg, to whom it first came for comment, contemptuously brushed it aside as 'prattle'.¹ It is significant that Lenin treated Rosa Luxemburg, not as a Pole, an opponent-in-kind who for ten years had been within the orbit of Russian Social Democracy, but as a distinguished foreign commentator clothed in all the majesty of the SPD. 'We have to be thankful to the German comrades for the attention which they devote to our party literature and for their attempt to disseminate this literature in German Social-Democratic circles.' Nor would he give battle all along the front; the more she wanted to discuss first principles, the more Lenin chose to argue about discrete facts. 'Rosa Luxemburg deals in absolutes and ignores relative truths. For instance she completely missed the purpose of our wish for centralized control so preoccupied was she with the horrors of that control itself.'² He carefully analysed the voting at the congress—he was really the first scientific psephologist of Marxism; had the congress not given his ideas the approval of a clear (Bolshevik) majority? But above all, the article was defensive. He had learnt his lesson; in future, fringe groups would be kept out of his party, or at least confined to the periphery. He would not risk public confrontation again. It was a lesson he remembered even after 1906, when the Poles began to play a significant part in the RSDRP; this time he dealt with them not as Germans but

¹ See *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 91, letter dated Summer 1905. Lenin's article is called 'One step forward, two steps back (An answer to Rosa Luxemburg)', first reprinted in *Sochineniya*, Vol. VII, pp. 439–50. The article was drafted by Lenin in Germany with the assistance of an unknown friend.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 439–41.

as with any Russian opponents.¹ Meantime he prepared for the next congress at which there would be no Poles. In the event, the third congress of the RSDRP was dominated by the Bolsheviks, and it politely refused the German offer to arbitrate in the Russian party dispute.²

Rosa Luxemburg's effect on the actual Bolshevik–Menshevik dispute was therefore slight. Lenin might be stung by foreign comment, but he would not accommodate his policy one whit.³ Only the Russian revolution temporarily submerged the quarrel; but when it was over the confrontation between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks emerged once more, sharpened by a new post-revolutionary bitterness which put even the previous arguments in the shade. It was not until much later, after Rosa Luxemburg's death, that her isolated comments on the organizational problems of Russian Social Democracy were resurrected and used as building blocks in the new technology of constructing political legitimacy out of historical alignments for or against Lenin.

¹ See below, pp. 589–91, 595–6.

² *Tretii s'ezd RSDRP, Protokoly*, Moscow 1959, pp. 339–40. The congress took place in April–May 1905.

³ Throughout 1905 Lenin trailed before his readership a number of derogatory references to what by this time had already become concretized as a special but fallacious Marxist theory of organization—Rosa Luxemburg's 'organization-as-process'. Most of these described her views as 'little else but defence of a lack of principles', and 'something not to be taken seriously' (see for instance *Vpered*, 14 January, 14 February, 21 February, 1905). Naturally the opportunity of lumping Rosa Luxemburg with Akselrod and other Mensheviks was not to be missed. The most recent summary of the literature of issues can be found in Luciano Amodio, 'The Lenin–Luxemburg Confrontation on Party Organization', *Quaderni Piacentini*, Vol. IV, No. 21, January–February 1965, pp. 3–20.

This controversy has of course left its mark in subsequent polemics, and Rosa Luxemburg's critique of Lenin has been used many times as evidence—from an impeccably revolutionary Marxist source—of Lenin's basically bureaucratic and dictatorial tendencies (see for instance above, p. 1). Elaborate reference is made in the following major works: F. Dan, *Proishchozdenie Bolshevizma*, New York 1946; N. Valentinov, *Mes Rencontres avec Lénine*, Paris 1964; Bertram D. Wolfe, *Three who made a Revolution*; see also Amodio, op. cit., pp. 9–10, note 10.

VIII

REVOLUTION OVERTAKES THE REVOLUTIONARIES, 1905-1906

I: GERMANY

IN the eyes of contemporaries the Russian revolution erupted dramatically on 22 January 1905. An act of specific violence on the outskirts of St. Petersburg was followed by repercussions so intense and widespread as to justify the sacred word revolution, a continuous and above all an interconnected process with enormous if unforeseeable consequences. Only later, in the search for perspective, were the earlier warning signs identified and appreciated; at the time the chief feature of the Russian revolution was its marvellous unexpectedness. Surprise was universal—for the Tsarist government with its palate jaded by years of hair-raising police reports; for the distant Germans for whom nothing but squabbles, chaos, and terrorism ever came from the East; but most of all for professional revolutionaries like Martov, Lenin, and Rosa Luxemburg. The fact that she later worked out a connection between the wave of strikes which began in the last years of the previous century and the events of 1905 is evidence only of her sense of history and not of any special contemporary perceptions.

Rosa Luxemburg at once moved into high gear. She identified her activities in both her roles: the postulation of tasks for the Russian and Polish proletariats and the translation of these revolutionary events for the benefit of German Socialists. Her personality, split into the two 'separate' contexts of Russian Poland and Germany, separated her efforts into two distinct compartments, and we are therefore justified in dealing with each one separately. Though the importance of the Russian revolution was great enough to call for detailed blow-by-blow reportage, Rosa Luxemburg always translated the lessons from these events into a German

context.¹ Emphasis and selection were deliberate. She was sufficiently aware of the difference between the two societies, and between the two Socialist movements in Russia and Germany, to realize that such pointing up was necessary; the lessons would be lost if they were indiscriminately reported. Rosa Luxemburg was probably the only person able to carry out this dual task; and during 1905 she devoted almost all her effort to it—the most burning problem of the time. “The connection of political and social life among all capitalist states is today so intense that the effects of the Russian revolution will be enormous throughout the whole so-called civilized world—much greater than the effect of any bourgeois revolution in history.”²

Though the revolutionary events in Russia were not matched by any similar outbreak in Germany, there were some surface indications of ferment. Germany, too, was in the grip of heightened tension, a fever which swept through the best-fortified regions and across national borders like the plague. In 1905 the number and extent of strikes in Germany reached a new peak; both trade unions and employers reported a hardening of attitudes and the language of the class conflict crept insidiously into the most routine confrontations. The events in Russia gave these economic clashes a self-conscious political character. At the same time, the first real movement for Prussian suffrage reform crystallized into the political peg on which to hang the new militancy; the political orientation of Social Democracy focused on this issue. The interaction between political and economic dissatisfactions—which Rosa Luxemburg was later to elevate into a peculiar feature of a revolutionary period—was clearly at work in the early months of 1905. None of this was caused specifically by the Russian revolution, but events in Russia were widely discussed in the German press and this certainly raised the temperature. German Social Democracy developed a distinct feeling of solidarity with the proletariat in Russia; here and there even muted calls for emulation could be heard.

Since the years 1905–1906 not only made their immediate

¹ No attempt will be made to cover her analysis of the Russian revolution for German readers except in so far as it related to specific German problems. Her coverage was only a précis of her still more extensive writings in the Polish press and will be dealt with in the second part of this chapter; the interesting aspect here is the difference in the conclusions drawn.

² ‘Reflection of Revolutionary Flames’, *SAZ*, 29 April 1905 (special May Day issue).

contribution to the development of SPD policy but later became a rich source of recrimination and misunderstanding in the party, the general effects of the Russian revolution on German Social Democracy must be summarized briefly. The party as a whole undoubtedly moved left—the executive and those elements in the SPD which produced as well as interpreted the consensus: left, it should be said, not into the arms of ‘foreign revolutionary romantics’ like Rosa Luxemburg and Parvus, but in their willingness to discuss positive action and to work out tactics accordingly. The idea of the general strike was much in vogue. Already in 1904 *Neue Zeit* had opened its pages to contributors on this subject, and had actively encouraged discussion of tactics as well as wider implications. The anarchists and syndicalists who had previously been driven underground by orthodox Social Democracy now rose to the surface like mushrooms on the periphery of the SPD; when it came to something resembling ‘their’ general strike they felt they were close to legitimacy once more. For the first time for years anarchist speakers appeared on provincial Socialist platforms by invitation. The orthodox party press led by *Vorwärts* was much more cautious; but it, too, gave pride of place to Russian events and for the first few months abstained from wagging blunt and cautious fingers over the difference between Russian chaos and German order. Here was ‘good old somnolent *Vorwärts*’, that ‘creeping object without a backbone’, in the van of salutation for the Russian workers.¹ In more practical terms, the Russian representatives in Germany, living in their opaque world of illegal circles and pseudonyms, found sudden interest and sympathy among their hosts. The puzzled, *petit-bourgeois* attitudes of benevolent indifference among the German comrades quickly thawed out into spontaneous demonstrations of goodwill and offers of practical assistance; Russian and German students discovered all at once that they had much in common.² Even more important in creating solidarity was the negative aspect of common

¹ For the coverage of the revolution in the German press, Left as well as Right, see the exhaustive collection, ‘*Die Russische Revolution von 1905-1907 im Spiegel der Deutschen Presse*’, Vols. 2/III to 2/VII in the series *Archivalische Forschungen zur Geschichte der Deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, 2nd Series, Berlin (East), 1955-61.

² See M. Lyadov, *Iz zhizni partii v 1903-1907 godakh (Vospominaniya)*, Moscow 1956, particularly p. 16, and O. Pyatnitskii, *Zapiski bolshevikov*, Moscow 1956, p. 38. But neither of these books does justice to the sudden *frisson* of Russo-German solidarity in 1905; both were written with all the hindsight of many years of Communist indictments of German Socialist *embourgeoisement*.

persecution; the German authorities now clamped down all the more ruthlessly on all Social Democrats suspected of furthering the discomfiture of the Emperor's imperial cousin in Russia.¹

All over Germany meetings were held in support of the Russian revolutionaries, with inflammatory speeches from members of the executive followed by collections to provide more practical backing. Money was, as always, the staple export of the rich and well-organized SPD. The year 1905 was one of agitation on a new scale—not being an election year the agitation was free of the limiting necessities of cadging votes. The executive, as well as analysts like Kautsky, adopted a more militant attitude, whether in their approach to agitation or in their willingness to discuss more revolutionary tactics. The atmosphere in Germany during 1905 had a new tang: at the top, a predisposition to more radical thinking and planning; at the bottom, a new militancy in pressing the routine economic and political confrontations between Socialism and society. In itself this year of heightened expectations left little positive trace either at top or bottom, but it did leave memories on which a further wave of agitation five years later could self-consciously build. The year of revolution in Russia acted as a precedent in Germany—for the theory of class consciousness, like the English common law, is a cumulative edifice built upon the multiple accretions of experience. And in the minds of a small left-wing group the events in Russia and in Germany planted a seed of practical revolution which was never entirely to be uprooted. It was they who hammered home 1905 as a German as well as Russian precedent that would not be denied, even though they magnified the importance of German revolutionary sentiment in the process. This was the group for which Rosa Luxemburg provided the intellectual leadership and personal example; for nearly a decade she became almost the sole embodiment of the validity of this experience. Karl Radek's later statement that 'with [Rosa Luxemburg's] *Massenstreik, Partei und Gewerkschaften* begins the separation of the Communist movement from Social Democracy in Germany' may have been elliptical but it was not untrue.²

¹ For the Königsberg trial of 1904, the most spectacular of these prosecutions, see above, pp. 197–8, note 2.

² *Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Leo Jogiches*, Hamburg 1921, p. 15. For a brief analysis of the effects of the Russian revolution on official SPD thinking, see H. Schurer, 'The Russian Revolution of 1905 and the Origins of German

When the Russian revolution broke out the SPD had only recently emerged from its long tussle with revisionism. After the 1903 congress the executive considered itself victorious, and its theory-conscious allies were on top of the world. Kautsky and Rosa Luxemburg in close partnership had carried the colours of the German victory over revisionism into the International, and had brought home an even more resounding triumph from Amsterdam. The articulate defenders of revisionism were silent at last. The attack on revisionism in practice had been carried right into the southern camp—into the stronghold of the so-called special and all-permissive conditions. The German party leaders had every reason to be pleased with themselves, and Kautsky was in his most optimistic mood. With revisionism apparently out of the way, he could now devote his intellectual energy to the formulation of a more aggressive strategy for a once more united party.

But the unity was more apparent than real. The trade-union leaders, pragmatists all, had kept relatively silent during the spate of words about revisionism; they had resisted only when directly attacked, when intellectuals—particularly foreign ones—had claimed authority to speak on organizational matters with a competence which they clearly did not possess. The debate about the general strike, however, which had begun in 1904 in the relatively remote sanctum of *Neue Zeit*, was now spilling over on to the shop floor. The constituency parties—in Germany, as in Britain, among the most radical elements in the party—seemed possessed by the mass-strike devil, and claimed the right to interfere in local trade-union affairs. As the debate moved dangerously forward as far as consideration of when and how, the trade-union leaders were forced to come out into the open. Not only were the

Communism' in *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 39 (1961), pp. 459-71. This article exaggerates the permanence of the impact of Russian events on Germany and consequently fails to distinguish adequately between the real left wing and official SPD thinking as exemplified by Kautsky. The later break between Rosa Luxemburg and Kautsky thus becomes largely incomprehensible except in purely personal terms.

A thorough examination from German official archives of the effect of the revolution on Germany as a whole, on the SPD, the bourgeois parties, on Reich as well as provincial governments, is in 'Die Auswirkungen der ersten Russischen Revolution von 1905-1907 auf Deutschland', Vols. 2/I and 2/II in the series *Archivalische Forschungen zur Geschichte der Deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, Berlin (East) 1955-61.

usual agitators currently going the rounds and peddling their utopian mass strike, but even revisionists like Bernstein and Dr. Friedeberg, who saw the strike purely as a deterrent, were actively engaged in the discussion. The question was no longer whether the mass strike was feasible but the extent to which the party executive could keep its finger on the strike button. The trade-union leaders were already disturbed by the current rash of industrial strikes. As early as January 1905 the miners' leaders had attempted to prevent a large-scale stoppage in the Ruhr. Their colleagues on the Central Council did their best to stop it from spreading into other industries. When it came to deliberate extension of strikes for purely political purposes, like Prussian suffrage, the union leaders took fright. At the triennial Trade Union Congress in Cologne in May 1905 they faced up squarely to the problem; indeed, they moved over to the offensive. Here no clever party scribblers with their taunts and puns were present, no SPD executive to preach party solidarity. This was the platform on which the particular interests of the unions could be stated—untrammelled by any outside considerations. Speech after speech reflected the trade-union leaders' preoccupations; the unions were not strong enough for 'experiments'—at least not until the success of the experiment had become a certainty! What about the highly practical problems of feeding and clothing the strikers' families? And who would prevent the employers' profiting from the disarray with lockouts and reduced wages—while union members spent their strength in political battles with which they were but marginally concerned. Surely the answer was still more and better organization and above all peace and quiet in which to build it. 'Let us have no more talk of mass strikes . . . general strikes are general nonsense.'¹

The union leaders thought they could identify their main enemy quickly enough—the same waspish Rosa Luxemburg who had downgraded their decades of splendid work into futility with the Sisyphus metaphor. The foreigner, the woman, the greenhorn was stumping the country preaching revolution, praying for chaos in civilized, sophisticated, and secure Germany—all the chaos and misery of backward Russia. Otto Hué, the miners' leader, concluded an article in the July number of his union paper with some return advice.

¹ Quoted in K. Kautsky, *Der Politische Massenstreik*, Berlin 1914, pp. 117 ff.

In Russia the struggle for liberty has been raging almost a year. We always have wondered why our experts on the 'general strike theory' don't take themselves off speedily to Russia, to get practical experience, to join in the battle. In Russia the workers are paying with their lives; why don't all those theoreticians, who anyhow come from Poland and Russia and now sit in Germany, France and Switzerland scribbling 'revolutionary' articles, get themselves on to the battlefield? High time for all those with such an excess of revolutionary zeal to take a practical part in the Russian battle for freedom, instead of carrying on mass-strike discussions from summer holiday resorts. Trying is better than lying, so off with you to the Russian front, you class-war theoreticians.

The revisionists joined in the chorus. Here was a chance to get even with their main adversary without raising any problems of principle which might have brought down the wrath of the party executive on their heads once more. *Sozialistische Monatshefte* sarcastically referred to her as an imitation Joan of Arc. The spectre of real revolution made the affairs of the SPD the urgent concern of the Liberal press as well. They had already begun to talk about 'bloody Rosa' and, delighted as always with any disagreements within the Socialist camp, they joyfully took up the cry of the sensible miners' leader. 'Excellent words', wrote Friedrich Naumann in *Die Hilfe*; 'let her tell us why she isn't sufficiently "international" all of a sudden to go off to Warsaw.'¹

Rosa Luxemburg returned the compliment. For the first time she openly identified the trade-union leaders as the most dangerous current vehicle of revisionism within the party. In speeches throughout the year she compared the heroic deeds of the Russian workers with the chicken-hearted policy of contentment in the German trade unions. The 1st of May in Russia and Poland, traditionally the occasion for working-class demonstrations, had produced proportionately significant outbreaks of strikes and protests in this year of revolution. Rosa Luxemburg analysed the May events in great detail in the German press and was given pride of place in *Vorwärts*. The allusion to an example to be followed in Germany, where the May Day spirit had never really taken hold, was thinly veiled.² After the Cologne trade-union congress she reviewed its debates and decisions first as a renunciation of the new revolutionary spirit in Germany, and secondly as a trade-union declaration

¹ Quoted by Rosa Luxemburg in her speech on 21 September 1905 at the Jena party congress, *Protokoll . . . 1905*, p. 269.

² See *Vorwärts*, 3 May, 4 May, 6 May, 7 May 1905.

of independence from party supremacy. The Cologne decision amounted to a total misconception of the profound social requirements which had produced the mass-strike phenomenon in the first place. Worst of all, it was parochial: in order to escape the inexorable demands of social revolution the trade-union leaders shut themselves up in an arrogant German self-sufficiency which was merely a larger national version of south German particularism.

Belgium isn't worth studying . . . a latin, an 'irresponsible' country, on which the German trade-union experts can afford to look down. Russia, well Russia, that 'savage land' . . . without organization, trade-union funds, officials—how can serious, 'experienced' German officials possibly be expected to learn from there . . . even though precisely in Russia this mass-strike weapon has found unexpected, magnificent application, instructive and exemplary for the whole working-class world.¹

By posing the issue of the relationship between trade unions and party, Rosa Luxemburg lifted the problem out of its particular context, and beyond the sphere of mere personal disagreements about tactics. No wonder the trade-union leaders recognized their most dangerous enemy from then on. Her allusion was prophetic—even though it escaped the notice of the party leadership at the time: by the following year, while Rosa Luxemburg was in Warsaw, party and trade-union leaders had to face a constitutional crisis over their respective authority and mutual relationship. By that time the SPD executive, too, had had enough of revolution. In their agreement with the trade-union leaders of February 1906, the latter were officially accorded autonomy in all trade-union questions and the party in practice abdicated any right to enforce political policy on the unions without the latter's full consent. The fact that the agreement was secret proved its departure from recognized and established practice. With this, the executive's participation in the revolutionary atmosphere of 1905, already breathless and failing, had finally come to an end.²

But Rosa Luxemburg was more than just the most daring exponent of official party policy. While she shared the general satisfaction at the defeat of revisionism, this re-establishment of what was after all an old position no longer sufficed. The trade-union leaders might be treated as just another manifestation of

¹ 'Die Debatten in Köln', *SAZ*, 31 May 1905.

² See below, pp. 309, 317; also p. 366.

revisionism, a new attempt to undermine the supremacy of the 'good old tactics', but the debates of 1905 in Germany—at least for Rosa Luxemburg—were no mere static defence of orthodoxy but the beginnings of a whirlwind. Already by the end of 1904 she had perceived the difference between defensive measures inside the party and a more positive tactic in relation to society as a whole. The expenditure of energy in 'pursuit of particular opportunist boners' was showing less and less marginal return; the party as a whole had to move left and not confine itself to whipping the reformists back into Social-Democratic 'normality'.¹

Though Rosa Luxemburg was clear enough in her own mind where she differed from official party attitudes, little sign of these differences appeared in public. There could be no question of any open opposition to the leadership. No doubt the main considerations were tactical; the atmosphere of 1905 was entirely different from that of 1910 when opposition seemed inevitable and hence desirable—and the penalties of conforming greater than the risks even of a one-woman campaign. More basic was the hope that the logic of the situation, the pressure of events in Germany and the influence of the Russian revolution, would themselves move the SPD in the required direction of greater activity—and keep it there. Meantime the task of those who wanted a more radical policy was not to oppose their own conception of tactics to that of the leadership, but to spread the Russian news before the public and to hammer away at the analogy with present events in Germany—to turn the executive's declared intentions into actual performance.

This then was Rosa Luxemburg's policy. When Bebel in the name of the SPD executive published an open letter on 9 April 1905, calling on all German Socialists resident in Poland or Russia to join the organized Social-Democratic parties of those countries, Rosa Luxemburg persuaded the SDKPiL Central

¹ Letter of Rosa Luxemburg to Henriette Roland-Holst, 17 December 1904, Henriette Roland-Holst, *Rosa Luxemburg*, p. 215, and see above, p. 250. Dissatisfaction with the pyrrhic victory over revisionism was not confined to Germany. In France, too, a few individuals had looked further than the purely verbal annihilation of Jaurès; there had been a suggestion of founding a new International for the genuine left-wing groups, through which they could move forward unhampered by the self-satisfaction of mere orthodoxy. ('... the old "Engels International" is finished; now it's the turn of Bernstein and Millerand—they've won. It's high time to found a new International.' Letter from Bonnier to Kautsky, 10 October 1900, Guesde Archives, IISH.) For some typically English cold water on this continuing proposal three years later, see Hyndman to Bonnier, 16 December 1903, in IISH Bulletin, Vol. X, 1955, pp. 176 ff.

Committee to reprint this appeal under their own aegis. It was useful as a propaganda weapon against the PPS in the Polish context, but it also served to underline the intimate connection between Social Democracy in Germany and Russia.¹ Similarly Rosa Luxemburg seized upon the executive's cautious preoccupation with the mass strike as proof of official legitimation. Authority for the use of this weapon was now beyond dispute; the only question remaining was how and when and on what scale it should be used: Rosa Luxemburg carried the discussion into every possible area, in speech and letter and print. Throughout the year she travelled all over the country to address meetings and initiate discussion. 'In spite of an overload of literary and organizational work for the Polish revolutionary movement, and in spite of poor health, she unleashed a quite extraordinary spate of agitational work in Germany.'² She pulled every string in order to get invitations to speak—her position as leader of a party directly involved in the Russian revolution and the help of friends like Clara Zetkin enabled her to make appearances even on a few trade-union platforms, like that of the metal workers who had some strongly radical branch organizations in the provinces.³ These activities rose to a crescendo in the second half of the year. But throughout, the accent was on elaboration and interpretation of official SPD policy; Rosa Luxemburg was careful to give the impression that her speeches had official blessing. What was new was not the policy (nor did she lay claim to any originality); it was the situation that had changed and the new line was merely the SPD's dialectic adaptation to circumstances. When Rosa Luxemburg laid stress on the need for flexibility she praised it as a valuable and basic quality in party strategy, not as something new or different that was currently lacking—let alone something she was propagating in opposition to official policy. The fact that her interpretation of official policy was not challenged by anyone except the trade-union leaders was due to the general atmosphere of revolutionary speculation which the executive certainly did nothing to hinder. The discretion given to individual party speakers and journalists to interpret party policy was still very wide in those days; only after 1910 did greater attention have to be paid to the official line.

¹ See below, p. 327, for the skilful use made of this proclamation by the SDKPiL leadership in its propaganda war against the PPS.

² *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, p. 387 (Sectional introduction by Paul Frölich).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

Rosa Luxemburg was by no means alone in her campaign to extend the ill-defined frontiers of meaning and intention as far as possible. An important section of the SPD threw itself joyfully into the campaign for action. Apart from Kautsky and Franz Mehring, there was a whole group of party intellectuals, highly moral people who found in Social Democracy a refuge from the indifference and self-seeking of bourgeois society; for whom revolution was not so much historically necessary as morally desirable—for individual as much as collective reasons. There was Arthur Stadthagen, Rosa's lawyer (unofficially, as he had been disbarred from official practice as long ago as 1892 for criticizing the German legal profession), Emmanuel and Mathilde Wurm, Hans Diefenbach, and many others—not all particularly political friends but intelligent and sensitive people to whom the new spirit of action was highly congenial. Rosa Luxemburg worked on them all to write and speak, and congratulated them on any particularly telling contribution.¹ She relied on their moral support and they on hers. These half-dozen were to be especially associated with her for the next four years. It was a brief and temporary preview of the later *Spartakusbund*—with different participants.

Apart from her personal influence, Rosa Luxemburg's position was strengthened particularly by her close association with Karl Kautsky on *Neue Zeit*. As an assistant editor and chief adviser on all Russian questions, she had a lot to say in contributions to the paper. She saw Kautsky frequently and was often able to 'adjust' arrangements which seemed to give undue weight to her opponents. When *Vorwärts* invited Jaurès to address a meeting in Berlin, Rosa induced Kautsky to ensure that an invitation should at once be sent to Guesde or Vaillant so that the radical line would be equally represented.² She was now *per du* with the Kautskys—a breakthrough to the second person singular; for the first time she planned to spend her summer holidays with them at St. Gilgen in Austria, though the last-minute demands of the SDKPiL took her to Cracow instead. This familiar intimacy with the respected figure of Kautsky and a whole group of intellectuals centred round *Neue Zeit* greatly helped her to present her case with the imposing seal of official blessing. Whatever the enduring

¹ See letters dated 17 and 25 July 1905 to Stadthagen in *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 33.

² *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 31.

suspicion of Bebel and the official leadership, Rosa Luxemburg had faith in the alliance with Kautsky and the consensus of agreement between them. On most matters she felt that she could count on 'my Karl'.

On 17 September 1905 the annual SPD congress met at Jena to review, discuss, and resolve as usual the events of the year. Traditionally this was the occasion when differing interpretations of party policy could confront each other and if possible be resolved. As always at party congresses, the latent conflict between ideology and pragmatism, to which a party like the SPD was prone, came out into the open. The executive always tried to avoid too sharp and clear an assertion of ideology over the practical and self-perpetuating requirements of policy. The party congress was never confronted openly with any attempt to belittle ideology (as opposed to theory); instead, congress resolutions were usually watered down later in their practical application. Thus on the one hand the executive mobilized its supporters to prevent too sharp a deviation from its traditional middle path—and was usually able to kill heavily partisan resolutions. On the other hand it accepted the tone established by the 'sense of the congress' and did not fly in the face of predictable majority opinions. This was the measure of its difficulties. In this revolutionary year of 1905 the tone was sharp—and the executive made little direct attempt to soften it.¹

Rosa Luxemburg had pushed the analogy of the Russian ex-

¹ No doubt there was a gradual change in the function of party congresses between 1890 and 1905. What had originally been a policy-making body was gradually turned into an increasingly formal festivity, a symbol of ideological assertion which helped to counteract the dispersal and frustrations inherent in permanent opposition. This new saliency of ideological assertion was particularly noticeable at the 1905 congress. The party congress had become 'an expressive function of ideology' whose purposes were to 'increase the loyalty of party members . . . to the given ideology and to the party holding this ideology'. (Ulf Himmelstrand, 'A theoretical and empirical approach to depoliticization and political involvement', *Acta Sociologica*, 1962, Vol. 6, Nos. 1/2, p. 91. See also R. K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, Glencoe (Illinois) 1957, Chap. 1.) For a discussion of this problem in the particular context of German Social Democracy in the present period, see Günter Roth, *The Social-Democratic Movement in Imperial Germany. A study of class relations in a society engaged in industrialization*, unpublished doctoral thesis, Berkeley, California 1960; also J. P. Nettl in *Past and Present*, loc. cit. The role of party congresses in Social Democracy before the First World War, and in Communist parties since 1917, in terms of a dichotomy between legislative decisions and functional symbolism, deserves further empirical study to verify the theoretical analysis established from work on non-Communist, especially Scandinavian, politics.

perience and the discussion of the mass strike further than anyone else—to the final limits of the permissible. The congress would, as always, help to define these frontier areas, would approve her conquest of any new territory or leave her isolated beyond the pale. The immediate issue was the mass strike; everyone waited keenly to see which way Bebel would jump in this matter and how far he would go. His address, over three hours long, was radical in tone, in its general outline—but, as so often in both past and future, his practical recommendations were ‘practical’ indeed: wait and see if our class enemies act against us, we shall certainly know how to reply. The first move was specifically left to them. Within this scheme of things the mass strike had a place, though a defined and limited one. ‘Since he saw revolution as a defensive act, so he recommended the mass strike primarily as a defensive weapon . . . against an attack on either universal suffrage or the right of association—the two prerequisites for the pursuit of the Erfurt tactic.’¹ On the surface he had something for everyone, like Father Christmas with the children: support for the obvious consensus that the mass strike was a legitimate Socialist weapon; recognition of its possible use to satisfy the Left; severe restrictions on its use for the ‘practical’ trade unionists. The importance of Bebel was never in what he said but how he would later allow it to be interpreted; textual exegesis and interpretation was the occupational disease of German Social Democracy.² To a large extent the fierce tone was a substitute for clear thinking—and this fundamental prevarication forced his critics into a similar dichotomy between public support and private criticism. This same uncertainty is clearly reflected in Rosa Luxemburg’s private comments. To Jogiches she wrote immediately after the congress:

I was once more in the vanguard of our movement, something which you could never guess from the *Vorwärts* report [of the congress] because they have falsified it completely. The truth is that the whole congress was on my side, Bebel agreeing with me at every moment

¹ Carl E. Schorske, *German Social Democracy 1905-1917*, p. 43.

² And still is in Communist countries. Stalin both wrote the texts (highly equivocally) and enforced the interpretation; Mao too (‘Let a hundred flowers bloom’ and the substantial analysis of permissible deviation, e.g. ‘On the Historical Experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat’, *Jen-min Jih-pao*, 5 April 1956.) Nowadays the habit of the CPSU leaders and in Poland is increasingly to make texts precise, specific, and unmistakable in meaning; no interpretation should be necessary.

and Vollmar sitting next to him almost getting apoplexy. On the whole Jena is a great victory for us all along the line.¹

Within a few days the atmosphere of symbolic participation in the congress had dispersed and more critical evaluation prevailed. To her friend Henriette Roland-Holst in Holland, Rosa Luxemburg described the congress far less optimistically. She and her friends already looked like a 'far Left opposition'. The agreement with the executive, far from being genuine, was largely tactical; a necessary alliance against the revisionists. If there was a revolutionary consensus, Bebel's submission to it was reluctant and unconscious, not deliberate.

I entirely agree with you that Bebel's resolution deals with the problem of the mass strike very one-sidedly and without excitement [*flach*]. When we saw it in Jena, a few of us decided to mount an offensive during the discussion so as to nudge it away from a mechanical recipe for defence of political rights, and towards recognition as one of the fundamental revolutionary manifestations. However, Bebel's speech put a different complexion on things, and the attitude of the opportunists (Heine, etc.) did even more. On several other occasions we, the 'far left', found ourselves forced to fight, not against him, but with him against the opportunists, in spite of the important differences between Bebel and us. . . . It was rather a case of joining with Bebel and then giving his resolution a more revolutionary appearance during the discussion. . . . And in fact the mass strike was treated, even by Bebel himself—though he may have been unaware of it—as a manifestation of popular revolutionary struggle—the ghost of revolution dominated the whole debate, indeed the whole congress.²

At the congress itself Rosa Luxemburg saw her task as twofold: to be the spearhead of the attack on the trade unions, and to do her utmost to maintain the revolutionary frontiers against Bebel's conservative demarcation. The more personally her opponents went for her, the broader the form of her reply; to all detailed and practical criticisms of the mass-strike concept and the validity of the Russian experience she opposed the broadest amalgam of revolutionary activity.

¹ Jogiches letters, end of September 1905, IML (M).

² H. Roland-Holst, *Rosa Luxemburg*, p. 218, letter dated 2 October 1905. The unconscious contradiction in tone between the beginning and end of this extract are evidence not only of the objective difficulty in interpreting the verbose but slippery Bebel, but also of Rosa Luxemburg's own capacity for writing herself into a state of relative euphoria (or pessimism); her mood was always more sharply defined at the end of any letter than at the beginning.

Anyone listening here to the previous speeches in the debate on the question of the political mass strike would really be inclined to clutch his head and ask: 'Are we really living in the year of the glorious Russian revolution, or are we in fact ten years previous to it?' (Quite right.) Day by day we are reading news of revolution in the papers, we are reading the despatches, but it seems that some of us don't have eyes to see or ears to hear. There are people asking that we should tell them how to make the general strike, exactly by what means, at what hour the general strike will be declared, are you already stocked for food and other necessities? The masses will die of hunger. Can you bear to have it on your conscience that some blood will be spilt? Yes, all those people who ask such questions haven't got the least contact or feeling for the masses, otherwise they wouldn't worry their heads so much about the blood of the masses, because as it happens responsibility for that lies least of all with those comrades who ask such questions.¹

The issue was not technical but conceptual; against the whole business of practical considerations she upheld the alternative of a revolutionary state of mind. 'What', she shouted at Bernstein, who interrupted her, 'do you know about the mass strike? Nothing.' Organization, far from making mass strikes possible, itself only comes into existence through mass action. As for the costs, which her opponents had totted up in a staggering invoice:

Surely we can see in history that all revolutions have been paid for with the blood of the people. The only difference is that up till now this blood has been spilled for and on behalf of the ruling classes, and now when we are within sight of the possibility that they might shed their blood for their own class interests, at once there appear cautious so-called Social Democrats who say no, that blood is too precious. . . . The most important thing is to instruct the masses and there we don't have to be as cautious as the trade-union leaders were in Cologne. The trade unions must not become their own ultimate purpose and through that an obstacle to the workers' room for manœuvre. When will you finally learn from the Russian revolution? There the masses were driven into the revolution; not a trace of union organization, and step by step they built and strengthened their organizations in the course of the struggle. The point is that all this is a mechanical, an undialectical conception . . . strong organizations are born during struggle, in the very process of clarifying the class struggle. In contrast to all this small-mindedness, we have to say to ourselves that the last words of the Communist Manifesto are not a series of pretty phrases for use only at public meetings,

¹ *Protokoll* . . . 1905, p. 320.

but that we are in deadly earnest when we call to the masses: 'the workers have nothing to lose but their chains but have to gain the whole world'.¹

Already the dispute over the new revolutionary boundaries was overshadowed by an utterly new approach to class conflict. Action came first, the creator of strength and organization—and not, as had been traditionally held in Germany, an optional but risky dividend. This analysis in fact turned German thinking upside down; more galling still was to be its justification, the supremacy of the Russian experience which at one blow threatened to sweep away years of German progress and with it the SPD's claim of revolutionary primacy within the Second International. The latent action doctrine of 1905 would in the next nine years grow stronger and more systematic in proportion to Rosa's alienation from SPD orthodoxy. All this, however, is historian's hindsight. To most participants at the time it seemed no more than a misunderstanding, a matter of emphasis and tone, an excess perhaps of revolutionary excitement. Bebel half humorously summed up the congress's tolerant surprise at Rosa Luxemburg's fervour:

The debate has taken a somewhat unusual turn. . . . I have attended every congress except during those years when I was the guest of the government but a debate with so much talk of blood and revolution I have never listened to. (Laughter.) Listening to all this I cannot help glancing occasionally at my boots to see if these weren't in fact already wading in blood. (Much laughter.) . . . In my harmless way I certainly never intended this [with my mass-strike resolution]. . . . None the less I must confess that Comrade Luxemburg made a good and properly revolutionary speech.²

And a month after the congress he repeated his mild protest at a private meeting:

August accused me (though in a perfectly friendly manner) of ultra radicalism and shouted: 'Probably when the revolution in Germany comes Rosa will no doubt be on the Left and I no doubt on the Right,' to which he added jokingly, 'but we will hang her, we will not allow her to spit in our soup.' To which I replied calmly, 'It is too early to tell who will hang whom.' Typical!³

¹ *Protokoll . . . 1905*, pp. 320–1.

² *Protokoll . . . 1905*, pp. 336, 339.

³ Jogiches letters, second half of October 1905, IML (M).

The trade unionists with their personal attacks on Rosa Luxemburg stood out more sharply from the general consensus than Rosa with her enthusiasm—and towards the end of the congress some of the trade unionists felt the need to tone down their attacks on her by lifting the calloused hand of labour in sarcastically naïve apology.

Look, Comrade Luxemburg, I am a mason by trade. I didn't go to high school and cannot cope with these razor-sharp ideas. We all know that our knowledge doesn't reach up to the rarefied level of Comrade Luxemburg. . . . We all know that our knowledge doesn't match up to that of people who in their own youth had a good education and were never hungry.¹

Naturally the general commitment to revolution was very relative. Conditions in Germany were vastly different from those of Russia and what really divided Russian and German Socialists was a basic outlook on life. Bebel's mild derogation of Rosa Luxemburg's bloodthirstiness did not strike the groups of Russian students in the gallery as either apt or funny. 'Vibrant with revolutionary enthusiasm, they were rather put out by this bourgeois congress of German Socialists, yet [these were] the same Socialists who had provided the theoretical foundations for revolutionary Russia and who had just sent 100,000 francs . . . to support those fighting and struggling.'²

Among other things, the congress had to listen to a renewed echo of many practical men's basic distrust of theory. *Neue Zeit* was under attack for having raised the problem of mass strikes in its pages—'a factory of revolutionary theories, which, thank heaven, few workers read'. It fell to Rosa Luxemburg in the absence of Kautsky to defend *Neue Zeit* and to hoist aloft the banner of theory against its denigrators. In doing so she separated for the first time the masses from their leaders. It was the latter who were the chief exponents of the policy of compromise with society—the former knew well enough where their interests lay. 'The mass of trade-union members is on our [the party's] side and knows well that it is in the interests of both party and unions that the whole working-class movement should be permeated with the spirit of Socialism.'³ This differentiation between leaders

¹ *Protokoll* . . . 1905, p. 334, speech by Bömelburg.

² *Le Temps*, 21 September 1905, quoted by Joll, *Second International*, p. 128.

³ *Protokoll* . . . 1905, p. 271.

and followers, at present a mere passing hint and confined to the unions, would become the integral part of Rosa Luxemburg's future thinking about the whole party and be raised to a level of fundamental importance at the outbreak of the First World War.

Rosa Luxemburg could thus look back on the congress with considerable satisfaction. Even if the frontiers had been staked out more narrowly than she liked, they had at least been moved forward sufficiently to embrace the mass strike once and for all. For years to come Rosa Luxemburg would come back to the mass-strike resolution of the 1905 congress as a precedent, as indestructible proof that the mass strike had been officially incorporated into the tactical armoury of German Social Democracy and that no reinterpretation or explanations could ever again exorcise it. Later, as the executive moved to the Right, Rosa Luxemburg stood pat on this one issue—all the way into opposition; simultaneously with the desire to interpret the real meaning of the mass strike went the need first of all to hold the executive to its commitment. Thus Rosa Luxemburg's revolutionary interpretation of the Russian events was always coupled to a formally conservative, almost legalistic, emphasis on precedent.

The executive regarded the congress above all as a legitimization of its four-year-old battle with the revisionists and used the new revolutionary atmosphere primarily to complete the defeat of the revisionists within the party. One of the last bastions of revisionism was *Vorwärts*, Rosa Luxemburg's longstanding nightmare, peopled by sparring partners like Gradnauer and Eisner. At the pressing request of the Berlin regional organization of the party, who looked upon *Vorwärts* as primarily their paper, the Berlin Press Commission decided in the autumn of 1905 to carry out a purge. First the executive tried quietly to 'feed in' two radical assistant editors, but the resultant indignation and solidarity of the editorial board led to more thorough action. Six revisionist editors went and a new team took over. At the particular request of August Bebel, Rosa Luxemburg now joined the *Vorwärts* editorial board.¹ *Tempis mutandis*—this was the job that he had advised her to refuse in 1899.

¹ The evicted editors were Kurt Eisner (later prominent in the first phase of the Bavarian Soviet Republic in 1919), Wetzker, Gradnauer, Kaliski, Büttner, Schröder; the newcomers were Rosa Luxemburg, Cunow, Stadthagen, Ströbel, Düwell. Thus the old team of six was replaced by a new team of five. This purge gave *Vorwärts* a radical outlook which it was to keep right up to the first months

The purge had already been in the air during the summer and Rosa Luxemburg was aware of some impending change, though not of the intention to appoint her. She was pleased to have the opportunity of putting forward her views in the central organ of the party, but was immediately sceptical as to the extent of her influence and powers. At the end of October, even before her participation was certain, she played down the significance of the change. 'It will consist of very mediocre writers, with their hearts in the right place; they'll all be *kosher* enough. This is the first time since the world began that *Vorwärts* has an entirely left-wing government on the premises. Now they've got to show what they can do. . . .'¹ None the less, she began to contribute regularly to *Vorwärts* in the last week of October, particularly on Russian questions; from the 25th of that month she had practical control of the Russian desk. At the beginning of November she was formally installed and her comments on the Russian revolution appeared almost daily, though in anonymous form. By 3 November the extent of her powers had already become clear—and with it the first impact of disillusion:

As you correctly deduced, *Vorwärts* is no better than *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung*. What is worse, I am the only one who understands this problem and partly Karl Kautsky: the editors are no better than indolent oxen. There is not one journalist among them, apart from the fact that Eisner & Co. with the whole bag of revisionists are carrying on a determined campaign against us in the press and all we can get to reply on our behalf are August (!) or Cunow and similar gentlemen (!!). I am limited to the Russian section although I write the leader every now and then and go round dishing out good advice and praise for initiative which is then carried out so terribly badly that I can only throw up my hands. . . . I remarked to Ströbel that his answer to Calwer [a revisionist] is even worse than if Eisner had written it, that we did not come to *Vorwärts* just to wag our tail and cover up our traces, that we have to

of the war. Most of the editors became 'Centrists' and supporters of Kautsky; Cunow had a cataclysmic conversion to patriotism and joined Lensch and Haenisch in the coterie which was to form round Parvus on the *Glocke*. Stadt-hagen died in mild opposition in 1916 before the foundation of the USPD. When Rosa Luxemburg resigned from *Vorwärts* at the end of December (see below, pp. 314 ff.), her place was taken by Hans Block, another of Kautsky's supporters, whose presence and attitude as editor of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* in 1913 was to precipitate the foundation of the oppositional *Sozialdemokratische Korrespondenz* under the editorship of Rosa Luxemburg and Julian Marchlewski.

¹ Jogiches letters, end of October 1905, IML (M). Parts of the letter have been published in *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, p. 386.

write sharply and clearly. To which he proudly replied next day: 'Now I shall do better and you will be pleased with me.' And today I see in the current number some horrible bleating about 'revolutionary lightning'—a mish-mash of senseless phrases and radical chatter. . . . We shall fall into such disgrace that I am truly fearful and I see no way of escape because we simply haven't the people . . . I am alone . . . tormented by my current preoccupations.¹

None the less, for the two months of November and December Rosa Luxemburg blazed out one fiery comment on Russian events after the other. The period coincided with the last great upheaval in Russia—the preparations for the Moscow rising, the general strike in St. Petersburg, and the sympathetic events in Poland. On 17 October (or 30 October in the West) the Tsar had issued his manifesto and amnesty, but then declared martial law a few days later. The country was in chaos. All this flowed through the pen of Rosa Luxemburg—and though her task was mainly foreign reportage she drew the analogy for Germany whenever possible. No doubt she resented her confinement to a foreign desk—and equally clearly this confinement was deliberate. But though the party was satisfied with this situation, her daily high-toned enthusiasm for the Russian revolution brought her renewed hostility in the bourgeois press. The official attention of the government was insistently drawn to her activities, and the right-wing parties in the *Reichstag* called for action against this homeless agitator and purveyor of hate. Rosa Luxemburg, *dénaturée* and *dépaysée*—two major crimes in an essentially traditionalist society—was undermining the proud stability of efficient Prussia. Could nothing be done to stop her?² It fell to Bebel to defend her as the commanding general of her party and—at least vis-à-vis the class enemy—as her personal friend. In the *Reichstag* he identified himself completely with his difficult ally—as tradition demanded.³

Unexpectedly, her enemies, inside the party and out, who had been crowing about revolutionaries in secure places egging on others to spill their blood, were made all at once to eat their words. Rosa Luxemburg suddenly decided to leave for Warsaw forthwith—abandoning the newly conquered commanding heights at

¹ Jogiches letters, 3 November 1905, IML (M).

² *Stenographische Berichte . . . Reichstag*, 11th Legislative Period, II Session 1905/1906, col. 359 ff., 15 December 1905.

³ *Loc. cit.*, col. 2638 ff., 5 April 1906. Another tradition that was to be overthrown after the outbreak of the war: see below, Chapter XIV, p. 649.

Vorwärts and the whole discussion of the German mass strike. Her reasons were 'Polish', valid and urgent—nothing less than the fear of being left out of the most exciting moment in the life of 'her' SDKPiL. We shall see more precisely why she went when discussing the Polish side of her story. Throughout the second half of 1905 she had shivered with intermittent nostalgia at the thought of the real revolution in the East; after the Tsar's manifesto in October the flow of exiles back to Russia only made her longing more acute. These were all friends—or at least fellow émigrés—and their return left her increasingly isolated. Even though Jogiches was not likely to be sympathetic, she complained that '[the news of Martov's and Dan's return to St. Petersburg] agitates me; my heart is gripped by a sense of isolation and I long to get away from the misery and purgatory of *Vorwärts* and to escape somewhere, anywhere. How I envy them.'¹

To her German friends her decision seemed capricious, incomprehensible—yet also typical of her impetuous courage. They never knew how deeply she was attached to the Polish movement and to what extent she had always been involved in the SDKPiL's affairs—Rosa Luxemburg herself ensured that they should not know. They did their best to dissuade her. Bebel and Mehring insisted on elementary prudence—just as they had warned Parvus in October of the personal risks he was running.² In Rosa's case their preoccupations were greater still. She was a woman—though pointing this out to her merely made obstinacy more certain; there was also the horrifying and all too recent execution of Kasprzak to serve as an example. The Kautskys, who were Rosa's closest friends, pleaded that she would be abandoning their joint campaign to radicalize the SPD at the very moment when success was near. The place of the intellectual was at his desk—another reason to spur her on rather than make her desist.

But whatever the underlying causes, the final decision was a sudden one—taken not earlier than mid-December. At the end of November Rosa Luxemburg, in a speech in Hamburg where the biggest strike of that year was about to start, had openly challenged the trade-union leaders to a series of public confrontations—they should come and argue with her at open meetings and not skulk silently and then issue defiant declarations based on news-

¹ Jogiches letters, end of November 1905, IML (M).

² Parvus, *Im Kampf um die Wahrheit*, Berlin 1918, p. 9.

paper reports of her words.¹ It was unlike Rosa Luxemburg to issue such a challenge if she had not the slightest intention of being there to meet it. From 25 November to 19 December an extended series of articles on the revolution in Russia appeared almost daily in *Vorwärts*. Then there was a gap of ten days from the 21st while Rosa Luxemburg prepared for her departure—the acquisition of false papers, passports, and, most important, the signal to Leo Jogiches of her impending arrival in Warsaw. Her last article, in fact, was written over Christmas and appeared after she had gone.

On the morning of 28 December 1905, immediately after the Christmas holidays, a small group of people assembled on the platform of the Friedrichstrasse Station, Berlin's railway terminus to the East. The Kautskys and a few others were seeing Rosa Luxemburg off, to 'go to work'.² They loaded her with gifts—useful things like shawls and mufflers for the Russian winter—as well as good advice on how to keep warm. To a family whose physical adventurousness was confined to an annual holiday at a mountain spa, the idea of travelling to Warsaw in the mid-winter of revolution was lunacy, if not masochism—even though they had to admit to a sneaking admiration for Rosa Luxemburg's extraordinary courage. Finally, with a defiant whistle-blast, the train moved off—and Rosa Luxemburg, well-known German writer and intellectual, became Anna Matschke, the anonymous Polish conspirator falsely decked out as a minor journalist.³ As the train moved eastwards into the gathering dusk Rosa Luxemburg in her third-class compartment prepared joyfully for the coming experience.

In the event her departure took place not one moment too soon. Instead of participating in the real revolution which was to be the central experience of her life, Rosa Luxemburg—had she remained—would have witnessed the gradual extinction of excitement in Germany. First came the failure to match words with deeds, the stiffening of attitudes on the part of the executive, the agreement

¹ The meeting was reported in the *Hamburger Echo*, 15 November. See also the report of Rosa Luxemburg's speech at Leipzig on 7 November on the same topic, in *LV*, 8 November 1905. The challenge was officially repeated in *Vorwärts*, 26 November 1905, Supplement 1, p. 1.

² *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 96.

³ Rosa Luxemburg took the name and papers of Anna Matschke, who was a real person. This borrowing of identity was the usual manner of illegal infiltration into Russia.

between executive and trade unions in February 1906—in fact the return to German normality which she so feared and despised. It was an imperceptible process and largely secret; even Rosa Luxemburg's sensitive perceptions might have missed the changes beneath the familiar and warming phraseology of revolution. For her, full of the Russian revolutionary experience, the impact of boring and familiar Germany was to be all the harsher when she returned almost nine months later—and this sudden confrontation of two worlds did more to sharpen her ideas for the future than any gradual disillusion could have done. As in August 1914, a shock jolted her thinking into uncompromisingly productive channels. If Rosa Luxemburg had not gone to Warsaw in December 1905 the German Left would never have benefited from the clarity of her dissent—and would itself not have emerged with such a respectable intellectual heritage.

2: POLAND

The Russo-Japanese War and the ignominious Russian defeat first brought the possible collapse of Tsarist autocracy into the range of the most optimistic revolutionary vision. Together with the other parties in Russia and Poland, the SDKPiL worked out a programme of minimum demands which the revolutionary parties could press on a weakened government should the occasion arise. Naturally enough, it was Rosa Luxemburg who wrote it. The evolution of her ideas from 1904 to 1906 reflected not only the widening revolutionary perspectives but the corresponding sharpening of Social-Democratic demands and evaluations.¹ In the process the Social-Democratic programme evolved from very general statements of principle to more precise demands. To begin with there was little beyond the need to destroy the autocracy and replace the government by a popular republic. More immediately relevant was the evidence of the government's weakness and to the dissemination of this most of Rosa Luxemburg's Polish writing in 1904 was devoted.

As yet it still amounted to little more than occasional rhythmic

¹ See 'Czego chcemy?' (What do we want?), first published in *Przegląd Robotniczy*, Zürich 1904, No. 5, pp. 1-21, and 1905, No. 6, pp. 1-40; finally expanded into a brochure of the same title published in Warsaw in January 1906. For the sake of historical continuity the same title was retained, though the content was considerably changed. See below, pp. 338 ff., for a fuller discussion of this programme.

accompaniment to the prevailing melody of struggle with the PPS. As we have seen, even the negotiations with the Russians had ultimately been dominated by the dictates of this one and everlasting battle. No ideological commitment to Russian unity, no chance of realizing a minimum political programme in Poland itself, could overshadow this priority.¹ As defeat followed upon Russian military defeat in the course of 1904, the oppositional groups in Russia attempted to work out some practical form of collaboration. In October 1904 a conference was called in Paris by the representatives of the various revolutionary organizations. Since invitations were issued to all potential allies including middle-class opponents of Tsarism, the decision to accept or refuse became a critical test of attitudes in Socialist ranks; confrontation with the government took second place to the sharp ideological divisions within the revolutionary camp. The Socialist Revolutionaries and the PPS accepted the invitation, while the *Bund*, SDKPiL, and RSDRP declined. The PPS gave wide publicity to their participation as evidence of their willingness to collaborate with anyone pledged to weaken Tsarism—and this at once drew a spate of Social-Democratic criticism of such ‘opportunistic kow-towing to bourgeois parties, the mistaken emphasis on terror and bloodshed instead of the mass strike’.² In the PPS the influence of Piłsudski and the activists was at its height. They saw their opportunity in the creation of what was to be in effect a second front in the Russo-Japanese conflict, and negotiated with the Japanese for help and assistance to promote a new national Polish uprising. As yet there were no signs in Russia or Poland of any revolutionary activity with which the SDKPiL could oppose the PPS policy of purely national secession. The Polish Social Democrats were on the defensive and confined themselves to reiterating general Socialist principles.

All this changed dramatically on 22 January 1905. The bloodshed in St. Petersburg and the wildfire response throughout the Russian empire signalled the outbreak of revolution.³ The Poles

¹ See above, pp. 277 ff.

² O. B. Szmidt, *SDKPiL dokumenty, 1893–1904*, Vol. I, p. 568; also appeal by SDKPiL Central Committee, *ibid.*, p. 562.

³ The PPS traditionally dated the outbreak of the revolution in Poland from a fracas in the Plac Grzybowski in Warsaw on 13 November 1904—thus anticipating Russia by two months. In SDKPiL eyes this was a minor, purely nationalist, affair. See ‘Jak nie należy urządzać demonstracji’ (How not to arrange demonstrations), *Czerwony Sztandar*, December 1904; J. Krasny (ed.) *Materiały do dziejów ruchu socjalistycznego w Polsce*, Moscow 1927, Vol. II, pp. 43–47.

came out five days later on 27 January in spontaneous response to the events in Russia and with fully equal fervour. A state of emergency was proclaimed and there were clashes and casualties, but the repression was sporadic and the heightened momentum was maintained for several months. It was a period of extreme confusion. Economic and political demands leap-frogged over each other; whatever the cause, the articulate dissatisfactions of the middle classes in Russia as well as in Poland found themselves carried along on a heaving base of working-class action. The Social Democrats were in a quandary. They had not predicted such events and were in no sense responsible for them—yet at the same time the masses had spontaneously come into action precisely in accordance with the most optimistic prognosis of Social-Democratic theory.¹ Moreover, the connection between Poland and Russia had been formally established for all to see; far from a separate and anti-Russian movement in Poland, the workers of both countries behaved as if no ethnic frontier existed between them.

In the first phase of the Russian revolution, which reached its height in June, all the Socialist parties tried to adjust themselves to events, to mesh into the moving wheels of history and to align their policy to the action of the masses as best they could. 'The influence of the political parties on the development of the events of January and February could hardly be felt. Neither SDKPiL nor PPS nor the *Bund* was ready as yet to direct such great masses in action either politically or organizationally. At that time their political propaganda had barely begun to penetrate the masses and influence the character of their actions.'²

In this first phase a curious contradiction in party alignment took place. At the bottom, on factory floor or local cell, the often hazy distinction between PPS and SDKPiL seemed to lose all meaning in action; control by the two parties was anyhow negligible and only the disciplined action groups of Piłsudski stood out

¹ Róża Luksemburg, 'Przykład do teorii strajku powszechnego' (Example of the theory of the mass strike), in *Wybuch rewolucyjny w caracie*, Cracow 1905, pp. 37-40. This was a reissue of an article in *SAZ*, 3 March 1905.

² Stanisław Kalabiński and Feliks Tych, 'The Revolution in the Kingdom of Poland in the years 1905-1907', *Annali dell'Istituto Giangiacomo Feltrinelli*, Year 5, 1962, p. 198. This summary of research on the revolution in Poland (based on more substantial work by the authors cited on p. 183) is the most modern and comprehensive account. No satisfactory history of the 1905 revolution in Russia or Poland as yet exists. The quotation is especially interesting in view of the fact that it represents the official thinking of party historians in contemporary Poland.

sharply. This confusion in practice—in spite of all the years of intellectual caterwauling—was to have profound consequences for the PPS. The party was soon forced to choose between the masses and the armed fighters, between joining the Russian revolution or keeping separate from it. In March 1905 a national conference was called against the wishes of Piłsudski and his friends—and constituted itself as the seventh party congress. A new Central Committee was elected and Piłsudski lost control over the political direction of the party. However, he did retain control over the military organization which he had been largely instrumental in building up—a fact which separated him even more from the new leaders of the party.¹ At the top, however, and particularly abroad, the differentiation between PPS and SDKPiL became sharper than ever—and the Social Democrats did their best to keep it so. The relatively simple alignments produced by the conference of October 1904 shivered into a newer and more delicate kaleidoscope, particularly as the differences between component parts of the Russian party began to emerge more clearly. Partly through the good offices of the Foreign Committee of the SDKPiL, a conference of Russian revolutionaries was arranged to take place in Zürich in January 1905. Both the SPD and the Austrians were to participate, partly in order that their authority might help to unite the squabbling Russians, partly also to commit them to moral and financial support for the Russian revolutionaries. The conference came to nothing—and Rosa Luxemburg privately did her best to see that it should not. She wrote to Akselrod:

Bebel is so little informed about the issues and the whole thing so ill-prepared, that nothing can go right. How you can agree to take part in a conference with Adler, that specialist in supporting opportunism, a man moreover who gives every aid and comfort to federalism, terror, nationalism and co-operation with the liberal nationalist block which we have already refused, how you could agree to invite the Polish terrorists—all this is surprising and quite incomprehensible.²

Even though the PPS was not invited, the fact that Adler was to be present came in her view to much the same thing. However

¹ See Introduction, pp. 1–11, to *PPS-Lewica 1906–1918, Materiały i dokumenty*, Warsaw 1961, Vol. I, 1906–1910.

² Rosa Luxemburg to Pavel Akselrod, 9 January 1905 (Russian dating), in *Sotsial-demokraticheskoe dvizhenie v Rossii, Materialy*, Moscow/Leningrad 1928, p. 150.

insistently Rosa might preach Russian unity, she resisted to the utmost every attempt to create a similar unity among the Poles—even though the Germans, guided by a spectator's clear-cut logic, did not always appreciate the subtle difference.

Though Rosa Luxemburg was little concerned with the practical problems of the revolution, she was as always the spearhead of her party's intellectual and policy formulations. As she saw it, the overriding need was intellectual clarity—more than ever in this period of real revolutionary activity. 'If we don't want to forgo our advantage which has been enhanced more than ever as a result of the May [general strikes and demonstrations], we must now unleash a veritable shower of publications.' Accordingly she would write 'until her eyes fell out with tiredness'.¹ The first thing was to put before her Polish readers all that had been written by distinguished authorities on the Polish question—irrespective of whether it was for or against Polish independence; let the reader choose—helped by a carefully slanted introductory preface. Throughout May Rosa Luxemburg spent much time and thought on this omnibus work on the Polish question. She considered it a triumph, and defended herself energetically against Jogiches' criticisms.

The preface seems frankly perfect to me and the radical changes we [once] wanted to make are—to say the least—quite uncalled for. It is a calm and thorough exposition of many things which will be very useful to the reader, make a decisive impact on him and act as his guide through the complicated material. The fear that I make too much play of our contradiction of Marx seems groundless. The whole thing should in fact be taken as a triumphant vindication of Marxism. Our clear 'revision' will impress our youngsters all the more. A detailed re-hash of the 1895 row with the PPS is I think much to the point because the importance of that discussion cannot be exaggerated. You forget that when we first considered the preface it was precisely our aim to explain to our youngsters how immensely important was the revision of the old Polish tradition in Europe, and to make good the odd fact that for ten years now we have been arguing fiercely with the PPS in German, French and Italian but never in Polish . . . and now the most important thing of all: the overall effect [of the preface] is neither brash nor purely destructive. I am sure it will make an excellent impression on the intelligentsia; precisely on account of its restrained tone I managed to avoid a very dangerous trap: a cheap verbal triumph over nationalism

¹ Jogiches letters, 20 May 1905, *Z Pola Walki*, 1931, Nos. 11/12, p. 211.

which would have repelled the reader like a slap in the face without winning his confidence or persuading his intellect. At one time you too were preoccupied by the same problem. My notes of our conversation two years ago recall your words [in Russian]: 'We must not seem to fight against independence solely and exclusively, we must not look for a merely verbal triumph.' . . . None the less the entire book is actually a most effective use of the whip.

P.S. At worst any impressions of direct disagreement with Marx could be altered with a little re-touching.¹

Who was she writing for? Who were these youngsters and intellectuals?² In this revolution, as in Germany thirteen years later, clarity of vision and a widening of intellectual horizons were considered functional parts of revolution—as though both the revolutionary mind as well as the revolutionary will were capable of infinite expansion under the pressure of events. The two processes of growth were complementary and interdependent—without a growing intellectual appetite the whole moral and self-liberating purpose of revolution was largely destroyed. Mere will was nihilistic.³ This was an essential part of Rosa Luxemburg's philosophy. Her programmatic writing always had this twofold purpose, the postulate of higher goals both as practical slogans for

¹ Jogiches letters, 7 May 1905, *ibid.*, pp. 201–2. The preface and collection, referred to at the time as the *Polonica*, appeared as *Kwestia polska a ruch socjalistyczny*, Cracow 1905.

² A comparison with the stresses of Bolshevik propaganda during the same period is interesting. The Russian material is well documented in the substantial collection *Revolutsiya 1905–1907 gg. v Rossii: dokumenty i materialy* (ed. A. M. Pankratova, Moscow 1955 onwards). An interesting analysis of this material in terms of stress distribution of issues in accordance with regional and social divisions among the recipients or addressees of propaganda in Russia, is undertaken by D. S. Lane, *The 'Social Eidos' of the Bolsheviks in the 1905 revolution: A comparative study*, University of Birmingham, Centre for Russian and East European Studies, Discussion papers, Series RC/C, No. 2, October 1964. Although no similar statistical comparison is possible for Poland since a complete documentary collection of leaflets and other material has not been published, my own impression of a sample of such material in ZHP, Warsaw, suggests that SDKPiL propaganda was addressed more to intellectuals and so more inclined to stress the ideological totality of Marxist revolution than the equivalent Bolshevik material. The only exception was the repeated and strong emphasis on the national question in the struggle against the PPS—a stress absent among the Bolsheviks. Naturally this applies particularly to Rosa Luxemburg's work; none the less, the general intellectual tone of SDKPiL material compared with that of the Bolsheviks is striking.

³ Readers familiar with classical political philosophy will catch the echo of one of the oldest problems in the world of philosophical speculation: how to reconcile this with Marxist materialism? It might be argued that for Rosa Luxemburg the final and self-liquidating apotheosis of materialism, the capacity for such self-enlargement, was the *process* of revolution, not the consequence of its successful achievement. For elaboration of this thesis, see below, Chapter XII.

political action and as internalization of new experiences and wider perceptions. The revolutionary proletariat must not only know what to do but how and why it has to be done. The SDKPiL in 1905 gained thousands of new recruits, or at least supporters—people swept freshly into the revolutionary process by events which the party had neither created nor controlled. These newcomers had to be offered intellectual stimulation, all the more brilliant and startling for having to be compressed into such a short space of time: the long, solid German experience had to be predigested. Rosa Luxemburg offered the newcomers not only the new meat and drink of Marxism, but tried to answer in advance the sort of problems that must trouble an emerging class consciousness still befogged by ignorance and prejudice. At the same time they had to be assured that they were not alone; instead of building on their national prejudices, Rosa Luxemburg offered them the wider reassurance of solidarity not only with Russians but with their German fellow proletarians.¹

This then was Rosa Luxemburg's answer to the problem that Lenin characterized in more down-to-earth terms. 'Young strength is required. My advice is simply to shoot those that say there are not enough people. There are many people in Russia, you only have to go wider and be bolder, bolder and wider, and once again bolder if you want to attract the youth. This is a time of war. . . . Break with all the old habits of immobility.' But to Lenin the practical solution was still primarily a matter of organization.

Form the youth into hundreds of circles to support *Vpered* [the main Bolshevik paper] . . . enlarge the [Central] Committee threefold, including the youth, form five or ten sub-committees, co-opt each and every honest and energetic person. Give each sub-committee the right to write and edit its replies. . . . (No harm is done if they make a mistake; we will 'gently' correct them in *Vpered*.) We have to lay our hands on

¹ See, for instance, Rosa Luxemburg's pseudonymous dissertation on the problem of religion, so important in this context: Józef Chmura, *Kościół a socjalizm*, Cracow 1905—a curious piece of historical sophistry designed to show the distortion of Christianity from its early just and egalitarian principles in the hands of the systematizing hierarchy of the church. The sophistry was necessary because Rosa Luxemburg opposed the church but would not attack religion. This pamphlet has had a curious echo—in present-day Ceylon, where the substantial Trotskyite party has made it into something like an official text.

See also *Wybuch rewolucyjny w caracie*, Cracow 1905—a collection of articles on the struggle against Tsarism reprinted from the German press.

and send forth with the speed of lightning all those who have genuine revolutionary initiative. . . .¹

'A shower of publications' meant new publications. *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny* had ceased publication in 1904, and the need to replace it was urgent. A new paper had already appeared that same year in Zürich, *Przegląd Robotniczy*, and during 1905 its place of issue was transferred to Cracow. In May 1905 at Rosa Luxemburg's suggestion a further paper began publication, *Z Pola Walki* (From the field of battle), which was to continue throughout that year. Its particular association with Rosa Luxemburg and, indirectly, her pre-eminent position in the creation and development of Polish Social Democracy, are commemorated by the fact that the paper was revived for a while under the same name by Polish Communists in Moscow in 1929, and once again thirty years later, in 1959, as the house magazine of the Party Historical Institute in Warsaw.

But Rosa Luxemburg's efforts were not confined to relatively sophisticated analysis of the revolution. She wrote continually for the popular *Czerwony Sztandar* and it was here that she dealt with the immediate tasks of the party and the masses. Perusal of her work shows clearly that one of her main preoccupations was still the denigration of the PPS. This became all the easier as Piłsudski's fighting squads tried to impose their policy on the party, forcing the new PPS leadership of 1905 either to submit or split the party. Rosa could justifiably claim that her long jeremiad against a nationalism which merely borrowed Socialist energy for its own purposes was proving justified. What Piłsudski wanted had nothing to do with Socialist revolution at all. It was the expiring nationalist flourish of a dying class.² And when the May demonstrations of this year surpassed all previous efforts, Rosa Luxemburg could justifiably be proud of the proletariat's deliberate act of choice—in favour of the party that since 1892 had made the 1st of May its own particular ritual festival.³

Though she sincerely believed this infighting against competitors for the workers' allegiance to be a vital part of the struggle as

¹ Letter to Bogdanov and Gusev, 11 February 1905, *Sochineniya*, Vol. VII, p. 102.

² 'Revolutionary Action', *Czerwony Sztandar*, January 1905, No. 23, pp. 6–8. See also *Czerwony Sztandar*, July 1905, No. 27, pp. 7–9.

³ *Święto robotnicze 1 Maja*, Warsaw 1905.

a whole, it no longer sufficed on its own. By the summer of 1905 Rosa Luxemburg began to look beyond it into the greater void which no amount of such political small change could really fill. To begin with, she much preferred the stretch of intellectual analysis to whipping up popular articles in *Czerwony Sztandar*—and it was her insistence that pressed the creation of *Z Pola Walki* on her comrades. They were closer in Cracow to the events in Russian Poland and to that extent more concerned with the immediacies. 'I feel as though I were in an enchanted circle. This perpetual current stuff . . . prevents me from getting down to more serious work and seems to have no end', she wrote to Jogiches on 25 May.¹ Sitting far away in Berlin, at the dim end of the party's efforts, she felt that she was ill-equipped for snappy, up-to-date journalism.

Today particularly I was struck by the complete abnormality of my Polish work. I get an order to write an introductory article about autonomy (or about the constitutional assembly)—okay. But for that, one has to read the Polish and Russian publications to keep up to date with what is happening in society, to have regular contact with party matters. Otherwise all you will get from me are pale formulas or schemes. I cannot score bull's-eyes everywhere and the times have long gone when you simply reeled off the party's old and set line with a little agitational dressing. Today every single question comes straight from the front line. To limit this war purely to fighting the PPS in the old manner is an anachronism. If I am to write about autonomy I have to mention not only the PPS but the National Democrats and the Progressive Nationalists, etc. Each and every movement has to be taken into account. And how am I supposed to do this when I never see any Polish publications, neither the legal ones nor the underground literature . . . and when all I get from time to time is a bundle of isolated cuttings?²

This was not merely the accidental handicap of geography. Rosa Luxemburg became obsessed with the idea that she was being deliberately put on ice, that the easy logic which kept her safe and sound in Berlin—post office, letterhead, and contact woman—was part of Jogiches' deliberate plan to reduce her influence. Now at last he could control her output because she was no longer able to initiate ideas while he in Cracow had become the link between events in Warsaw and the Berlin factory which

¹ Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1931, Nos. 11/12, p. 214.

² Jogiches letters, end of October 1905, IML (M).

was required to turn out political comment on demand. Beneath the impact of this changing relationship there was, as always, the nagging resentment at being kept so far away from the centre of events. In the spring of 1905 all the important SDKPiL leaders had made their way to Cracow to join Dzierżyński and Hanecki; these two then went clandestinely to Warsaw while Jogiches, Marchlewski, and Warszawski unfurled the banner of the Central Committee in the old and elegant cathedral city. It was left to Rosa Luxemburg in Berlin to pick up the fag-end of the work, to represent the party in the International Bureau and to manipulate and influence the Germans.

Not that this work was unimportant or easily done. The PPS was always tugging at the elbow of the International, and Rosa as official representative of the SDKPiL had to see to it that a balance was maintained.¹ There was always the question of money—more important than ever now that the parties were in action. The block grants made by the International to the fighting comrades in Russia and Poland had to be shared out, as well as the special sums that were made available from time to time by the Germans. In February the SPD gave 10,000 marks—a truly generous sum—to Akselrod for distribution among the various Social-Democratic organizations, and Rosa Luxemburg, who had heard about the gift in advance from Mehring and Bebel, immediately wrote off to ensure that the SDKPiL got their proper share. Her proposal for division seemed fair—she asked for the same amount as the PPS and the *Bund*; nevertheless the Poles got only 1,500 marks instead of the requested 2,500.² In May Rosa Luxemburg badgered Huysmans, the secretary of the International Bureau, for quick distribution of a further sum, and by unanimous agreement the Poles got an additional 2,558 marks with more to follow—this time a larger sum than the *Bund* but still the same amount as the PPS.³

In Germany her position as expert and adviser on Polish as well as Russian affairs was informal; it needed constant reassertion, particularly at a time when the SPD executive was being pressed to

¹ Her *ad hoc* appointment following Cezaryna Wojnarowska's resignation the year before was confirmed at the SDKPiL's fifth congress in June 1906.

² See Rosa Luxemburg to Pavel Akselrod, 8 March 1905, *S-d dvizhenie*, p. 158. For the actual division, see letter of Yu. Martov, 10 February 1905, in IML (M).

³ Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1931, Nos. 11/12, p. 228. The proposal for the division was made jointly by Plekhanov and Rubanovich, the delegate of the Socialist Revolutionaries—hence it was not surprising that the *Bund* should come off relatively badly.

intervene and possibly to arbitrate in the Russian dispute. The atmosphere in Berlin was thick with the din of conflicting advice, and anyone who wanted to be heard had to shout loudly.¹ Sometimes she almost overreached herself, as when she pirated Bebel's letter to all German workers in Russia and used his carefully general and neutral appeal as a distinct legitimation of the SDKPiL vis-à-vis its PPS opponents—a coup which, as Adler pointed out to Bebel, was bound to commit the German party in the perpetual Polish guerrilla war. But Bebel did not share Adler's Polish prejudices—or rather, had different prejudices of his own; whatever he may have thought of Rosa's action in private, he chose to defend her against the PPS's 'outrageous' reaction to his impeccably harmless appeal.² Not least on account of Rosa Luxemburg's influence with the SPD authorities, relations between the leaders of the German and Austrian parties were at that time rather cool.

What finally made her sense of isolation and impotence boil over were the Russian events of October 1905. The previous concessions of an advisory Duma, the so-called Bulygin Duma, had been denounced by all the Socialist parties in Russia and Poland as a farce, though some of the liberal constitutional opposition had been willing to participate. At the beginning of October the printers came out on strike in Moscow and again a wave of general strikes spread throughout the empire. On 25 October the vital railway workers joined in and communications were practically paralysed. At first the authorities had tried to play it tough; instructions were issued to take the sharpest possible measures including the use of arms. But the strikes merely became more intense and unexpectedly the Tsar capitulated. He issued his manifesto on 30 October (new style), promising a constitution and a new, more effective Duma. At the same time he granted an amnesty for political prisoners and émigrés. Now vital decisions had to be taken quickly. The long, illegal struggle could suddenly come into the open. What should the new tactic be? At the end of November the SDKPiL held a full conference which included not only the leaders in Cracow but also those who were now released from

¹ One of her challengers for possession of the official SPD ear was a German Social Democrat called Buchholz who had been born and brought up in Russia and was in close contact with Russian groups, particularly the Mensheviks. See Rosa Luxemburg to Pavel Akselrod, 9 January 1905, *S-d dvizhenie*, loc. cit.

² The open letter dated 9 April 1905 is reprinted in Botho Brachmann, *Russische Sozialdemokraten*, pp. 141-4. For Bebel's private comment to Victor Adler, see *Briefwechsel*, pp. 455-7.

prison—Dzierżyński, arrested in Warsaw during the summer, and even Bronisław Wesołowski, Marchlewski's old friend who had been exiled in Siberia since 1894. The only important person missing was Rosa Luxemburg. She sat in Berlin and chafed while the stream of Russians flowed past her back home to Russia from Switzerland and from France and England—many of them passing directly through Berlin. The revolution had reached a new level of success and excitement in the second half of 1905, and inevitably Rosa Luxemburg's impatience and frustration mounted apace. Though eleven days after the manifesto a state of siege was declared which in practice revoked many of the Tsar's promises, the wave of enthusiasm would not be stemmed. Above all, most of the revolutionaries had at last succeeded in joining 'their' revolution.¹

Finally there was the purely private element, the link with Jogiches. It was close but it could never be taken for granted. Rosa's present isolation had its personal penalties too. She had come to Cracow at the end of July 1905 for four weeks—against his wishes; his dissuasions were met with the brutal brevity of a telegram—'I am coming to Cracow'.² And now the chips were down. What could previously—with goodwill and imagination—be explained by the needs of the situation and a necessary division of revolutionary labour between them, was now plainly a deliberate attempt to keep her at a distance: plain at least to Rosa Luxemburg, if not yet to friends like Adolf Warszawski and his wife. Jogiches' peremptory tone, his refusal to explain or even provide information about party activities, was jeopardizing their whole relationship; so much so that Rosa Luxemburg dashed off to see him again in September immediately after the Jena congress—and to the devil with the exploitation of her German victory. 'I didn't like the look in your eyes and I want once more to look straight into them.' Still nothing was settled, and after her return to Germany she renewed her demands for her share of information and

¹ The only major Russian Socialist who did not go at all was Plekhanov. Akselrod was ill and did not get beyond the frontier until early 1906. The majority, however, took immediate advantage of the amnesty—particularly the main Bolshevik and Menshevik leaders. Parvus, impatient as always, had already gone in early October while Trotsky of course had been in Russia since February—the first of them all.

² Telegram of 10 July 1905: 'Ich komme nach Krakau', Jogiches letters, IML (M). For her stay, see also *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, pp. 93–94, 10 August 1905. To the Kautskys Rosa pretended that it was her whimsical idea of a holiday.

consultation. 'In spite of my work on *Vorwärts* I insist on being kept *au courant* with our work. Don't be childish and don't try to push me out by force from Polish work by depriving me of all information and news.'¹ But it was all to no avail; whatever personal assurances Jogiches may have given her in Cracow, silence punctuated only by curt instructions had become his routine. Rosa Luxemburg wrote bitterly at the end of October in one of her last letters before Jogiches himself went to Warsaw and thus out of any safe postal orbit: 'I am good enough for scribbling anything and everything but not for the privilege of knowing what goes on. And this is nothing new.'

There was nothing for it but to throw up her German work and go to Warsaw herself. Even before the amnesty, the SDKPiL leadership moved *en bloc* from Cracow to Warsaw. The opaque curtain round Rosa Luxemburg now shut her off from them completely. When they heard of her intention to come, both Dzierżyński and Warszawski warned her strongly against it. Her German friends tried even harder to retain her. But she ignored the latter; while the suspicious protests of her Polish colleagues served only to make the journey more urgent. All the news from the East indicated that a new confrontation between the government and the revolutionaries was imminent—the last, though neither side realized it yet. The virtual retraction of the manifesto's promises goaded the revolutionaries to a huge new effort: on 15 November another general strike in St. Petersburg, followed by the arrest of the leaders of the Soviet; in Moscow, preparations for the armed uprising. In Warsaw, too, plans were made for a sharper reply to the government, backed up by arms this time, to turn the latest strike into something more effective. Objectively and subjectively, for revolutionary as much as personal reasons, Rosa Luxemburg knew that she must go now or never.

The high excitement of her departure on 28 December almost immediately fizzled out like a damp squib—by courtesy of the railway company. Trains on the direct line to Warsaw were not running owing to the strike and Rosa Luxemburg had to make a big diversion through Illovo in East Prussia, whence she reported her first Russian experience—a good meal of *Schnitzel* at the railway restaurant.² Next day, however, she smuggled herself aboard

¹ Jogiches letters, end of September and early October 1905, IML (M).

² *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 97.

a troop train—the only civilian and certainly the only woman; the metaphor of a Trojan horse was not lost on her keen sense of humour. Finally, on Saturday 30 December (new style), she arrived at her destination, frozen stiff from confinement in an unheated and unlit train which had to proceed at snail's pace for fear of sabotage from the striking railwaymen. 'The city is practically dead, general strikes, soldiers wherever you go, but the work is going well, and I begin today.'¹

Warsaw was under a heavy pall of anxiety. The general strike in St. Petersburg was now known to have failed; the frantic efforts of Parvus to reform the Soviet after the arrest of Trotsky and most of the other leaders, and to call out the transport workers in a renewed strike, were meeting with little response. Similar news came from Moscow—though here the final confrontation had been a bang rather than a whimper: the Bolshevik-controlled Soviet had ordered, indeed attempted, armed uprising in the city. By mid-January it was clear to the Polish leaders in Warsaw that for the time being the revolutionary drive in Russia had slackened off. No one knew whether this was temporary or permanent, but the Polish leaders saw the present ebb as a *reculement* which they must use for a further and better leap forward, and as soon as possible. Rosa Luxemburg wrote to the Kautskys on 2 January 1906 (new style):

To characterize the situation in two words (but this is only for your ears), the general strike has just about *failed*—especially in St. Petersburg where the railwaymen made no real effort to carry it through. . . . People everywhere are hesitant and waiting. The reason for all this is simply that a *mere general strike by itself* has ceased to play the role it once did. Now nothing but a general uprising on the streets can bring about a decision, though for this the right moment must be prepared very carefully. The present period of waiting may therefore continue for a while unless some 'accident'—a new manifesto from the Tsar—brings about a stupendous new surge.

On the whole the work and the spirit are good; one must explain to the masses *why* the present general strike has ended without giving any visible 'results'. The organization is growing by leaps and bounds everywhere and yet at the same time it is messy, because everything is naturally in a state of flux. In Petersburg the chaos is at its worst. Moscow stands much more firmly and the fight in Moscow has indeed opened new horizons for the general tactic. There is no thought of

¹ Ibid., p. 98.

leadership from Petersburg; the people there take a very local point of view in a ridiculous manner (this by the way is clear from the argument developed by D[deutsch] when he asked for help for Petersburg alone). From their standpoint this was very ill-advised as I had to tell him myself afterwards: in St. Petersburg alone the revolution can never succeed; it can only succeed in the country as a whole. . . .

. . . My dear it is very nice here, every day two or three persons are stabbed by soldiers in the city; there are daily arrests, but apart from these it is pretty gay. Despite martial law we are again putting out our daily *Sztandar*, which is sold on the streets. As soon as martial law is abolished, the legal *Trybuna* will appear again. For the present the production and printing of the *Sztandar* has to be carried out in bourgeois presses by force, with revolver in hand. The meetings too will start again as soon as martial law is ended. Then you will hear from me! It is savagely cold and we travel about exclusively in sledges. . . . Write at once how things are faring in the *V[orwärts]* and whether August [Bebel] is furious.¹

Uncertainty did not mean hesitation. By now both Polish revolutionary parties had caught up—at least intellectually—with the fullness of revolutionary possibilities. The PPS was splitting ever more visibly down the middle; the dissatisfaction with the military and exclusively anti-Russian efforts of the Piłsudski wing had been reinforced by an open letter from Daszyński in Cracow in which he called for a clear separation of the Polish struggle from that of the Russian; the latter had failed, the former must be free to succeed on its own. Specifically Daszyński opposed the continuous wave of strikes which only ruined the economy of the country without furthering any visible revolutionary ends.² The SDKPiL had also begun to appreciate the insufficiency of strike movements as such—at least for the purpose of driving the revolution forward.

For the moment the situation is this: on the one hand it is generally felt that the next phase of the fight must be one of armed *rencontres* [following the example of the recent events in Moscow]. I have learnt much from this *and all of it more encouraging than you can imagine*. . . . One may for the moment regard Moscow as a victory rather than a defeat. The entire infantry remained inactive, even the Cossacks!

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, pp. 98-100. Rosa Luxemburg's italics.

² See 'Open letter', *Naprzód*, 3-5 January 1906. Rosa Luxemburg's answer is in *Czerwony Sztandar*, 16 January 1906 (No. 44) and 27 January (No. 48).

There were only minimal losses on the part of the revolutionaries. The whole of the enormous sacrifices were borne by the bourgeoisie—i.e. the people who had no part in the affair inasmuch as soldiers simply fired blindly and destroyed private property. Result: the entire bourgeoisie is furious and aroused! Money is being contributed in quantities for arming the workers—among the *leading* revolutionaries there was hardly a casualty in Moscow.¹

That the prolonged strike movements were causing great misery could not be denied, especially now that the government had mounted a counter-offensive. The employers, previously only too anxious to come to terms with their striking workers, were now stiffening their attitude and locking the workers out.

The sore spot of our movement . . . is the enormous spread of unemployment which causes indescribable misery . . . *voilà la plaie de la révolution*—and no means of curbing it. But there has alongside this developed a quiet heroism and a class consciousness of the masses which I should very much like to show to our dear Germans. . . . Here the workers *of their own accord* make such arrangements as for instance setting aside a day's wage each week from the employed to the unemployed. These conditions will not pass over without leaving their marks for the future. For the present the work accomplished by the revolution is enormous—deepening the gulf between the classes, sharpening conditions and clearing up all doubts. And all this is in no way appreciated abroad! People say the struggle has been abandoned, but it has only gone down into the depths of society. At the same time *organization* progresses unceasingly. Despite martial law, trade unions are being industriously built up by Social Democracy . . . the police are powerless against this mass movement. . . .²

The theoretical transformation of the mass strike into the next stage of armed uprising was a vital problem which Rosa Luxemburg attacked head on in her usual manner. The 'young intellectuals'—that postulated readership to which her most important writing was addressed—now expected a dialectical analysis in which the process of mass strikes was meshed accurately and historically into the next stage of armed uprisings. First, Rosa Luxemburg analysed the three general strikes of January, October, and December 1905—each representing a stage of growth and intensification. She defined these stages as follows:

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, pp. 102–3, dated 11 January 1906. Rosa Luxemburg's italics.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 110–11, dated 5 February 1906.

In the first phase of the revolution the army of the revolutionary proletariat assembled its forces and brought together its fighting potential. In the second [and third] phase this army achieved freedom for the proletariat and destroyed the power of absolute rule. Now it is a question of removing the last shreds of the Tsarist government; to get rid of the rule of violence which hinders the further development of proletarian freedom.¹

It was very important to differentiate her concept of armed uprising from that of the PPS. The latter's was an act of desperation, the consequence of the totally wrong analysis which claimed that the mass strikes had failed and that the spirited action of a few armed men could be a substitute for the unsuccessful efforts of the whole proletariat.² The armed uprising Rosa Luxemburg had in mind, on the contrary, would be carried out precisely by the same participants as those who made the mass strikes—only more of them and more determined. It would be the masses themselves who would call for this action; dimly the antithesis masses/leaders emerged for the first time as a justification for venturing on a path which the naturally prudent leadership might otherwise hesitate to follow.

In a word, the course of the last strikes has proved not that the revolutionary cause is retreating or weakening but on the contrary that it is moving forward and growing more intense; not that the Socialist leaders are beginning to lose influence over the masses but that the masses as usual at any turning point of the battle only push the leaders spontaneously to more advanced goals.³

Lenin put it in very similar terms when he analysed the extent to which the Social-Democratic leaders measured up to their situation. 'The proletariat understood the development of the objective circumstances of the struggle, which demanded a transition from strike to uprising, earlier than its leaders.'⁴

Clearly Rosa Luxemburg's 'spontaneity' was not autonomous

¹ *Z doby rewolucyjnej: co dalej?*, Warsaw 1906, p. 12. This pamphlet was an enlargement and elaboration of the analysis of 1905 under the same title. (See *Czerwony Sztandar*, April 1905, No. 25, and the first version of the pamphlet itself reprinted from it a few months later in Cracow.)

² See 'Blanquism and Social Democracy', *Czerwony Sztandar*, 27 June 1906, No. 82.

³ *Z doby rewolucyjnej: co dalej?*, p. 14.

⁴ 'Lessons of the Moscow Uprising', *Sochineniya*, Vol. XI, p. 147. In all the textual exegesis of Lenin's work, this quotation is remarkable for its absence. See below, Chapter XVIII, p. 809, for one of the rare occasions where it was used.

or natural but responsive; the necessary weapon against those leaders (PPS) who were decrying the role of the masses and the value of their action. But how did the armed uprising look in practice? First, it would produce its own peculiar weapons—and not necessarily those of history's conventional armed revolts. These were the typical symptoms of bourgeois revolution. What would decide the issue here was the willingness of the masses to make sacrifices. They had behind them the immense energy of historical necessity and enlightenment—far more effective weapons than mere arms. Moreover, the government was weak and therefore incapable of the kind of repression that might cause a physical blood-bath.¹ In the last resort armed uprising thus meant not the willingness to shoot but the willingness to be shot at. We need not take this Gandhian paradox too literally. The SDKPiL were perfectly conscious of the need for weapons and energetically set about procuring them within their physical (and financial) means. Rosa Luxemburg's arms and aims were those of the spirit, of class consciousness; a detailed course in weapon training and street fighting, whether necessary or not, would never be a subject for her to elaborate. But the one does not automatically contradict the other. The emphasis on intellectual and social weapons was all the more necessary to counteract the philosophical barrenness of Pilsudski's revolutionary technology. In the context of 1906 there was no internal contradiction here, and no substantial difference on this point between the SDKPiL and the Bolsheviks.² But at the same time the fork in the revolutionary road can now be perceived. Sooner or later the specific problem of terror as an intellectual concept would have to be met. While the Bolsheviks took the hurdle easily, Rosa Luxemburg balked—only to by-pass the problem with a slightly uneasy silence at the very end of her life.³ We must, however, distinguish here between two quite different

¹ *Z doby rewolucyjnej: co dalej?*, pp. 23–27.

² Rosa Luxemburg's inability to rise to the level of the concept of armed uprising—except fleetingly in January 1919—was held against her as one of her great mistakes (see below, Chapter XVIII). This is due partly to Stalinist ill will, but evidently even more to the simple fact that her Polish writing was unknown in Russia as much as in Germany and all criticisms of her work were and are based on German texts.

³ See below, Chapter XVI, pp. 730–2. Once again her later Communist critics have performed a curious transposition of reality. Her *alleged* omission is held to be true understanding and analysis of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is in fact incorrect—except in so far as the phrase became just a synonym for terror. Only Radek put it frankly, without verbal fancy dress (see below, p. 731).

problems. The use of arms and the technical preparations for armed uprisings was something which the SDKPiL was quite willing to face—and no doubt Rosa Luxemburg was well aware of this. The institution of terror as a revolutionary concept, legitimized by incorporation into the sacrosanct process of the dialectic (called dictatorship of the proletariat), was quite a different matter. However, it was not to arise in this crude form until the October revolution of 1917. In 1906 Rosa Luxemburg genuinely believed in armed uprising. The fact that bloodshed would result from the first use of weapons by the enemy, that Socialist resort to arms was in part defensive, did not alter this, though the defensive aspect was later to be writ rather large during the German revolution. In public as well as in her letters to the Kautskys, Rosa Luxemburg was firmly committed to this next steep step up the ladder of revolutionary progress.

The letters to the Kautskys are not merely casual chat. Rosa Luxemburg, churning out almost daily broadsides for publication, badly felt the need to balance these public effusions with a cool and unbiased private appraisal, without any tactical considerations. We know Rosa's built-in need for this balance in other connections; previously it had always been Jogiches who had provided the outlet for her innermost scepticism; now he was next to her, and it was accordingly the Kautskys who benefited. Yet at the same time Rosa's scepticism was frequently overborne by the excitement of her own intellectual creation, by the euphoria of real live revolution into which she had plunged as though it were the purifying Ganges. More than that, it was her own party which was having its baptism of fire, the party she had helped to found; and she joyfully contrasted the success of the SDKPiL in its own back-yard with the unsatisfactory performance of the distinguished revolutionaries in St. Petersburg.

I cannot describe all the details here. The main points are—unusual difficulties over the printing, daily arrests, the threat of summary execution for all those taken into custody. Two of our comrades had this sword of Damocles hanging over them for days; it appears however that matters will rest there. Despite everything the work progresses lustily. Great meetings take place in the factories, handbills are written and printed almost every day, and the newspaper [*Sztandar*] appears almost daily, albeit with sighs and groans. . . . The real picture in St. Petersburg is . . . indescribable chaos within the organization, factional

splits despite the attempt at union, and general depression. Let's keep this to ourselves. In any case do not take it too much to heart. As soon as a new wave of events reaches them, the people there will move with more life. . . . The family feast [the Russian party congress] will take place somewhat later than intended; in any case sincere thanks for the greetings from the old folks [the SPD executive] which I shall transmit in due time.¹

Great expectations—and efforts to live up to them. Rosa Luxemburg was writing at a rate which even she, with her enormous capacity for concentration, had never achieved hitherto: analysis, exposition, writing, printing, distributing—the process of revolutionary cognition and its transformation into theory and tactics for Social Democracy. The whirlwind rush of taking the manuscript down to whatever printers could be inveigled or forced into producing it, the surveillance of the printing, the checking, the distribution, and finally once again the mental work of digesting new impressions and ideas from the political process and committing them to paper—all this was pre-eminently Rosa Luxemburg's task. At the same time there was the renewed contact with the leadership, the clandestine meetings and discussions, the possibility of clarifying the Central Committee's policy with her own sharply etched views—above all, the knowledge that at this moment of crisis she was close to the man she loved and admired; no wonder that these few weeks provided the high-water mark of her life for many years to come. We do not know how her colleagues first received her. It is possible that Jogiches may have resented her presence and that their co-operation, however fruitful politically, may have been ringed with a sour edge of personal tension. The bacillus which was to lead to the inward death of their relationship a bare twelve months later may have already been at work in their collaboration.² But this was not the moment for personal resentments. For the first time the SDKPiL was at work—in just the circumstances for which it had always prayed:

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, pp. 108–9. Rosa had asked for, and obtained, the status of fraternal German delegate to the congress. She did not, of course, attend the Stockholm congress in April 1906.

² See below, pp. 378–84. The evidence for the cause of their break is based on events that relate strictly to the period after Rosa Luxemburg's departure from Warsaw and Jogiches' escape from prison at the beginning of 1907. But I cannot overcome the suspicion—based on some of the doubts and worries expressed in Rosa Luxemburg's letters of the second half of 1905—that the root cause for the failure of their relationship was already inherent at that time.

an atmosphere of intellectual clarity and optimism welding together a group of professional revolutionaries long accustomed to each other, men known outside only by their brief and pithy pseudonyms, coming and going mysteriously on their revolutionary business, each one knowing only a part of the whole so that in case of capture the loss would be minimized. And in between all this, the curious interstices of a normal life—at least for Rosa. We often forget that revolutions rarely last twenty-four hours a day—people sleep and talk and eat; they visit relatives and Rosa Luxemburg had a family in Warsaw whom she had only met briefly in transit abroad for the last sixteen years. They were determined to make the most of her return. 'Personally I do not feel quite as well as I should like to. I am physically weak although this is now improving. I see my brothers and sisters once a week, they complain bitterly about it, but *non possumus*.'¹ Beneath the superstructure of revolutionary excitement, the mundane necessities and arrangements of life could never be entirely ignored. Even in January 1919, when Rosa Luxemburg was on the run and armed bands of soldiers were searching for her all over Berlin, she could still write calmly to her friend Clara Zetkin that it would be wiser to postpone her visit for a little while until things had quietened down.

The SDKPiL had entered the revolution at its start in January 1905 with a bagful of ideas which bore little relation to what was actually happening. Its membership had consisted at the most of a few hundred secret activists. By February 1906 the party had some 30,000 members, artisans and proletarians, in spite of the fact that its activities had been plunged once more into illegality after a brief fortnight of open agitation.² In addition, its influence extended over large numbers of workers, directly or indirectly exposed to its ideas—the wildfire of strikers looking for intellectual *points d'appui*.

Having rapidly caught up with the revolution, the SDKPiL tried to turn from following to leading. It was agreed that armed insurrection was the next step and at the beginning of 1906 Julian

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 103, dated 11 January 1906.

² Kalabiński and Tych, 'The Revolution in Poland', *Annali . . . Feltrinelli*, p. 247. In 1907 the official figure given to the fifth Russian congress in London was 25,654; see M. Lyadov, *Itogi londonskogo s'ezda*, St. Petersburg 1907, p. 84.

Marchlewski was sent to Belgium to purchase arms.¹ No one knew when, or even whether, the moment for this initiative would ever come; it certainly could not be dictated by the party but could only take place once the revolutionary vehicle was driven forward again by the masses. Rosa Luxemburg had been clear and specific about this all along; only a new wave of action could provide the necessary stimulus. How then to create the necessary atmosphere? This was Rosa Luxemburg's task and we must now examine how she dealt with it.

First, the clear enunciation of a programme. This was not a matter of political technique. The uniqueness of the moment and its dialectical possibilities had to be identified and captured. The programme, always a dynamic instrument, had to exploit these possibilities to the full and yet lead directly beyond them to the next stage. It had to be neither utopian nor slack—tension at full stretch was required. The party had always stood for the destruction of the Tsarist autocracy as its main revolutionary task. Already in 1904 Rosa Luxemburg had outlined this minimum programme. Now she returned to the problem, both at some length in pamphlets and more combatively in propaganda articles in *Czerwony Sztandar*. Her analysis of the revolution was very similar to that of the Bolsheviks—autonomous advance-guard action by the proletariat to achieve what was essentially a bourgeois revolution; maintenance of proletarian supremacy to ensure that the bourgeois beneficiaries of this revolution, fearful of the new proletarian spectre, did not slip back into the bear-hug of the autocracy. Though the working class must be the motor of these achievements, it did not claim correspondingly exclusive privileges; its action was for the benefit of society as a whole.² Here the analysis began to differ sharply from that of the Bolsheviks. There was no talk of any dictatorship, either in words or by implication. Instead, the achievements of the working classes on behalf of society as a whole would provide the conditions for the necessary growth of working-class consciousness out of which the confrontation of the next stage could emerge—proletariat versus *bourgeoisie*, like the situation that existed in Germany. 'These struggles are vital for raising the level of the workers. . . . The political

¹ *Julian Marchlewski*, anonymous biographer, Warsaw 1951, p. 59. See also *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 111, dated 11 January 1906.

² *Czego chcemy? Komentarz do programu SDKPiL*, Warsaw 1906, p. 29.

struggle serves primarily to defend the interests of the proletariat and to extend its influence on the legislature and the politics of the state as a whole.¹ Rosa Luxemburg sharply defined the allocation of roles between the working class as actor and nascent bourgeois society as benefactor:

When it is a case of establishing the political order, that is a task for the whole people, but when it is a matter of strangling energetically and boldly the remnants of reaction and safeguarding the aims of revolution, that is the task of the class which is the very soul of the struggle, which has brought political maturity and consciousness to the people as a whole—i.e. the sovereign proletariat.²

The precise political demand was for a constituent assembly for the whole of Russia (we shall look at her proposals for the relationship between Poland and Russia later), freely elected and with the necessary powers to decide the republican constitution of the state. This constituent assembly would be the new field of battle in which Social Democracy—the organized and most conscious section of the proletariat—would carry out a struggle on two fronts: the final dispatch of reaction, fighting a rearguard battle, and the preparation for the coming assault on the politically maturing *bourgeoisie*. Rosa Luxemburg characterized this struggle in three steps: first, the achievement of the constituent assembly; second, forcing the *bourgeoisie* to remain loyal to the revolution; third, the workers' provisional government to hold the fort until the democratic constitutional forms emerging from the constituent assembly could take effect. Presumably the workers' provisional government would then be replaced and would resign its temporarily arrogated power into bourgeois-republican hands. This of course was the logical consequence of commitment to the step-by-step dialectic which postulated capitalism prior to Socialism and turned the thrust of working-class action away as yet from any specifically proletarian aims—the unsatisfactory impasse from which Trotsky and Parvus tried to break out with their notion of a chain reaction or permanent revolution leading direct to a Socialist solution without a lengthy capitalist 'pause'.³

¹ Ibid., p. 14.

² *Rzecz o konstytuancie i o rządzie tymczasowym*, Warsaw 1906, pp. 13-14.

³ A detailed comparison with Bolshevik and Menshevik views will not be attempted here. For the latter, see L. Schapiro, *The CPSU* (an anti-Leninist view), and J. L. H. Keep, *The Rise of Social Democracy in Russia*, Chapter VII. For a brief confrontation, see also Chapter XIII below. The Poles came up with

The constituent assembly would then give concrete form to the all-Russian republic which the SDKPiL was already demanding as the programmatic minimum. In addition, all nationalities would be emancipated, with the assurance of freedom for their own cultural development, national systems of education, freedom to use their native language, and autonomy for each ethnic region. The elections would be secret, based on universal, equal, and direct suffrage. Towns and villages would be self-governing and the same electoral prescriptions would apply to urban and rural self-government. Rosa Luxemburg did not allocate any governmental role to Soviets (nor did anyone else) though she was well aware of their significance; these were spontaneous instruments of the struggle but were not to be incorporated into the permanent institutional structure. This conception of Soviets as a means rather than an end still dominated the early thinking of the *Spartakusbund* in Germany twelve years later, and it was not until the *Spartakus* leaders had to face the unwelcome demand of the majority of the SPD for a constituent assembly that they allocated a more positive and permanent role to the workers' and soldiers' councils—inspired by a Russian example itself already out of date!¹

The elective principle ran right through the SDKPiL programme, applying to judges as well as officials at all levels. For the rest, the programme was the impeccably orthodox application of the rights of man as articulated in the French Revolution: equality of all before the law, inviolability of the person, freedom of speech, press association, and assembly; freedom of conscience, and full emancipation of women. To this were added the fruits of recent Socialist discussion in Germany: "The abolition of a standing army and the creation of an army of the whole people—that is the best guarantee of a country's peaceful development and the best means of facilitating the final liberation from the yoke of capitalism."² From the same source came the demand for compulsory and free education; the abolition of customs tariffs and indirect taxes and their replacement by a progressive tax on income, property, and inheritance; and finally a spread of attractive

theoretical slogans rather later than the Russians, partly in order not to be left as the only sloganless group in the RSDRP. See also Chapter XVIII for the use of the real and artificial differences as Communist ammunition against the radical Left before 1914.

¹ See below, pp. 715, 720–8.

² *Czego chcemy?*, p. 47.

labour legislation. The influences are clear: the old 'Russian' demand for abolishing the autocracy, the essence of bourgeois legality and equality taken from the classic example of bourgeois revolution in France, and finally the German preoccupation with direct, as opposed to indirect, taxation and a people's militia—with all the contradictions and difficulties inherent in these demands.¹

Rosa Luxemburg devoted special attention to the problem of autonomy since it was the most touchy subject in Poland and the main point of opposition to the PPS. As we have seen, the old method of lying in wait for the PPS to put forward an idea, and then pouncing with a polemical reply, was no longer good enough; the SDKPiL had to fill out with flesh and blood the meaning of its much-advertised autonomy. So the constituent assembly would be all-Russian; and the basic constitutional forms for the new state must be centrally decided by one all-Russian body. 'But each country is a separate entity [*całość*] within Russia, it has a distinct cultural life and its social-economic forms are different from those of the rest of the country.'² There would accordingly be a *sejm* or national assembly in Warsaw as well, concerned with those problems which were justifiably and distinctly Polish. Thus the *sejm* would deal with all matters affecting schools, courts of law, local government offices, and all matters relating to the national culture. Its authority would be delegated by the Russian centre and limited to these specific fields; the big political questions would be settled in Russia—though, of course, the Poles would be represented proportionately in the central government together with all other minorities. The fully federal solution propagated by some Liberals—quite apart from any extreme demands for total independence—was a bourgeois trick to forestall adequate working-class representation; by supporting it the Polish workers would only support their class enemies who played on nationalism as a means of diverting revolutionary energy into safer channels.³

As Rosa Luxemburg had insisted in 1905, the SDKPiL had to take issue not only with the PPS, its immediate class competitor, but with the bourgeois parties who had entered the ring of apparent opposition to Tsarism. The most important of these were the

¹ For an analysis of these difficulties and their relevance to the peculiar German context, see above, Chapter VI, pp. 215-16.

² *Czego chcemy?*, p. 23.

³ *Rzecz o konstytuancie . . .*, pp. 16-18, 31-33.

National Democrats—and the attack on federalism was in effect a reply to Dmowski's compromise solution of the national question. Thus Rosa Luxemburg had to tread carefully between two contradictory programmes, the PPS and its demand for revolutionary independence—to be answered by breaking up the juxtaposition of revolution and independence as mutually incompatible—and the National Democrats' non-revolutionary or reformist federalism, a concession which they hoped to gain from Tsarism—which in turn had to be denounced by showing that the interests of the Polish and Russian *bourgeoisie* were identical, and so called for a similar and joint response on the part of the two working classes. The path was tortuous, the argument necessarily sophisticated; only Rosa Luxemburg's skill enabled her to steer between the Scylla and Charybdis of mutual contradiction. But once again she came up against the old problem of overstating her case, which had already arisen in 1895; if Polish independence was really so *démodé*, how to make this paper tiger into a snarling menace? If neither the *bourgeoisie* nor the masses really wanted independence, then who did? Rosa Luxemburg promoted the general scapegoat of latter-day Marxism for this purpose, the hidden solvent of all difficult class equations—the *petite bourgeoisie*.¹ For years the intellectuals of the Second (and Third) International went on treating the lower middle classes as a dispensable walk-on in their dialectic productions, until in the end this forgotten class suddenly developed its own terrifying strength and extorted a grim revenge from its detractors—in the guise of Fascists and National Socialists.

Though Rosa Luxemburg ranged far beyond the narrow confines of the old Polish disputes, the war with the PPS was never for one moment forgotten. The split in the PPS, already apparent in 1905 and now widening apace, was not lost on her and she exploited it with telling effect. Pilsudski was clearly justifying her worst expectations and a majority in his party was turning against him, but she did not welcome the emergent PPS-Left with open arms. Far from being potential allies, they had now become mere opportunists who vacillated between various unsatisfactory policies. 'Today alliances with the bourgeoisie (Paris block),

¹ *Rzecz o konstytuancie* . . . , p. 37. See also *Program federacji, czyli PPS w błędnym kole*, Warsaw 1906, pp. 10–13. For Rosa Luxemburg's analysis of the scapegoat *petite bourgeoisie* on similar abstract lines in the German revolution, see below, pp. 554, 749.

tomorrow armed conference with Japan; yesterday alliance with the terrorist Socialist revolutionaries, today programme of federation.¹ Rosa Luxemburg offered no compromise. The only acceptable solution was for the PPS-Left at its coming congress in February 1906 to embrace the Social-Democratic programme of its opponents without reservation—in fact to come over to Rosa's camp. Though in fact the PPS-Left had a majority in the congress and confined Piłsudski's supporters to the technical management of the party's fighting forces, the expected split did not take place yet. Rosa Luxemburg continued to taunt the Left with indecision; and though at the ninth PPS congress in November 1906 Left and Right of the party finally split apart, with Piłsudski forming his own organization—the PPS Revolutionary Fraction, or *Frak* for short (in SDKPiL parlance)—the Left still did not embrace the Social Democrats. So in spite of a growing similarity of programme, the polemics were to continue on both sides, stoked with all the personal animosity of fourteen years of bitter polemics. The habits of a working lifetime could not be broken so easily, and Rosa Luxemburg continued to bait her opponents just as uncompromisingly as ever.²

Though the revolutionaries hardly realized it, the intensification of their efforts in the first three months of 1906 lagged behind the course of events. Precisely at the time Rosa Luxemburg was showering pamphlet upon article to create an intellectual and political framework for the inchoate revolutionary movement, the tide of that movement itself was ebbing fast. The last great efforts of December and early January were followed by only limited ripples which were no longer capable of generating the mass support of workers in Poland or Russia. In 1906 a total of 1,180,000 workers were out on strike, compared with 2,863,000 the year before. Alongside industrial action the persistent, if inarticulate, peasant pressure split up into individual, local acts of terrorism and destruction. For some time the SDKPiL clung to the hope that the pause was merely longer than had been anticipated. At their fifth congress, which assembled in the Galician resort of Zakopane from 18 to 23 June, the delegates agreed almost unanimously that a resumption of the revolution could shortly be

¹ *Program federacji* . . . , p. 14. The characterization closely anticipated that of the Centre and USPD by *Spartakus* ten years later. Once more Polish conditions mirrored the German future with frightening accuracy.

² For the post-revolutionary polemics with the PPS, see below, pp. 560-5.

expected. Accordingly, new measures were planned to provide better organizational control over the next mass action, to point it more sharply at the heart of the government's defences. The struggle had to become more political, better organized, above all more disciplined and effective. Like the Bolsheviks, the Poles were learning the advantage of centralized direction and control. The hitherto large measure of constitutional independence on the part of the local committees was officially much reduced—even though, as we have seen, it had been little more than a fiction for many years. Since the SDKPiL had now officially joined the newly reunited RSDRP, special emphasis was laid on the all-Russian unity struggle. The usual élite dominated the proceedings; though both Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches were inevitably absent, Julian Marchlewski opened the congress and the crucial report on revolutionary achievements was presented by that most eminent practitioner of agitation and discipline, Feliks Dzierżyński.

Soon, however, the ebb of the revolution had to be recognized even by the optimists. The Tsarist authorities had gone over to a counter-offensive in March 1906—the first for over a year. A wave of arrests swept over the cities, sometimes followed by summary executions. The police redoubled their efforts to penetrate the revolutionary organizations with their spies. Frequent appeals were issued to the army to collaborate closely with the civil authorities. At the same time the growth of trade unions, though intended to increase and organize the revolutionary potential of the workers, in fact diverted their energies from political action into more immediate economic demands. Thus the efforts of the SDKPiL to keep the newly emerging unions 'political' to a large extent failed, so much so that when trade unions were later made legal by the government the Social-Democratic leaders had become sceptical of their value; Rosa Luxemburg for one saw no point in re-creating in Polish conditions and with the blessing of the authorities precisely those self-centred and undisciplined trade-union figures with whom she had been bickering in Germany since 1900. In any case, the strongest influence in the new trend for industrial organization did not come from either Socialists or Social Democrats but from the National Democrats, who formed their own trade unions to compete with the Socialists. By now the Liberal Party, with its programme of compromise and concession,

began to exercise a growing influence on the exhausted and somewhat disillusioned workers. It stood for consolidation of the benefits obtained and limited co-operation with the authorities as long as they remained in a mood for concessions—and long after. In practical terms this choice focused on participation in the second Duma—advocated by the bourgeois parties, particularly the National Democrats, and to begin with rigidly opposed by both Socialist parties and by the *Bund* as well as the RSDRP. The unemployment and hardship—‘la plaie de la révolution’—was taking its toll; there were lockouts rather than strikes, culminating in the great struggle at the Poznański works in Łódź at the end of 1906.

Though the SDKPiL would not—indeed could not—admit formally that the revolution was coming to an end, they observed the disintegration of mass action into fisticuffs with considerable concern. They too had lost much of their leadership to the police drag-net—Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches immured in the notorious Pavilion X, Marchlewski arrested but not recognized and shortly released, Leder also arrested and awaiting trial. The Central Committee withdrew to Cracow in the spring, leaving its most experienced conspirators Hanecki and Dzierżyński in Warsaw. The battle against the authorities had degenerated into costly clashes with the militant supporters of the National Democrats, and the leadership was obliged to advise against what they described as pointless brawls—both between the two Socialist parties and between the workers organized by the Socialists and Liberals respectively.¹ The practical period of the revolution was over; the time had come for digestion—and theoretical analysis. Once again it was Rosa Luxemburg’s turn to move to the centre of the stage. But for the moment there was the bare and brutal question of her survival.

At the end of January 1906 Rosa Luxemburg had written to Karl Kautsky that ‘Luise is a thousand times right in wishing me back in Berlin. I would take off at once for that destination were it not for the fact that I must first finish several things here and then go to St. Petersburg for the “family celebration”’.² The news

¹ *Czerwony Sztandar*, 11 June 1906, No. 76, and 19 June 1906, No. 77. The appeals have the suggestive titles ‘Walka ideowa zamiast walki na pięści’ (Fight with ideas instead of fighting with fists), and ‘Walka rewolucyjna czy rewolucyjne awanturnictwo?’ (Revolutionary struggle or revolutionary hooliganism?).

² *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 108.

from Berlin, with the report of mass strikes in Hamburg and the counter-offensive by the German trade-union leaders, made Rosa feel restless. Once more the revolutionary grass began to seem greener in the other valley. She planned to return to Berlin in mid-March. Her colleagues thought the situation more dangerous for her than ever in Warsaw and she had anyhow magnificently fulfilled her immediate tasks of exposition and propaganda. Accordingly, Rosa Luxemburg got her German journalist's pass visa'd for her return journey and began to make definite arrangements for departure.

But the axe fell too soon. Sunday 4 March (new style) was a mild, muggy day which broke the winter with a slushy thaw. A police raid on the house of one Countess Walewska flushed two unexpected lodgers out of bed, German journalists whom the police suspected of being Polish revolutionaries—though they flourished papers with the names of Anna Matschke and Otto Engelmann. It seems that the certainty of Rosa Luxemburg's presence in Warsaw had finally been obtained by press reports from Germany; the right-wing papers carried denunciatory stories about Russian revolutionaries in Germany at the time.¹

The two, man and woman, were hauled off to the Town Hall loudly maintaining aliases and innocence. Armed with definite suspicions, the police raided the home of Rosa's sister and soon uncovered photographs. Pretence was no longer possible. Jogiches did better; his alias was broken only at the beginning of June, again perhaps through identification from Germany. The German government certainly did everything possible to collaborate with the Russian police.

Rosa Luxemburg accepted her lot with fatalistic irony.

This way will have to do just as well. I do hope you won't take it too much to heart. Long live the Re . . . and everything connected with it. In some respects I even prefer sitting here to arguing with [my German trade-union opponent] Peus. They caught me in a pretty undignified position, but let us forget about that. Here I am sitting in the Town Hall where 'politicals', ordinary criminals and lunatics are all crowded together. My cell is a veritable jewel; with its present ornaments (an ordinary single cell for one person in normal times) it now contains

¹ The connection is suggested by Frölich, p. 136. He attributes the identification of Rosa Luxemburg as Anna Matschke to an article in the conservative *Post*. I am informed by Dr. Tych that there is documentary evidence that the police action was triggered off by the *Post* article.

14 guests, fortunately all of them political cases . . . I am told that these are really conditions approaching paradise, for at one time 60 people sat together in one cell and slept in shifts. . . . We are all sleeping like kings on boards on top of each other, next to each other, packed like herrings, but we manage nicely—except for the extra music provided; for instance yesterday we got a new colleague, a mad Jewess, who kept us breathless for 24 hours with her lamentations . . . and who made a number of politicals break out into hysterical sobs. Today we finally got rid of her and there are only three quiet *meshuggene* left. . . . My own spirits are as always excellent. For the present my disguise is still working, but I suppose it won't last long. . . . Taken by and large, the matter is serious, but we are living in serious times when 'everything that happens is worth the trouble'. So cheer up, and don't worry. Everything went *excellently* during my lifetime . . . my health is quite all right. I suppose I shall soon be transferred to a new prison since my case is serious.

1. Pay my rent, I shall pay back everything promptly, and with many thanks.

2. Send an order for 2,000 Austrian *kronen* at once to Mr. Alexander Ripper at the printing press [a Warsaw address supplied] giving as sender Herr Adam Pendzichowski. Leave *all further possible demands* from that quarter unheeded. . . .

4. Pay out no money apart from this, *without an order from me*, unless perhaps upon demand by Karski [Marchlewski] otherwise not. . . . Dear Karl, for the time being you must take over the representation of the Social Democracy of Poland and Lithuania in the International [Bureau]. Send them official word to this effect; eventually travel to meetings will be refunded. . . . News of my arrest must not be published until the complete unveiling [the breaking of Rosa's alias]. After that, however—I will let you know when—make a noise 'so that the people here will get a scare. I must close, a dozen kisses and greetings. Write me direct to my address: Frau Anna Matschke, Town Hall Jail, Warsaw. Remember I am [here as] an associate editor of *Neue Zeit*. But of course write carefully. . . .¹

Whatever fate might await her, there were practical details to attend to both for the party and for herself. Only in such moments of stress did Rosa tackle her financial problems with calm efficiency!

Conditions in the Warsaw jails were truly chaotic. Each police *razzia* brought in more prisoners to the already overcrowded jails and the task of identification and questioning was at first carried

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, pp. 113-15, dated 13 March. The letter must have been smuggled out.

out haphazardly. The whole thing was run in the classic 'Tsarist tradition, brutality combined with inefficiency. After a few days Rosa was moved from the Town Hall to Pawiak prison, and then on 11 April to the notorious Pavilion X of the Warsaw Citadel outside the city on the banks of the Vistula. This was the fortress for dangerous political criminals—the place where the nationalist revolutionaries of 1863 and the first members of *Proletariat*, all major public enemies, had at one time been incarcerated. The government saw little point in sophisticated distinctions between revolutionary opponents. Soon Rosa's family obtained permission to visit her, and found their sister encased 'in a real cage consisting of two layers of wire mesh or rather a small cage that stands freely inside a larger one so that the prisoner can only look at visitors through this double trellis work'. Rosa Luxemburg recalled the scene many years later—when she was trying to cheer up the wife of another convict, Karl Liebknecht.

It was just at the end of a six-day hunger strike in prison and I was so weak that the Commanding Officer of the fortress had more or less to carry me into the visitor's room. I had to hold on with both hands to the wires of the cage, and this must certainly have strengthened the resemblance to a wild beast in a zoo. The cage was standing in a rather dark corner of the room, and my brother pressed his face against the wires. 'Where are you?' he kept asking, continually wiping away the tears that clouded his spectacles.¹

Her family naturally set to work at once to get her out. Their first suggestion was an appeal for clemency to Count Witte, the Russian premier. This Rosa refused out of hand. The next problem was the establishment of her German nationality. This had to be proved and not merely asserted; there were agonized letters to Berlin and endless but inevitable delays in reply.² Her family intended to couple this with an appeal to the German Consul for intervention on her behalf, which Rosa Luxemburg again resisted; but they approached the German authorities regardless. At the end of June her brother briefly visited Berlin to complete the most important part of the release formalities—the raising of money for bail or ransom.

¹ *Letters from Prison*, Berlin 1923, p. 17, dated 18 February 1917.

² See letter from Rosa Luxemburg's brother to Arthur Stadthagen, 26 June 1906, *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 34. It appears from this exchange that the telegraphic code of the Luxemburg family business in Warsaw was 'Luxemburgois'—an ironic address for a revolutionary Socialist.

Rosa Luxemburg's crime against the state was one of the most serious, and her friends were well aware of it. Henriette Roland-Holst badgered the Kautskys for news, and so did Clara Zetkin and the Mehrings. Bebel asked for good wishes to be conveyed and assurances of help if possible. Kautsky transmitted all these messages to his acquaintances in the SDKPiL.¹ In return he begged Warszawski for the latest news, but the latter was unable in good conscience to allay the fears in Berlin. Money was still the most helpful alleviator of tension with the Russian bureaucracy.

Some news of Rosa, as I promised. . . . Matters are very bad. The threat of a court martial was real enough. We decided to force the issue with money. First thing was to get the indictment changed to another paragraph. This succeeded. . . . Next, it will probably come to an amnesty, but one from which Rosa will be excluded. We are doing our best to get things moving, so that only those paragraphs are listed [in the indictment] which would not exclude Rosa [from an amnesty]. Perhaps tomorrow or the day after tomorrow I may be in a position to send better news.²

His warnings had the required effect in Berlin and Josef Luxemburg was able to collect 3,000 roubles, the sum demanded as bail, when he appeared in person. The money almost certainly came direct from the SPD executive, though Rosa probably did not know this at the time.³ She was as always determined to maintain her revolutionary posture to the last and ask for no help, either from the German authorities or from the party. The SDKPiL leadership supplemented their financial persuasion with an unofficial threat of reprisal; if anything happened to Rosa they would retaliate with action against prominent officials.

Though her spirit was high, Rosa's health was rapidly deteriorating and the prison doctors could easily justify an official release on

¹ Correspondence in Kautsky Archives, IISH.

² Adolf Warszawski to Karl Kautsky, 15 May 1906, IISH Archives, DXXIII, 64.

³ The evidence for this is circumstantial but I consider it conclusive. Certain suggestions were to be made from time to time about her ungratefulness when she developed her open oppositional tendencies after 1910. The reference was clearly to some special obligation on her part to the SPD leadership. When in 1907 Bebel formally offered her a sum of money on behalf of the executive to restore her depleted finances, she refused the idea of 'further payments' as she did not want to be 'kept' by the executive. (Luise Kautsky's statement to Werner Blumenberg in Amsterdam.) Finally, and most important, Bebel wrote to her peremptorily after her release in July and ordered her back to Berlin. Clearly he was in a position to justify such a command. See *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 122; also Frölich, p. 139 (though Frölich's dating is wrong).

bail for reasons of health. The reaction of many months of feverish activity had taken its toll. Her hair began to turn grey, a medical commission reported in June that she was suffering from 'anaemia, hysterical and neurasthenic symptoms, catarrh of the stomach and dilation of the liver'. Though these reports were probably greased into exaggeration, she herself reported to her friend Emmanuel Wurm that she looked 'yellow' and felt 'very tired'.¹ The discipline of Social Democracy causes revolutionaries to cast almost identical shadows in the sun; but once immured in prison and darkness their peculiar personality takes unhindered charge. Parvus in the Peter-Paul fortress in St. Petersburg merely lamented his fate; he was unable to think or write one word, as though paralysed. Trotsky in a cell near by simply abstracted himself from reality and used the welcome opportunity of solitude to complete his processes of revolutionary digestion. The theory of permanent revolution was worked out in its full logical implications in jail—as though he had enjoyed the seclusion of an Oxford college. Rosa, having to share her cell, was unable to think quietly for long enough to write more than scraps of manuscript which were smuggled out of jail. But for the rest, she talked and preached and diffused revolution to the immediate circle of her fellow inmates, and her letters show an aggressive and determined cheerfulness which, broken only by a few desperate moments, she was to maintain throughout the long and much drearier imprisonment during the First World War.

On 8 July 1906 she was finally released, the result of threats and pleas to the authorities, the medical diagnosis, and most of all the charm of money. She was free—but not allowed to leave Warsaw. There was not much work for her to do. The revolution had receded and the main body of the leadership had moved back to Cracow. A few articles for *Czerwony Sztandar*, polemics against Dmowski, and advice to the workers—the last parting shots of a party fighting a rearguard action.² Her main concern now was to get out of Warsaw altogether. The public prosecutor in Warsaw to whom her file had been handed was still having difficulty with her German nationality. Frequent calls at the dispersed offices of an inefficient bureaucracy brought some of the informal contact which exists even under the harshest government; a gossiping Russian official gleefully told her that even if the Russians let her

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 41, letter dated 8 July 1906.

² See *Czerwony Sztandar*, 30 August 1906, No. 102, pp. 1–2.

go, the German police had already asked for her expulsion at a specific point on the border. A prosecution was now pending against her in Germany for seditious remarks at the Jena congress a year before.¹ But the main hurdle had been overcome with her release from prison; she was out of the clutches of the police and the rest was a matter of time and formalities. Finally, on 8 August (new style), she was allowed to leave Warsaw with instructions to report to the police in Finland, whither she was bound. By now her programme had crystallized: a month or so in Finland close to the Russian revolutionary leaders gathered there, and the preparation of a considered analysis of the events she had witnessed—for the benefit of German readers. For it was now clear that the next important step must be her return to Germany in time for the next party congress. Germany was once more to be the centre of her activities—her impact heightened by the lessons she would be able to impart to her staid but fascinated hearers.

Rosa Luxemburg had missed the SDKPiL congress of June 1906 and, perhaps more important still, the great unification congress of the Russian party at which the SDKPiL had finally pledged its adherence. The gathering of the clans originally intended for St. Petersburg in February had never taken place; owing to police pressure, neutral Stockholm had been judged safer. Though Rosa Luxemburg had missed all this she was still determined to discuss the experiences of the revolution with the Russians. Now that organizational unity had been achieved, such consultations were especially necessary. Besides, the multiplicity of her experiences—Polish as well as German—would make the Russian leaders listen to her with respect. A new feeling of unity and co-operation appeared to have swept through the RSDRP. It was the ideal moment for Rosa Luxemburg to exercise her influence on the Russian leaders. Above all, she wanted to see what these Bolsheviki, with their nearly successful Moscow rising, were really like.

At the outbreak of the revolution the leaders of the SDKPiL, and Rosa Luxemburg in particular, had been orientated towards the Mensheviks. The personal breach with Plekhanov was never repaired, but Rosa Luxemburg had managed for a time to achieve polite and reasonably friendly relations with Akselrod, Dan, and

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 126, letter dated 11 August 1906.

particularly Potresov. Though she certainly sided with the Mensheviks in the pre-revolutionary campaign against Lenin, her interest in the internal problems of the Russian party was very limited. What was involved for Rosa Luxemburg was the general problem of revolutionary theory, not its application to the factional squabbles in the RSDRP. She was prepared to enter the public lists against Lenin, but this did not commit her to unqualified support for his opponents. As far back as 1904, when both Bebel and Kautsky had given their unqualified support for Menshevik collaboration with the Russian liberals, she alone in Germany had expressed strong reservations.¹ Throughout 1905, as Menshevik policy developed, Rosa Luxemburg became increasingly critical of the new *Iskra*; in private her comments were couched in a tone of increasing asperity. She never could mince words. But as long as there was still hope of persuading Martov, Akselrod, and Potresov of the errors of their ways it was better not to polemicize against them in public. 'I am all for not making it excessively difficult for them to come over to us by too sharp a polemic—merely for the sake of words. I would rather try and get their agreement for the wording of the resolution.'²

In general the Poles saw the Mensheviks as potential collaborators, but not as automatic allies. Above all, Rosa Luxemburg was determined not to be drawn into the whirlpool of Russian party squabbles, and tried to prevent Kautsky and other prominent Germans from becoming involved. Whenever she was called upon—and even when she was not—she advised caution and diffidence towards the emissaries of both Russian camps who were now beginning to solicit Berlin for sympathy and particularly for material help. She warned the SPD against placing too much credence on the boastful assertions of each of the Russian factions that they alone represented the party as a whole; when the Bolsheviks held a conference at Tammerfors in Finland and claimed the authority of a full party congress, she warned the Germans that the conference resolutions should not be republished in Germany at their face value.³

If anything, Rosa Luxemburg was anti-Lenin rather than pro-Menshevik. Her criticism of the Mensheviks certainly did not

¹ See letter from Bebel to Akselrod, 4 June 1904; Kautsky to Akselrod, 10 January 1905, in Akselrod papers, IISH.

² Jogiches letters, mid-October 1905, IML (M).

³ *SAZ*, 20 June 1905.

make the Bolsheviks any more attractive. *Bolszyńskiwo*—as it was known in the Polish party—was still a synonym for narrowness, obstinacy, and unreason; any trace of it in Polish attitudes was to be deplored and eradicated.¹

When Rosa Luxemburg reached Warsaw and discussed the December events in both St. Petersburg and Moscow with her colleagues, she found quite a different attitude. Criticism of the regrettable tendency to overrate Russian liberalism, which had already caused some minor if sharp squabbles with the Mensheviks in 1905, now turned into something close to condemnation of Menshevik pusillanimity in St. Petersburg and corresponding admiration for the Bolshevik Soviet in Moscow. Things looked quite different in Warsaw than in Berlin; the reports of Menshevik activity in St. Petersburg supplied by Leo Deutsch [Deich] on recent visits to the German capital were now characterized as distinctly fishy'. The Mensheviks had nothing further to offer on the subject of general strikes; Parvus's final efforts in St. Petersburg had failed lamentably, due—by his own admission—to his errors and inexperience. The Bolsheviks had at least attempted armed insurrection and the Polish Social Democrats also committed themselves to this essential next stage. Rosa Luxemburg purveyed the December events in Moscow to Polish readers with sympathy and enthusiasm.² More significantly, the Poles accepted the Bolshevik version of events in both Moscow and St. Petersburg

¹ Once approval of the Bolsheviks had come to be the touchstone of orthodoxy, the attitude of Rosa Luxemburg and the Polish leaders towards the Russian faction became the subject of detailed Communist study and commentaries. See Introduction by A. Krajewski to Jogiches letters, *Ż Pola Walki*, 1931, Nos. 11/12, p. 178; also 'The SDKPiL in the revolution of 1905-1907', *ibid.* For a modern view of the same old problem, see Jan Sobczak, 'The anti-Menshevik position of the SDKPiL in questions of the intra-party struggle in the RSDRP in the period between the fourth and fifth RSDRP congresses', *Iz istorii polskogo rabocheho dvizheniya*, Moscow 1962, pp. 58-102; also the polemics between Roman Werfel and Julian Hochfeld in *Po Prostu*, February-March 1957, reprinted in Adam Ciołkosz (ed.), *Róża Luksemburg a rewolucja rosyjska*, Paris 1961, pp. 233-56. But today it is no longer a cause for Polish self-flagellation; unlike the East Germans, the Poles have consigned the problem to history and the historians. See the mere passing reference to this question in official ideological evaluations of the SDKPiL, e.g. Feliks Tych, 'On the 70th anniversary of the foundation of the SDKPiL', *Nowe Drogi*, July 1963, No. 7(170), pp. 25-37.

I have treated this problem very summarily since it is in fact of secondary historical importance, and mainly interesting as a reflection of later struggles in the various Communist parties. See below, Chapter XVIII.

² 'Armed revolution in Moscow', *Czerwony Sztandar*, 3 January 1906, pp. 1-2.

supplied by Lenin's emissary who passed through Warsaw on his way to Berlin.¹ According to Rosa Luxemburg's information, the Petersburg Social Democrats had voted to participate in the Duma elections, which was further evidence of feeble-minded direction. 'And that is the result of the victory of the *Iskra* faction over the Lenin faction of which they are very proud. Unfortunately I could not get to Petersburg in time, otherwise I would have soured their "victory" for them. . . . We cannot be a party to such nonsense.'²

Why this rapid change? It was clearly not a spontaneous assessment on the part of Rosa Luxemburg but an aversion acquired from her colleagues. By the beginning of 1906 both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks had worked out their version of revolutionary strategy; Lenin with his slogan of democratic dictatorship of proletariat and peasantry, the Mensheviks with their more orthodox support for a bourgeois revolution. Lenin particularly had given much thought to immediate tactics, and in one of his most clear-cut articles had contrasted his own prescription with that of his opponents.³ The Poles largely agreed with the Bolsheviks—though they themselves did not work out a slogan of their own in reply until 1908. The main difference between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks was largely over the function of the proletariat in the current revolution, which—both sides were agreed—could only reach the limits of a bourgeois-democratic one. Plekhanov allocated the proletariat a secondary, supporting role to the *bourgeoisie*, who at the present state of history must still be the main spearhead of attack against the feudal remnants of absolutism; for Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg, on the contrary, the proletariat would—indeed must—be the prime mover in the creation of a bourgeois capitalist society, liberal democracy within which the proletariat could then go on to develop its anti-capitalist struggle. Here the dialectic—at least the modern interpretation of it—came up with one of its neatest, most striking paradoxes: the proletariat must fight for its

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 104, dated 11 January 1906. The envoy was probably Lyadov. For the later Communist version of the St. Petersburg events, which goes so far as to attribute deliberate sabotage to the Mensheviks, see P. Gorin, *Ocherki po istorii sovetov rabochikh deputatov v 1905 godu*, Moscow 1930, p. 337. Still later, the Second Soviet in St. Petersburg under Parvus's chairmanship disappears from history altogether; after the arrest of Trotsky and the First Soviet, all revolutionary activity allegedly shifted to Moscow.

² *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 104, dated 11 January 1906.

³ 'Two tactics for Social Democracy in the democratic revolution', *Sochineniya*, Vol. IX, pp. 1-119.

own direct class enemy the *bourgeoisie*, must fight to bring the latter to objective ascendancy, but at the same time retain the positions of power gained by its role as revolutionary vanguard. We have already seen the same problem reflected in Rosa Luxemburg's Polish writing.¹

But what was at issue here was not in the last resort a question of sophisticated Marxist interpretation. The theoretical constructs refined by polemic came only later and were mere outward form—in the aftermath of revolution when the revolutionaries had nothing to do but settle down to sharpen their wits on each other. For the moment there was the brutally simple antithesis of action against inaction, forcing the pace or waiting for others to do so. Whether the castigation of Menshevik inactivity was justified is of secondary importance; the SDKPiL decided that the Bolsheviks had shown themselves as the activists of the Russian revolution and therefore became the natural allies of the equally active Poles. At the fourth, or unity, congress of the RSDRP in Stockholm in April 1906 the Bolsheviks unrolled the red carpet for the Poles. They in return helped the Bolsheviks to obtain a majority on several important matters before the congress. Representatives of the SDKPiL, as the only Poles admitted to the congress, now joined the Central Committee of the Russian party. Informally, a curious parallelogram now came into being: on one side SDKPiL and Bolsheviks, on the other Mensheviks and PPS-Left—though the latter were outside the Russian movement. This alignment, at first the incidental product of similar attitudes and programmes, was soon reinforced by more specific support. Beneath the formal appearance of unity both Russian factions retained their separate existence and organization, especially the Bolsheviks; both looked for allies and the two sets of Poles, too, were keen to have formal Russian support for their unceasing polemics against each other. But this was yet to come. For Rosa Luxemburg and her colleagues one of the most important achievements of the revolution in the year 1906 was the formal embodiment of party unity at the Russian congress—a unity which they would fight hard to maintain in the coming years and which in the last resort was even more important to them than any alliance with the Bolsheviks.

Rosa arrived in the second week of August. The revolutionary leaders had established themselves at Kuokkala, in the compara-

¹ See above, p. 338.

tive safety of Finland but within easy reach of St. Petersburg. Here Rosa Luxemburg joined them. Their life followed a curious routine—stealthy visits to the capital during the day and then, after the evening return to quiet Kuokkala, the long, smoke-shrouded sessions into the early hours. St. Petersburg made a disagreeable impact on Rosa Luxemburg. 'The general impression of confusion, of disorganization, above all a lack of clarity in their ideas and tactics, has completely disgusted me. By God, the revolution is great and strong as long as the Social Democrats don't smash it up.'¹ This was still the Menshevik hangover. Rosa Luxemburg was kinder to individuals than to the principles for which they stood. She visited Akselrod and Vera Zasulich who were at liberty, and 'fatty' Parvus as well as 'fishy' Deutsch who were not. Parvus had been in jail since 3 April and now both awaited their transport to Siberia at any moment. They were delighted to see her and Rosa could report that 'both are in good spirits and health though Fatty has lost weight'. Matrimonial as well as political troubles were buzzing round his head; the second Mrs. Helphand had appeared in Warsaw a day after Rosa had left, a destitute refugee from the pogroms in Odessa. 'The other one—wife number three—is here in St. Petersburg but I haven't visited her.'² In addition, Rosa knew that Parvus's ex-partner Julian Marchlewski was still breathing fire and slaughter for his having left him and their bankrupt publishing venture at the mercy of the insistent Munich creditors. Perhaps she really was able, as he later claimed, to reassure Parvus that all the outstanding debts had now at last been paid.³

Personal visits apart, Rosa Luxemburg spent most of her time with Lenin and his immediate Bolshevik circle. She had met him personally only once before, during 1901 in Munich, through the good offices of Parvus who, in the early halcyon days of *Iskra*, had been the only contact with German Social Democrats which Russian conspiratorial caution had permitted. Now at last, after polemics and dislike at a distance, they got to know each other well. Evening after evening she sat in Lenin's ground-floor flat

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 126, 11 August 1906.

² *Ibid.*, p. 128.

³ Parvus, *Im Kampf um die Wahrheit*, Berlin 1918, p. 23. See also Marchlewski's letter in Kautsky Archives, IISH, D XVI, 391, dated 14 November 1905. Apart from other troubles, Maxim Gorky claimed that Parvus had fraudulently converted the income from Gorky's play, *The Lower Depths*, the German distribution rights of which had been handled by Parvus' copyright agency.

in the house of the Leiteisen family in Kuokkala and talked over the Russian revolution at length with Lenin, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Bogdanov.¹ She made a considerable impression on them; 'the first Marxist who was able to evaluate the Russian revolution correctly and as a whole'.² A personal sympathy between Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg—based, like all Lenin's friendships, on mutual intellectual respect—was born at this time and was to survive for six years until party differences drowned it once more in the froth of polemics. Even then a spark of personal sympathy always survived the renewed hostilities; though Lenin fell out completely with Leo Jogiches and necessarily included Rosa Luxemburg in his onslaught on the 'old' Polish leadership, he never went for her personally as he did in the case of Jogiches—while she in turn deliberately abstained from any public reply to his attacks.

Fascinating though they were, these discussions were secondary to Rosa Luxemburg's main purpose in Finland. The Hamburg provincial organization of the SPD had commissioned her to write a pamphlet on the Russian revolution in general and the mass strike in particular. This was to serve as a text for the forthcoming SPD congress at Mannheim at which Rosa Luxemburg planned to make her dramatic reappearance in the German party. It was also to be Rosa's considered verdict on the great events of the past year. Most of her time in Finland was devoted to this work. She stayed in the country house or *dacha* of a woman painter and party comrade called Cavas-Zaroudny—close to but not immersed in the endless Russian discussions and their meetings and committees; a little haven of peace and quiet all to herself and highly conducive to intellectual activity. As she was still under police surveillance Rosa Luxemburg used the name of Felicia Budelovich—and it took her German friends some time to understand that the well-known Rosa Luxemburg and the mysterious Felicia Budelovich were one and the same person. With her interest focused more and more on the coming return to Germany, she pressed the Kautskys for copies of the most important German newspapers, to help her research and to make her familiar once more with the scent of German circumstances. What she read

¹ N. Krupskaya, *Memories of Lenin*, p. 112. From memory Krupskaya wrongly gave the date as June and the place as St. Petersburg.

² See G. Zinoviev, *Zwei grosse Verluste* (speeches at the session of the Petrograd Soviet, 19 January 1919), Petrograd 1920, p. 18.

failed to please her—naturally enough; but all the same she was bursting to get back into the familiar fray. The system of total and secret comparting of her two revolutionary lives came into operation once more—no one in Germany must know anything of her contacts with the Russians in Finland, and the latter were probably unaware that she was increasingly orientated towards Germany once more. Her health was rapidly recovering and with it her usual state of mind returned—an increasing impatience to be back at work. She was impatient also to get news of the impending prosecution against her; she had no wish to be put ‘behind bars preventatively as soon as the tip of my nose smells royal Prussian liberty (as you know with me the nose always projects before anything else)’.¹ But it was difficult for her friends to give her the required assistance; the case was still pending and the public prosecutor, undisturbed by her thirst for knowledge, was still considering proceedings against Bebel as well as Rosa Luxemburg.²

By the end of August she was mentally back in Germany already—and longing to make the physical journey as well. Interlaced with the instructions to Kautsky about Polish party funds—during Rosa Luxemburg’s absence he was the acting outpost of the SDKPiL in Berlin and had control of the bank account—were the renewed and niggling preoccupations with rent and tradesmen’s bills, the symptoms that normal life was about to be resumed. As usual Rosa’s financial affairs were precarious as well as messy; it was Luise Kautsky’s doubtful task to put them right—and also to ensure that the tradesmen did not make too much hay in Rosa’s absence.³ Rosa’s political comments, too, focused more and more on Germany. She always preferred brisk arrivals to solemn farewells; she did not like attending autopsies on the immediate past. The Russian revolution, whether temporarily

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 119, dated 7 April 1906.

² Jena, where the 1905 congress had taken place, was in Thuringia and the case was therefore the responsibility of the provincial authorities. The public prosecutor was advised by his Reich superiors that there was no hope of obtaining a conviction against Bebel but every prospect of one against Rosa Luxemburg. Report of Dept. of Justice (*Reichsjustizamt*) to Reich Chancellor, 17 October 1905, in *Archivalische Forschungen*, Vol. 2/I, *Die Auswirkungen . . . auf Deutschland*, p. 140. The authorities were visibly determined to ‘get’ Rosa once more.

³ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 132. See also a letter from Julie Bebel to Luise Kautsky and Rosa Luxemburg, 11 October 1908, IISH Archives, D III, 122, in which the unfortunate wife of August Bebel was suddenly requested to account from memory for payments made on Rosa’s behalf two years earlier.

halted or rolled right back into a decade of reaction, was to provide many years of theorizing and squabbling among the RSDRP factions. Rosa Luxemburg had other and more immediate fish to fry. In her conception, the German movement still predominated. Galvanized by recent Russian experience, the SPD must now be made to capitalize all the more on its unique situation. The battle would thus be transferred to the most vital sector of the Second International—always providing that the lessons of the Russian revolution as experienced and interpreted by Rosa Luxemburg could be absorbed in Germany. This was how she conceived her next task—and how she outlined it to her new Russian friends. The real value of the Russian revolution was the application of its lessons to the West, particularly Germany. One wonders what Lenin's comments were.

The prospects she was leaving behind in Russia seemed politically bleak. Even Warsaw was better than St. Petersburg—'where no one in the street seems to be aware of the fact that there is such a thing as a revolution any more'.¹ But though she might claim to 'itch' to get back to Warsaw, the pull was personal rather than political—and in any case such a journey was out of the question. Her family had reported that police were everywhere; friends and relations were in 'real danger of their lives at every step'. The fate of her fellow prisoners was a solemn warning. Some of them were dealt with by administrative decree, but Jogiches for one was to be put on trial. It had taken months to establish his identity, but once the police had broken his alias—in spite of Rosa's efforts to help preserve it with German affidavits—he had to face not only charges of 'plotting to overthrow by armed violence the monarchical form of government as laid down in the constitution' but even the ironical addition of 'trying to obtain the independence of Poland'. The military command of the Warsaw district was not interested in fine distinctions between different types of revolutionaries. His trial eventually took place in January 1907. The indictment covered Rosa Luxemburg as well, though of course she refused to appear in person. Jogiches refused to plead or even to speak; he remained contemptuously silent throughout the three-day trial. He was convicted of high treason as well as military desertion—like thousands of other émigrés of every political complexion, he had evaded military service in 1891 by going abroad.

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 135, dated 26 August 1906.

The sentence was harsh—eight years' hard labour in Siberia and lifelong enforced residence there. But like Parvus and Trotsky he escaped, actually just before the departure of his transport; an escape which Hanecki had helped to organize by bribing a policeman.¹ By this time Rosa Luxemburg had been back in Germany for some months.² But whatever relief she must have felt at Jogiches' safe return to Germany in April 1907 was now overshadowed by the personal break between them. Their relationship was never to be fully restored. So the consequences of the Russian revolution for Rosa Luxemburg proved to be poignantly personal as well. In her private life as much as in politics there could never be any half measures. Once her mind or her heart had been closed no amount of pressure or pleading could open it again.³

Rosa Luxemburg left Kuokkala on 14 September 1906. There was still no certainty about her own situation in Germany—whether the Prussian police would meet her off the boat with a warrant for her arrest. Now she no longer cared—to hell with ever-cautious lawyers who advised her to await the endless procrastinations of the imperial judiciary. The people in Hamburg urged her to stay for a few days in order to look through the proofs of her manuscript which she had sent them two weeks earlier. Her reading of the German press in recent weeks had already produced a welcome sense of combat; its mealy-mouthed tone made her 'feel ill at Plevna' like the Tsar at the prospect of the Turks—a sure sign that Rosa Luxemburg was fighting fit once more:⁴ for her no question of further rest, no slow and complicated theoretical regurgitation of experience. The next and important phase of her work already beckoned impatiently—the German party congress. Clara Zetkin had begged her to come to the 'Rhenish music festival at Mannheim'—'you bet I will be there', Rosa sang in reply.

¹ See J. Krasny, *Tyszka*, Moscow 1925, pp. 18–19. The incidents are referred to by Frölich, pp. 140–1, but some of the dates are incorrect.

Marchlewski, too, had been arrested towards the end of 1906 but the police had been unable to break his alias and he was therefore released in January 1907. See anonymous biography, *Julian Marchlewski*, p. 64.

² 'Regarding a sentence of fifteen years' hard labour passed on me, no official notification has reached me from the Military Court; consequently I am in no position to confirm or deny with certainty the truth of this report.' Rosa Luxemburg's letter to *Vorwärts*, 22 January 1907, No. 18, Supplement 1, p. 2.

³ For the full story, see below, Chapter IX, pp. 378–84.

⁴ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 132, dated 22 August 1906.

The full impact of the Russian revolution on Rosa Luxemburg's ideas and actions was not to become apparent for some time. Her immediate contribution to the events of the moment was important enough; we have seen how she tried to systematize her views and those of her party and disseminate them as far afield as possible. These were twin functions: on the one hand the use of programmatic stimuli to keep up the revolutionary urge and channel it correctly (away from nationalism and *putsches*), on the other the spread of revolutionary knowledge and wisdom to the different sections of participants, from intellectuals to striking workers. Rosa Luxemburg held these to be her two most important revolutionary weapons—and both were inextricably connected with mass action. In this respect her coverage was much the same as Lenin's and that of the other Russian revolutionaries. If one compares the subject matter of her Polish writing with that of Lenin they prove remarkably contiguous; it is clear that they both come from the same intellectual stable—with one major exception, however: unlike Lenin, she made no original contributions to the tactics or methods of revolution. Lenin swept the experiences of 1905-1906 into a strongly stressed and pointed profile of future revolution in which an important place was assigned to the revolutionary peasantry. At the same time he reiterated his organizational doctrine more firmly than ever. Trotsky produced his theory of interacting or permanent revolution. Both in their different ways looked for specific tactical or theoretical lessons, and their efforts—then still mutually hostile and incompatible—were to help make possible the October revolution of 1917. Rosa Luxemburg, however much she may have systematized both her party's programme and tactics, did not produce anything that could be adopted for use. The peasant question was largely ignored; she still based her revolutionary analysis on an autonomous proletariat not only taking the lead but acting without allies. Even in 1908, when the Poles at their sixth congress attempted to produce a theoretical slogan to match that of the Bolsheviks, they sniffed with interest at Lenin's emphasis on the peasants but would not adopt his formulation *tel quel*.¹

In the all-Russian context the SDKPiL thus renounced any theoretical lead it might have achieved. The evergreen disputes with the PPS, especially about the national question, retained pride

¹ See below, pp. 565-8.

of place. The role of the Polish party within the RSDRP never attained its potential theoretical possibilities. Rosa Luxemburg herself took little or no interest in party matters except on the rare occasions when she was put up to speak or write, and Jogiches' activities were, as always, mere manoeuvres for factional ends without much theoretical elaboration or consequence. The only important aspect of policy to which the SDKPiL remained firmly committed was the continued unity of the Russian party—which had not yet again become an acute problem. But this Polish 'lapse' must not be exaggerated. The importance of Lenin's thinking was not to become apparent—and his ideas interesting—for another ten years; it is only the inflation of Leninism into dogma or anathema that tempts us to invest it with so much contemporary significance. Neither Lenin's nor Trotsky's analysis, or that of the Mensheviks, appeared to have much practical relevance to Russia in the dog-and-doldrum years before the war. There was in fact no prospect of renewed revolution in Russia; the slogans which emerged with such insistence were intended more for the effective struggle in the party than for any real leverage on Russian society. Their later application to the making of history was made possible by history itself; they might well have remained as nothing more than buried evidence of factional disputes about eventual revolutionary possibilities. But when in 1917 history unveiled the moment, no contribution from Rosa Luxemburg was available.

None the less, the Russian revolution was the central experience of her life and she turned it to brilliant account in another field. Her anxiety to return to Germany was not mere nervous instability; a search for better pastures beyond the next fence. The vague dissatisfactions with German party policy—previously felt but not fully analysed—were now to be converted into a definite doctrine by the Russian experience. First she tried to sell it to the German leadership, then to the party as a whole; finally she set up in opposition to the entire SPD establishment and plugged her lesson from her small base year in and year out to all who cared to listen. Significantly, many of her main allies were those who had shared the Russian experience, Marchlewski and the unacknowledged Radek. Clara Zetkin, devoted follower and friend, was able to substitute belief for what she could not evaluate through experience or cognition. By the time the war came Rosa Luxemburg had a fire-tested doctrine of opposition to hand round to which all

those who could not swallow the capitulation of the leadership were able to rally.

With all her gifts and efforts, Rosa Luxemburg's contribution to the revolution on its Polish home ground was not destined to leave its mark. The next step she envisaged was never to be made: the broad proletarian action leading to a democracy in which the proletariat would force both the *conditions* for its inevitable confrontation with capitalism and that confrontation itself. The next step was either a tenuous liberalism without the proletariat, or Lenin with the proletariat-peasantry combination; either an independent Poland or the Stalinist solution to the nationality problem. Neither was welcome to her—especially not in isolation, without a corresponding German upheaval. For anyone reading her Polish articles and pamphlets of 1905-1906 the feeling of utopian optimism, all the perceived reality of mass upheavals incarcerated in an arbitrary and often unreal system of beliefs, is overwhelming. The postulated open-endedness of mass action, for ever growing in size and intensity, was exaggerated. No provision was made for the necessary extra push by a disciplined and determined group of leaders, an élite, to overcome the armed resistance of existing society. The basis of mass support from a revolutionary urban proletariat was admittedly greater in Poland than in Russia, the relative land hunger and strength of the peasantry less significant; nevertheless the achievement of a successful social revolution by 'more of the same'—on which Rosa Luxemburg based her whole concept—was clearly out of the question. What was more, her solution of the national question was an extrapolation of highly abstract arguments which had been born and bred from factional squabbles in emigration; in spite of all her sophistication and persuasiveness, the attempt to apply them to a real revolutionary situation proved hopeless. Though for three months she gave herself completely to Polish work and believed profoundly in what she was doing, she herself provided perhaps the most accurate evaluation of her work—when she applied its conclusions elsewhere than in Russian Poland.

The proper place was and continued to be Germany. It was here that the experiences of the Russian revolution were to give birth to a doctrine that was viable and could be tried out in practice. Only in Germany did the social objectification of a participatory mass proletariat really exist, a class which made her social

orientation feasible. The concept of masses and leaders as different and conflicting could have meaning only in the German context. All that was needed was a 'Russian' situation in Germany, a 'Russian' will to act, and this Rosa Luxemburg now set about creating—or at least teaching people to recognize it when it existed. For what she brought back from Russia was not in the last resort analysis or knowledge, but the enormous prophylactic of revolution as a state of mind. Irrespective of policy, it was this state of mind which mattered, the moral liberation of doing rather than planning, of participating rather than teaching. Believing this beyond all need of proof or demonstration, Rosa Luxemburg's prescriptions of 1906 should not be judged too harshly in terms of their practical content. They served her as a trial run, not for a successful Russian revolution, but for Germany, for the transposition of Russian action to German circumstances. Rosa Luxemburg summed up the essence of her doctrine simply enough: 'The revolution is magnificent, and everything else is bilge [*quark*].'¹

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 44, dated 18 July 1906.

IX

THE LOST YEARS, 1906-1909

ON the way back from Finland in early September 1906, Rosa Luxemburg spent a few days in Hamburg with the publisher of her pamphlet on the mass strike. She already knew what she would find.

The people in Hamburg are, according to what they write . . . not at all satisfied; *Vorwärts* goes round the whole problem [of the mass strike] like a cat round its milk. This is of course August Bebel's instruction; he is always calling on others to be restrained, only in order to burst out like a hurricane himself. Only one never knows in which direction that particular thunderstorm will discharge.¹

Once she had arrived in Hamburg, the new atmosphere of restraint made itself apparent in a curious and significant incident. She had sent her manuscript from Kuokkala a month or so earlier so that it might be ready in time for the Mannheim congress, and now expected merely to read through the proofs. But the SPD executive had put its spoke in at the last moment; the original had to be withdrawn, the printing blocks destroyed—this was a normal precaution against police raids—and a toned-down version issued instead. The alterations were not substantial, mostly revision of certain particularly provocative phrases. The object was to avoid disturbing the new balance of relationship with the trade-union leaders. But the provincial organization of the party, who had commissioned the pamphlet—the most forceful strikes of 1905 had taken place in Hamburg—was resentful of this interference. The delay cost Rosa a few anxious days.² More important, it meant that the pamphlet could not now circulate as a radical brief for the delegates.

The surf at Mannheim from 23 to 29 September proved in the event to be merely the foam of a fire extinguisher—and most of the participants knew what to expect. 'The brief May flowering of

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 37, from Finland, dated end of August 1906. For a detailed discussion of this pamphlet, *Mass Strike, Party and Trade Unions*, see Chapter XII, pp. 496-513.

² *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, p. 389 (Introduction). *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 38, to Arthur Stadthagen, dated 20 September 1906.

the new revolutionary spirit is happily finished, and the party will again be devoting itself with all its strength to the positive exploitation and expansion of its parliamentary power', the organ of the revisionists had written with obvious relief.¹ In such an atmosphere Rosa's revolutionary enthusiasm, fresh from Russia, was painful to behold.

The first thing that struck her disagreeably was the strong aura of secrecy about the arrangements between the trade-union leaders and the party executive. No one at the congress knew their precise nature—except those who had participated in making them; even their existence was a matter only of strong surmise. But how else could one interpret the sudden extraordinary attempt on the part of the executive to claim now that the resolution at the Cologne trade-union congress early in 1905, which had declared the political mass strike unmentionable and had been criticized by the party at the time, was actually a confirmation of the party's mass-strike resolution at Jena later in the year? That resolution had seemed flat enough to Rosa at the time; now it was to be further vitiated by a monstrous reinterpretation. But mass strike apart, what was this new haggling on the quiet between trade-union and party leaders?²

Rosa's violence seemed out of all proportion to the rest of the congress. When she complained that no one seemed willing to learn from the experience of the Russian revolution, they immediately interrupted with 'Quite right, we don't'. She rounded on Karl Legien, the leader of the German trade unions: he was 'childish and had no idea of the real circumstances of revolution'. Instead, he had 'the old arthritic English conception that trade unions can only prosper through peaceful growth and development'.³ The words sounded petulant and discourteous. Next, she turned on Bebel:

I wanted to say a few words with regard to his speech, but I am not certain that I have understood it correctly, because I sat on the left, and today he spoke strictly towards the right. (Great amusement) . . . I would consider it advisable if he would clarify his position beyond any doubt in his closing remarks. As far as I understood, he meant that we can do nothing if war should come. Our friends in France would be in a pretty fix if Bebel's speech really has to be interpreted in this

¹ *SM*, 1906, Vol. X, No. 2, p. 914.

² *Protokoll* . . . 1906, p. 261. See above, pp. 311 ff., especially 316–17.

³ *Ibid.*



(a) Cesaryna Wojnarowska



(b) Adolf Warszawski (Warski)

SDKPiL Leaders



Clara Zetkin

sense . . . particularly when contrasted with their [own] resolution to veto any French intervention in Russia, [which they expressed in] that fine statement '*plutôt l'insurrection que la guerre*'.¹

Kautsky, still on the pinnacle of anti-revisionist radicalism, had himself submitted a critical resolution (No. 170) asking for closer co-operation between the party and the trade unions, and for the issue of a simple, widely distributed pamphlet about the mass strike. The resolution also emphasized the supremacy of the party over the trade unions: 'Only resolutions of a party congress are valid doctrine for the working-class movement.' He had the support of Rosa Luxemburg but was opposed by the executive; for the pamphlet in question was clearly intended to be Rosa's own. In view of Bebel's opposition, Kautsky in the end withdrew the part of the resolution concerning the pamphlet. The congress voted for the amended Kautsky resolution but also for an additional amendment put forward jointly by Bebel and Legien (No. 171) which immortalized the myth that there was no conflict between the trade-union resolution in Cologne and the party's resolution at Jena about the mass strike. Rosa's objections had failed; as so often, resolutions which began by expressing conflicting views were chopped up and compounded into a harmless amalgam which satisfied everyone except a few professional cassettes, who would not be content with thundering generalities.

Later at the congress she returned once more to the specific and most important question of the relationship between parties and trade unions.² Much play had been made by both executive and trade-union leaders with the dangers of anarchosyndicalism—that old bane of Marxist Social Democracy; in the facile echo of opposition to anarchism a ready means of euthanasia for the whole mass-strike idea could always be found. But by tying the party executive to the support of the trade unions against anyone they chose to label as anarchist, the party was really resigning its political primacy and its independent judgement.

I fear that the relationship of the trade unions to Social Democracy is developing like that of a peasant marriage contract, in which the woman says to the man: 'When we agree, your wishes will prevail, when we disagree, then my wishes will be carried out.' . . . If we kick out the anarcho-socialists from the party, as the executive has proposed,

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid., p. 315.

we shall merely set a sad precedent for always finding energy and resolution enough to set clear limits on the left, while leaving the doors wide open to the right. . . . Anarchism in our ranks is nothing else but a left reaction against the excessive demands of the right. . . . At least remain faithful to our old principle: nobody is evicted from the party for his views. . . . Since we have never kicked out anyone on the far right, we do not now have the right to evict the far left.

(Agreement and contradiction from the floor)¹

Rosa Luxemburg had time to deal only with this one example, but what was at stake was a general change of attitude on the part of the executive, and therefore of that considerable section of the party which always followed it faithfully. She sensed that the trade unions were the new factor behind this change; for the first time since 1898 she openly attacked their institutional influence, not merely the attitudes of a few leaders. This followed naturally from her preoccupation with the strike question. The decision and organization of strike movements was in the first instance a trade-union prerogative; though Rosa strenuously denied that such dependence on union decisions was justified, she none the less followed the bait right into the den where the dragon lived. For the next few years the trade unions were her special target.

It might seem as though this was merely a new symptom of the old battle against revisionism. But this was not how it appeared to Rosa Luxemburg. Trade unions were *sui generis*; they were not interested in the theoretical exposition of their attitudes and, unlike Bernstein, could not be attacked with the two-pronged pitchfork of theory and practice. The trade unions were a far more elusive and yet substantial enemy, well dug in and organized. The only way to deal with them was to impose the supremacy of the party on them from above, and later to assert the more revolutionary view of mass action from below. It was a pincer movement of short duration, for it assumed what in fact proved illusory—the willingness of the party to impose its concepts on the unions, or even, indeed, the existence of more revolutionary concepts in that party. The next few years witnessed a shift of emphasis. The party arm of the pincers withered away, while that of the revolutionary masses developed increasing blood and muscle.

For the moment the best way to get at the trade-union leadership was still by pushing the party executive as the supreme fount of all

¹ Ibid., p. 316.

authority and wisdom. In 1906 this still seemed possible, in spite of a temporary setback. But it required tact. It was no use just contrasting her Russian experiences with the new negative attitude of the German party, merely preaching the example of Russian enthusiasm against the organized conservatism in Germany. Rosa Luxemburg was sensitive enough to the atmosphere to alter her approach between her first speech and her closing remarks four days later. By that time it seemed that she was really defending the executive against the encroachments of wrong-headed and malignant robots from the trade unions.¹

A personal participant in the great events in Russia, she was naturally in great demand at local public meetings. At one meeting in Mannheim the crowd brushed aside the formal agenda with shouts of: 'Tell us about Russia.' Before this enthusiastic audience there was no need to adjust to the finer questions of internal party relations. These were the crowds, the masses who would ultimately make and unmake the party's policy. And what they wanted to hear was precisely what Rosa really wanted to talk about—the lessons of Russia.

What I have learnt from the Russian revolution is this. As soon as one believes it to be dead, it rises up again. I had intended to stay in bed today as I am not well, but I decided to appear and say a few words about the revolution, in so far as my strength allows me. My immediate predecessor called me a martyr at the end of his speech, a victim of the Russian revolution. I must begin, therefore, with a protest against this. Those who don't merely study the Russian revolution from afar, but participate in it, they will never call themselves victims or martyrs. I can assure you without exaggeration and in complete honesty that those months spent in Russia were the happiest of my life. Rather I am deeply saddened by the fact that I had to leave Russia and come back to Germany. . . . Abroad the picture created of the Russian revolution is that of an enormous blood-bath, with all the unspeakable suffering of the people without a single ray of light. That is the conception of the decadent middle classes but not of the working classes. The Russian people have suffered for hundreds of years. The suffering during the revolution is a mere nothing compared to what the Russian people had to put up with before the revolution, under so-called quiet conditions. . . . How many thousands have died of hunger, of scurvy, did anybody ask how many thousands of proletarians were killed at

¹ 27 September 1906, *Protokoll . . . 1906*, p. 316.

work, without any statistician bothering in the slightest? . . . Compared to this, the present sacrifices are very small.

Now the other side of the coin. While previously the Russian people lived on without the slightest hope of escaping their terrible misery, they now know why they are fighting and why they are suffering. . . . Today the middle classes are no longer at the head of our movement, and the proletariat has taken over the leading role. It knows full well that the introduction of Socialism overnight is not possible, that nothing other than a constitutional bourgeois state can be created. . . . But the very fact that this state will have been created by the efforts of working men's hands will give the proletariat an understanding of its own role and the benefits it must derive from it . . . it is not fighting with the illusions which still beset working classes in 1848, it is fighting for its rights within a bourgeois state, precisely in order to use these rights as weapons against the middle classes in the future.

In conclusion, Rosa drew the essential parallel between East and West.

The Russian events prove that, in line with the general situation, we in Germany must get ready for battles in which it is the masses who will have the last word. The Russian proletariat must be our example, not for parliamentary action but by its resolution and daring in putting the political aims just as high as the historical situation permits. If we are to get anything out of the Russian revolution it must not be pessimism but the highest optimism.¹

If the SPD congress would not listen to what Rosa Luxemburg had to say about the Russian revolution, at least the people did. For the first time she was appealing to the masses in Germany as a relief from the party leadership's lack of interest. As yet there was no clear issue here between masses and leaders, but all these events helped to strengthen the notion that the revolutionary potential rested in the masses and, if necessary, without the leadership. For the next eight years this view was to develop and reach its logical conclusion during the war, when *Spartakus* would exalt, and try to arouse, the membership specifically against their leaders.

Only after this festival of words came the return home to Berlin.

If Bebel had been angry over her Polish escapade, he was so no longer. He offered her a moderate sum of money to set her on her feet again, since her limited resources had all but disappeared

¹ *Redner der Revolution*, Vol. XI, *Rosa Luxemburg*, Berlin 1928, pp. 26-30. The speech was also reported in *Vorwärts*, 29 September 1906.

during her activities in Poland and the subsequent efforts to get her out of jail. But Rosa refused all financial help. She felt she had already accepted too much for her own independence. 'I will not be kept by the executive.'¹ Besides, she had seen the attitude of the executive at Mannheim and was unhappy about it; all the more important to avoid being under any political obligation. Bebel never quite forgave her for her refusal; their relationship became more mistrustful. He was further offended at an incident that took place early in 1907. Rosa and Clara Zetkin had been for a walk on Saturday morning and were to meet Bebel for lunch at the Kautskys' house. They had lost count of the time and arrived late; when Bebel said jokingly that he had feared they were lost, Rosa turned on him with a sour half-smile and said: 'Yes, you can write our epitaph: "Here lie the last two men of German Social Democracy".'² Bebel had always had a sneaking admiration for Rosa Luxemburg, but these gadfly attitudes destroyed his small fund of benevolence and made the political fracas a few years later all the more credible. Henceforth Bebel still turned his charm on Rosa from time to time, but always for precise political purposes—and Rosa knew it full well. 'Sugar sweet', she wrote contemptuously in May 1911. Whatever the political differences, both Bebel and Kautsky found it personally much easier to fall out with Rosa Luxemburg than with Eduard Bernstein. For, in spite of all the emphasis on everyone's theoretical positions, personal friendship was a politically negotiable commodity in the Second International—everyone was disclaiming it far too loudly!

Rosa had no precise plans for the future, but there was the beloved flat in Cranachstrasse—the red and the green rooms, the books—and there were the Kautskys, who had so valiantly acted as a communication base during her absence. What a welcome they must have given her, safely returned from the well-reported, but personally quite unimaginable dreadfulness of revolutionary Russia! This should have been the high point of the three-cornered

¹ This incident was reported by Luise Kautsky to Werner Blumenberg at IISH Amsterdam. I have gratefully to acknowledge my thanks to Herr Blumenberg for much background information about Rosa Luxemburg and for illuminating a number of specific incidents—he had the opportunity of speaking repeatedly and at length to Luise Kautsky during the Second World War in Amsterdam. Further references to this source will be listed as 'Blumenberg'.

² This remark has been variously quoted as being made at some official function. In fact, the information comes from Luise Kautsky via Blumenberg. Like so many of Rosa's epigrams, it became something of a saying in the SPD.

friendship and for some months it was, before Rosa's awful disillusion began to set in with the SPD in general and K.K.—as he was known—in particular. But for the moment she again frequented the Kautsky home and took part in the Sunday sessions when a walk through the fields with Luise Kautsky or Clara Zetkin before lunch would be followed by long discussions with visiting Socialists from all over the world. It was at this time that she met Trotsky, though the meeting did not lead to friendship; Rosa never had a good word to say for or about him. Their situations at the time were somewhat similar, their character and political thinking too individualistic for any chance of intellectual collaboration.¹ More important was the fact that Rosa much preferred Lenin, with whose faction the SDKPiL was closely collaborating at this time.

At once Rosa returned to her work on *Neue Zeit*; her sharp and lively pen again analysed important events in the SPD calendar through the twin sights of principle and tactic—with special emphasis on the lessons of recent events in Russia. Even the pedestrian affairs of the Printers' Union, considered the most arthritic and least Socialist of all the 'free' unions, were examined under the hot blowlamp of Russian experience—and were found to be melting into Socialism under the eastern heat.²

At last in November 1906 came the long-awaited holiday in the beloved south with Luise Kautsky; there was all too little time before the coming trial at Weimar in December for her speech at the Jena congress the year before—a whole revolution away. The possibility of this prosecution had dogged Rosa throughout her stay in Warsaw and Finland. Also the *Reichstag* elections for 1907 were in the offing, with an intense bout of campaigning due at the end of December and in the first weeks of the new year. A change and a rest in the sun were essential—the two ladies alone: all the appurtenances—Karl, the children, Granny—were left behind. Perhaps for the last time in her life Rosa let herself go like a child. 'Forgive that crazy Rosa if the whole thing is illegible', Luise wrote at the head of a postcard to her eldest son which Rosa had all but ruined with her surrealist interstices between the lines.³

¹ The similarity of *character* is stressed, indeed overstressed, by Deutscher in *The Prophet Armed*, p. 183.

² 'Die zwei Methoden der Gewerkschaftspolitik', *NZ*, 1906/1907, Vol. I, pp. 134–7. This article appeared on 24 October, a month after Rosa's return.

³ Text and partial facsimile in *Briefe an Freunde*, pp. 198–201, dated 5 December 1906.

The pale Indian summer of weather and mood did not last long, either personally or politically. In mid-December Rosa took the train back north over the Brenner with a heavy heart, to stand her trial at Weimar, the capital of Thuringia. The Jena speech earned her two months, due to begin the following summer. Meantime there was a lot of work to be done. The government of von Bülow dissolved the *Reichstag* and went to the country on a colonial and nationalist issue which later became known—especially among Social Democrats—as the ‘Hottentot elections’. It was a direct, specific attack on the SPD as the permanent internal enemy of Germany’s greatness, linked for the occasion with the fortuitous enemy of the moment, the Catholic Centre, which of late had been more than usually critical of the colonial policy of the government.¹ The appeal to nationalist sentiment, coupled with skilful mass agitation copied from the Social Democrats themselves, succeeded beyond all expectations. The SPD won only forty-three *Reichstag* seats instead of the previous eighty-one; all the other parties combined against it.² This electoral defeat was to preoccupy the SPD leadership morbidly for the next seven years, as a measure of its apparent image among the electorate; the hitherto progressive successes at each election had been taken for granted as part of the ‘inevitability’ of Socialism. Now the revolution would have to wait, at least until the lost electoral ground had been recovered; ‘easy does it’, especially on revolutionary phraseology, now became the official line.

Rosa had been as active as ever in the election campaign, speaking in Berlin and in the provinces. She was now one of the star speakers of the SPD, with an unrivalled grasp of social conditions which she was able to translate into clear and striking phrases for popular consumption; moreover she, unlike anyone else in Germany, could speak of revolution at first hand. For the purposes of such an election, a complete truce was declared among factions in the party; revisionists and radicals fell over each other’s feet and for a short while the issue simply became Social Democracy against the entire existing régime and all other political parties. This was particularly true at this election, where the government was in effect asking for a vote of confidence for its imperial policy. Henceforward imperialism played a major part in Socialist propaganda,

¹ Prince Bernhard von Bülow, *Imperial Germany*, New York 1914, pp. 208-47.

² Schorske, *German Social Democracy*, pp. 60-61.

and continued to do so until the First World War, while one analysis after the other of the new phenomenon poured from Socialist pens. Karl Liebknecht had already made his name by writing on this issue and serving eighteen months—a stiff sentence in those days—for his inflammatory pamphlet.¹ And various people in the party were already preoccupied with the search for a special tactic against imperialism and its necessary offspring, militarism and war.

But the internal party truce did not survive electoral defeat, and for many months to come radicals and revisionists belaboured each other with their respective analyses of the failure. The party executive, though officially neutral and merely distressed by the internal discord, had subtly moved against the radical tactic even before the Mannheim congress. The danger of 'Russian' disorder and fear for the precious, well-built organization of party and trade unions put the dampers on more firmly. Bebel himself, whose attitude had already shocked Rosa Luxemburg at Mannheim—the more so for his having been absent during the early months of 1906 when the change had taken place—now shed almost all his usual equivocation. Rosa was not among those who, like Liebknecht and—unexpectedly—Kurt Eisner, concentrated their fire on imperialism and German militarism, but she still played an important part in defending the radical case in general. She too had her particular angle at this moment—the mass strike as a means of broadening popular support for Socialist policies and keeping Social Democracy on the move. The tendency to run pet hobby-horses was a typical sign of defeat and of radical disunity; the party air was thick with special pleading. It was left to Kautsky to produce a broad and subtle analysis of the general failure. The *petit-bourgeois* floating voter who had hitherto supported the SPD at elections as a radical democratic party had now deserted it; but he saw this as a consequence of economic trends, as a reaction to the fear of growing Social Democracy—a sharpening of the final line-up of classes—not as a hurricane of straight nationalistic emotion which could temporarily blot out the dialectic process in any society: such a simple explanation was too crude for the fine-toothed Marxist equipment of his mind.²

Rosa Luxemburg did not entirely agree, but she reserved her

¹ Karl Liebknecht, *Militarismus und Antimilitarismus unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der internationalen Jugendbewegung*, Berlin, n.d.; for the trial, Richard Calwer, 'Der Hochverratsprozess Liebknechts', *SM*, Vol. XI, No. 2. p. 956.

² *NZ*, 1907/1908, Vol. I, pp. 590–5.

own comments for her close friends—for they went well beyond her public doubts about the party's tactics. 'German party life is nothing but a bad dream, or rather a dreamless leaden sleep', she wrote impressionistically on 20 March 1907, and to Clara Zetkin she wrote at greater tactical length:

Since my return from Russia I feel rather isolated . . . I feel the pettiness and the hesitancy of our party régime more clearly and more painfully than ever before. However, I can't get so excited about the situation as you do, because I see with depressing clarity that neither things nor people can be changed—until the whole situation has changed, and even then we shall just have to reckon with inevitable resistance if we want to lead the masses on. I have come to that conclusion after mature reflection. The plain truth is that August [Bebel], and still more so the others, have completely pledged themselves to parliament and parliamentarianism, and whenever anything happens which transcends the limits of parliamentary action they are hopeless—no, worse than hopeless, because they then do their utmost to force the movement back into parliamentary channels, and they will furiously defame as 'an enemy of the people' anyone who dares to venture beyond their own limits. I feel that those of the masses who are organized in the party are tired of parliamentarianism, and would welcome a new line in party tactics, but the party leaders and still more the upper stratum of opportunist editors, deputies, and trade union leaders are like an incubus. We must protest vigorously against this general stagnation, but it is quite clear that in doing so we shall find ourselves against the opportunists as well as the party leaders and August. As long as it was a question of defending themselves against Bernstein and his friends, August & Co. were glad of our assistance, because they were shaking in their shoes. But when it is a question of launching an offensive against opportunism then August and the rest are with Ede [Bernstein], Vollmar, and David against us. That's how I see matters, but the chief thing is to keep your chin up and not get too excited about it. Our job will take years.¹

Here was the left-wing tactic in embryo for the next seven years.² Why did Rosa, never given to reticence or fear of publicity, not come out with all this in public, as she did in 1910? Possibly she thought the reaction against the revolutionary mood of 1905 temporary. Kautsky and she were still friends and allies; maybe he

¹ *Illustrierte Geschichte der deutschen Revolution*, Berlin 1929, p. 62. The letter must be dated the beginning of 1907. Extracts from the letter are quoted by Frölich, pp. 148-9. Like most other letters from Rosa Luxemburg to Clara Zetkin, the original is in IML (M).

² With one important difference—cf. letter to Mehring, 1912, below, pp. 464-5.

advised her against it and she deferred to him yet again. In any case she was now to become curiously remote from German affairs for three years. What she had to say did not fit at all into the current notions of tactics in the party; the leadership was more concerned with the re-establishment of a position believed to have been weakened at the elections than with any attempt to move into sharper conflict with society. To protest one needs *some* echo, either from friends or at least from the imagined support of anonymous masses 'outside', as Karl Liebknecht had in 1916, and Rosa herself in the three years immediately preceding the outbreak of the war.

Almost the only public appearance which Rosa Luxemburg made in Germany during these months after the elections was at the funeral of Ignaz Auer, the party secretary, who had died on 10 April 1907. Speeches were made by Bebel representing the German party, Victor Adler for the Austrian, and representatives of various other countries. Rosa was present as the representative of the Russian Social Democrats, not in any German capacity; on their behalf she made a dignified and rather non-political speech befitting a fraternal delegate.¹

But at least the partnership with Kautsky in *Neue Zeit* was still flourishing. The two editors took themselves off to Lake Geneva at Easter 1907 for a working holiday to hammer out the policy of the paper in the latest situation and also to give Rosa a further chance to rest and recover her health.² As it turned out, this trip with Kautsky was the start of Rosa's disillusionment with the personality of her friend. It was the first time they had been alone together for any length of time and she found him 'heavy, dull, unimaginative, ponderous'. In the daily discussions his ideas appeared 'cold, pedantic, doctrinaire'. Worst of all, he was old—a great intellectual sin: 'I had no notion that [Kautsky] already requires so much rest, I took him to be much younger.' Rosa's ideal routine consisted of hard concentrated work followed by a brisk walk, but it was only with great difficulty that Kautsky could be persuaded to join her and she soon gave up trying. Though the disillusion is clear from letters written at the time, she only realized afterwards that this was in fact the beginning of the long decline in their relationship.

She was particularly busy with Polish affairs and continued to be for the next four years; this also helped to make her participation

¹ *Vorwärts*, 16 April 1907.

² *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 137.

in German affairs sporadic. But in politics—particularly left-wing politics—silence often means regression. Where she had stood at the centre of things before her departure for Warsaw, she now moved to the fringe. Partly as a consequence, her barnstorming attempt to re-emerge on to the main policy-forming stage of the SPD in 1910 did not quite succeed as she had hoped. For during her years of disengagement a change was taking place in the party leadership, a change of attitudes, of people, and even of institutions. Rosa never realized it until the head-on conflict with Kautsky in 1910. The new opposition was 'official', tame and polite. It preferred to act behind the scenes, 'politically' (which meant diplomatically)—the war-time centre in the making. The building of a real opposition had to begin entirely from scratch.¹

Now that the witch-hunting atmosphere of the revisionist controversy had petered out, the whole tone of the discussion—principles allied to tactics—had altered as well; the tacticians pure and simple were taking over the leadership of the SPD. There were no great issues. The trade-union leaders exercised a quiet but constant pull on the executive, and this was much less easily singled out for attack than the public declarations of a Bernstein or a Max Schippel. Most of the time, the trade-union attitude to controversy was a shrug of the shoulders, *lasst schwätzen* (let them drivel), while they got on with their work.² Noske made his first prominent appearance at the 1907 congress at Essen as the party spokesman on national defence and the army—a direct result of the executive's wish to keep that party in tune with the more nationalistic mood shown by the electorate.³ As usual, the executive's attitude was not of course called 'new'; solid quotations were available to show a tradition of patriotism in the SPD—but then, if one wished to dig for them, quotations were available for almost any attitude. In this atmosphere Rosa Luxemburg, fresh from Russia, was like a fish out of water—and until 1910 there was no specific item on which she could fasten her combative teeth.

Rosa 'sat out' her jail sentence of two months in June and July 1907. Unlike the time so proudly and impatiently served in 1904,

¹ See below, pp. 458-67.

² *Protokoll . . . 1913*, p. 295, speech by Gustav Bauer, deputy chairman of the Trade Union Commission. Are not all unions the same?

³ *Protokoll . . . 1907*, pp. 230 ff. Also Gustav Noske, *Erlebtes aus Aufstieg und Niedergang einer Demokratie*, Offenbach/Main 1947, p. 28. For Noske's important role after the war, see below, pp. 768-81.

she now was depressed and uncommunicative. There were no bristling, scintillating letters—only silence. She even failed to obtain a mandate to the 1907 SPD congress, for the first time since 1898 (though as the guest of the government she had missed the 1904 congress). The affairs of the Polish and Russian parties, and the International, predominated. From prison she went almost directly to the International congress at Stuttgart on 18 August 1907. There was thus hardly any time for the constituency work needed for a mandate. In any case, since the setback in the *Reichstag* elections, it was becoming uphill work for unattached radicals to get constituency support, unless they were firmly anchored to a local party organization, like Clara Zetkin in Stuttgart.

But political reasons alone cannot account for Rosa Luxemburg's silence and withdrawal. Adversity never depressed her; on the contrary, it usually stimulated the saliva of political controversy.

At the beginning of 1907 a major upheaval took place in her private affairs, perhaps the most important in her whole life. Her relationship with Leo Jogiches underwent a complete change and with it her entire outlook on life and people.

It is not easy to reconstruct the story correctly. Rosa herself was extremely reticent about her private life and not even her most intimate friends knew just how attached she had been personally to Jogiches or the extent to which the end of their intimate relationship affected her. Luise Kautsky partly guessed what was going on, but since she did not know the whole story, she wrongly guessed both the causes and the effects on her friend. Apart from her, nobody knew anything and Rosa Luxemburg's biographers either make no mention of this story or gloss over it with a few general phrases. Rosa herself discussed the matter with only one person with whom she was very intimate from 1907 to 1912.¹

¹ Thus Clara Zetkin, in her laudatory memorials after Rosa Luxemburg's death, drowns the remarkable combination of personal and political collaboration between Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches in general phrases: 'He was always her wakeful conscience in matters theoretical as well as practical' (Introduction to *Juniusbroschüre*, 2nd ed. 1920). Henriette Roland-Holst surveys the evidence about their relationship provided by Clara Zetkin and others after Rosa's death and comes to the entirely wrong conclusion that 'at the beginning Rosa Luxemburg may have looked up to Leo Jogiches . . . but as the younger girl grew into a woman who ordered her own life with a firm hand . . . the relationship between these two people, originally that of master and pupil, greatly altered its character'. It is also quite wrong to dismiss the intimacy of the relationship as an intellectual partnership 'complicated by an erotic element'. Karl Kautsky in his own

When Rosa Luxemburg left Warsaw for Finland after her release in July 1906 her relationship with Jogiches was intact. As far as she knew he was still in prison and due to be tried; she was extremely anxious about him and her correspondence with Polish friends hints at her anxiety on Jogiches' behalf. In February 1907 Jogiches escaped and lived in hiding for a short while in Warsaw, and then in Cracow, before travelling through Germany in April on the way to London for the Russian party congress in May of that year. During this time he seems to have been helped and looked after by a woman comrade in the Polish party, possibly called Izolska (Irena Szer-Siemkowska). The precise nature of this relationship is not known, though apparently there are some letters in Moscow from her to Jogiches which indicate that, though brief, it was close.¹ It is also not clear how all this came to Rosa Luxemburg's knowledge. The time interval between Jogiches' escape and his appearance in the West was no more than six to eight weeks; a highly conspiratorial person, it is hardly likely that his relationship with Izolska—if indeed it was she—would have been notorious. Most probably he himself wrote to Rosa Luxemburg

memorial gets nearer the truth when he emphasizes Rosa's intellectual attachment to Jogiches, and the fact that she 'continued to submit to his authority right up to the end of her life' (*Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht und Leo Jogiches. Ihre Bedeutung für die Sozialdemokratie*, Berlin 1921). Certainly Henriette Roland-Holst herself had no notion of the real relationship between them; she is inclined to belittle the importance of Leo Jogiches as deliberate self-inflation on his part which successfully deceived his contemporaries (Roland-Holst, pp. 20-24). There is no evidence that Paul Frölich, who could have got closer to the real truth than any of her biographers, succeeded in doing so; at the same time the tradition of Communist biographers necessarily discounts the personal element as much as possible.

Luise Kautsky herself was aware of the deep disturbance in Rosa's life. Her usual delicacy prevented her from writing about it, but she told Werner Blumenberg what she believed to be the true story, namely that Jogiches' conspiratorial attitudes caused him to draw the conclusion after their arrest in Warsaw that living together was dangerous for the cause of the Polish party and that they must split up in future. To this decision she ascribed Rosa's great emotional disturbance in 1907 and 1908 and her tendency to avoid any close friendship with a man from that time onwards. Luise Kautsky seems to have been aware that Rosa acquired a revolver about this time which she put down to possible suicidal tendencies. I owe this information to Blumenberg.

¹ According to my information, these letters are probably in IML(M). The details and dates of Jogiches' escape are in J. Krasny, *Tyszka*, Moscow 1925, p. 19—a very brief but the only reliable account. Krasny (a pseudonym, real name Józef Rotstadt) was himself a colleague of Jogiches and for a short time after 1916 a member of the SDKPiL Central Committee and a leading personality in the early Polish Communist Party. Frölich's dates are unreliable here.

about it from Cracow, but since none of the letters received by her survives there is no means of confirmation.

Rosa Luxemburg at once broke off all personal relations. There is a hint of it in a letter to Luise Kautsky, written while she was on her working holiday with Karl Kautsky in Geneva round about Easter, in which she specially asks Luise not to 'ask Leo about the keys; moreover do not mention me and say nothing to him about me (my arrival, etc.), otherwise you may unwittingly get me into a mess'.¹ She refused to meet Leo Jogiches or to communicate with him; as a man he was dead for her—though not of course as a party leader. The distinction was clear enough to Rosa, but incomprehensible and unacceptable to Leo Jogiches. They did not meet again until the Russian party congress in mid-May, to which they travelled separately. The congress, with its highflown discussions and conspiratorial asides luridly revealing the hidden menace of the meetings between Leo Jogiches and Rosa Luxemburg, was like one of those unexpected emotional precipitations in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*. In addition to everything else, one of Rosa Luxemburg's brothers who lived in England invited them both to a slap-up dinner during the congress. As Jogiches walked in with her past the potted plants in the entrance to face the smiles and all the food laid out on little tables, he whispered: 'As soon as this dinner is over I shall kill you'—'and this terrible moment was instantly sponged away with laughter and handshakes all round, though not for me'.² In the course of this battle of two strong wills, all of which took place *sotto voce* in the swirling atmosphere of a Russian party congress, Rosa succeeded in making three brilliant speeches about the Russian revolution and putting forward the analysis of the SDKPiL.³

Whatever Leo Jogiches may have done himself after his escape when en route to Siberia, he was determined not to let Rosa go. Love is an anodyne word; we owe it to two such sharply defined characters to be more specific in our judgement of their relationship. In Jogiches' case—and we have to rely largely on Rosa Luxemburg's interpretation of his motives—jealousy and possessiveness

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 138. Luise Kautsky deliberately made little of this; in a footnote she adds that Rosa Luxemburg had 'a personal difference at that time' with Leo Jogiches (*ibid.*, n. 4)—one of Luise Kautsky's absurdly tactful understatements.

² Letter to Konstantin Zetkin, May 1907.

³ For details of these speeches, see below, Chapter XIII, pp. 552 ff.

played a large part. Rosa was 'his' and he repeated to her again and again that she could never now be 'free' of him—and indeed she never was, though he later tightened the hold of party discipline more and more as her personal life moved increasingly beyond his horizon. Rosa knew well that she was being punished, and accepted things for that very reason. It is not too fanciful to attribute to his highly personal struggle some of the obstinacy and arbitrariness with which Jogiches later drove an important section of the SDKPiL into secession.

On her side the chief factor was obviously pride. All her life Rosa instantly ruptured any relationship which she felt had been compromised or taken too much for granted. Several times in the next few years she would do so again. In this respect her moral standards were absolute. She had a passion for clarity in personal as well as political relationships: 'I want you to see me as clearly as I can see you', she wrote—knowing full well that clarity is blinding, and the most destructive element of all in human relations.

Thus the end of what to all intents and purposes had been her marriage was instantaneous. By one of those coincidences which are normally a novelist's stock-in-trade, a young friend was sitting in Rosa's flat in the Cranachstrasse at the time she heard the brutal news from Jogiches, and she instantly rebounded head over heels into love with him. This was none other than the 22-year-old son of her close friend and colleague, Clara Zetkin. He was full of admiration and already extremely attached to her; as so often, her own unhappiness turned affection into passion. By the end of April they were lovers—a relationship that Rosa quite correctly described as straight out of the pages of Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* and from which she derived the enormous satisfaction of being lover, mentor, and friend. Perhaps it was not entirely a coincidence. Rosa Luxemburg was one of those people who was able to keep a certain unbridgeable distance from all her friends, political and personal, only because she always had at least one total intimate but one only—a symmetry that is more common in the lives of people with temperament than is usually realized. Passion is curiously exclusive and the need for it irresistible, while promiscuity is passionless—a mere collector's passion. If it had not been so Rosa, who had temperament enough for ten, would possibly have indulged in the generalized and partial confidences which most people deal out indiscriminately and for which they continually suffer the

boomerangs of betrayed confidence.¹ When her relationship with Konstantin Zetkin came to an end (and the correspondence went on until 1916, outliving the relationship which had brought it into being) the role of intimate confidante, before whom no defences were needed, was transferred to Hans Diefenbach, hitherto no more than a faithful, sometimes slightly ridiculous attendant, 'a very perfect gentle knight'. And after Diefenbach's death in 1917 the vacant role had to be transferred once more, to Luise Kautsky. After so many years of companionship, half truths and silences, she at last received the totality of Rosa's friendship. For the first time Luise was really taken by the hand and conducted into the midst of Rosa's most private thoughts and loves: 'Leo . . . doesn't know how one loves, but we two know, don't we Luise?'² Even Mimi, Rosa's famous cat, sometimes had to fulfil this role. Would it be too imaginative to suggest the need for a familiar without in any way wishing to make Rosa Luxemburg into a witch?

Jogiches sensed that he had strong cause to be jealous. He still had the keys to the flat that he had once shared with Rosa, and apparently for reasons of political convenience in their work insisted on retaining them. He was able to call at any time during the day and night—and exercised the discretion to the full. He captured one of her letters to Konstantin Zetkin—unaddressed—and the threat to kill her now became a double threat to kill them both. For the next two years he would dash after her during her journeys abroad and in Germany in order, as she thought, to surprise her with her lover. Rosa's purchase of a revolver which Luise Kautsky mentioned was no more than self-protection. Balanced on this razor edge, the situation continued more or less unchanged for the next eighteen months.³

¹ See *Briefe an Freunde*, pp. 77–78. This letter to Hans Diefenbach provided a comment on her relationship with Konstantin Zetkin and his mother though she never mentioned either of them by name. It is not clear exactly to what incident Rosa was referring in the letter but one suspects that at a time of great personal and political stress Clara Zetkin was imposing unquestioning obedience and subordination on her—according to Rosa—excessively sensitive son. This offended Rosa's sense of emotional autonomy.

'My friends must keep their accounts clean and in order; not only in their public but also in their most private lives. To thunder magnificently in public about the "freedom of the individual" and in private to enslave a human being out of mad passion—this I can neither understand nor pardon . . . and all this has nothing to do with temperament. You know that I have temperament enough to set a whole prairie on fire and yet every other human being's desire for peace is sacrosanct to me. . . .'

² *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 191, dated 26 January 1917.

³ Since so much happened in so short a time, it is perhaps desirable to em-



(a) Feliks Dzierżyński



(b) Ignacy Daszyński



(c) Marcin Kasprzak



(d) Jakub Hanecki (Firstenberg)
probably before or during the 1905
revolution

SDKPiL Leaders and Opponents



(a) Congress of Socialist International, Zürich, July 1893

Russian delegation with friends: Viktor Adler lying third from left; Plekhanov, hatless, in left centre, second row



(b) Congress of Socialist International, Amsterdam, 22 August 1904

Rosa Luxemburg at the back on the right, wearing wide-brimmed hat; Clara Zetkin behind man in straw hat, left; the Japanese Socialist Katayama in homburg and dark suit, left centre; Von Kol in waistcoat with his back turned

Off-duty at two International Congresses

In the autumn of 1908 Rosa wrote that the situation with Leo was still beyond a joke. 'The man is emotionally a wreck, he is abnormal and lives all the time with only one fixed idea in his mind—to kill me.'¹

In these circumstances Rosa struggled hard to break off all but the most essential party contact with Leo Jogiches and to liberate herself from his incessant demands. 'I am only I once more since I have become free of Leo. . . . ' To achieve this liberation it was necessary to come to a satisfactory arrangement about the flat and to ensure that his visits would take place only by arrangement. 'I cannot support this constant shoulder rubbing', she informed him in September 1908; and though from 1907 onwards her letters are impersonal—wherever possible in the passive or third person without address or salutation—some satisfactory *modus vivendi* was achieved. Though undiminished, the Polish party work became even more intellectual; indeed, Rosa was busier writing for the Polish party between 1907 and 1910 than on German matters. It was a remarkable achievement, as much due to Rosa's party loyalty as to the tremendous prestige and position which Jogiches achieved in the SDKPiL in these years.² However much she disliked him personally, she never lost her judgement or her respect for his talents. In July 1909 she wrote to encourage someone who had despaired of his ability to express himself on paper:

Leo for example is totally incapable of writing in spite of his extraordinary talent and intellectual sharpness; as soon as he tries to put his thoughts down in writing he becomes paralysed. This was once the curse of his existence . . . especially since he had to leave the practical work and organization in Russia [on his departure from Vilna in 1890]. He felt completely rootless, vegetated in constant bitterness, finally even lost the capacity for reading since it seemed anyhow pointless to do so. . . . Then came the revolution and quite suddenly he not only achieved the position of leader of the Polish movement, but even in the Russian;

phasize the dates once more. The cataclysmic realignment of relationships must have taken place in the second half of April 1907 after Rosa's return from Switzerland with Karl Kautsky. Jogiches passed through Berlin while Rosa was on Lake Geneva at or about Easter. It is just possible that they met briefly or were at least in touch during this period. At any rate Jogiches was using the flat during Rosa's absence and had the opportunity of informing himself about her activities. They did not travel to London together; Jogiches probably preceded her by several days, but certainly they met several times in London during the Russian congress.

¹ I do not doubt that this was something of an exaggeration, though equally it will not have been altogether invented.

² See below, Chapter XIII.

in addition the role of leading editor of the party fell into his lap. As before, he doesn't himself write a single line but he is none the less the very soul of our party publications.

Later, when the war came, their relationship became warmer once more. The experiences shared and the long period of co-operation proved a more durable link. As far as the great bulk of party comrades in the Polish and German parties were concerned—it must be remembered that only the leaders of both parties knew that there had ever been a personal relationship between Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches in the first place—the two names continued to be spoken in unison. During the war Jogiches did his best to look after Rosa Luxemburg during her long spell in prison, and their co-operation during the few remaining months of their lives was complete. Thus the story of Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches can with all justification be called one of the great and tragic love stories of Socialism. Neither Rosa nor Jogiches had that temperament for relatively stable domesticity which existed in the household of Marx or Lenin.¹

The break with Jogiches affected all Rosa's relationships. Indeed, it is a watershed in her whole approach to people. She had always been highly critical, but now it became even more difficult to gain her friendship without reservations: 'I am determined to bring even more severity, clarity, and reserve into my life', she wrote in 1908. The immediate effect was to believe nothing of anyone (*'niemandem nichts'*). This scepticism was as much political as personal. Yet, curiously enough, with the halo of the returned revolutionary over her head, she was much in personal demand. Parvus almost besieged her after his own escape from Russia: 'He comes

¹ I have discussed the whole question of the relationship of Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches in these years with Polish historians who have worked on the history of the SDKPiL. They are inclined to minimize the importance of these personal upheavals. They are unable to reconcile Jogiches' undoubted ability and achievements during these years with such blind and self-destructive jealousy. They point to the unlikelihood—if my interpretation is correct—of Rosa's willingness under such circumstances to continue working closely on Polish affairs. I offer their explanation here without comment but must maintain my own interpretation, since I see no difficulty in reconciling the one with the other. Nor can I see that Jogiches' achievement is in any way reduced by the fact that he may personally have been a man of enormously possessive jealousy as well as something of a sadist. Apart from his relationship with Rosa Luxemburg, both these qualities seem to me in evidence in his leadership of the SDKPiL, which contributed substantially to the otherwise inexplicable split in the movement in 1911 (see below, pp. 570 ff, 574 ff.). One of the things Stalin did not change in party historiography was the consensus that all leaders have peaceful and happy private lives.

as often as my changeable mood permits'—perhaps too often, for he becomes so 'fiery that I get scared'. But Rosa did develop a soft spot for him and an increasing regard for his intellect. At the end of 1906, as a Menshevist relic, he had still been a 'windbag'; in 1910 she praised his latest book, 'although I am beginning to think that the man is mad'—which with Rosa was an admission of temperament and by no means uncomplimentary.¹

Apart from Parvus, there was a regular and faithful group of men offering flowers, tickets to the opera, and rides in that new-fangled invention, the motor-car. Gerlach, Kurt Rosenfeld—like Parvus, a friend who had with delicate force to be prevented from turning into a suitor—and of course Hans Diefenbach. In the emotional upheaval of her private life at the time, the latter's quiet and even temperament sometimes grated on her: 'It has long been clear to me that Hans [Diefenbach]'s intelligence has very distinct limits and his pale face and perpetual pessimism is capable of diminishing even the sunniest day in the country.' Diefenbach persevered—whether oblivious of his mixed reception or in spite of it—and earned his reward during the war.² Then there was Faisst, 'the master', pianist and special interpreter of Hugo Wolf, who first introduced Rosa Luxemburg to this most esteemed of composers. Once again surface appearances deceive, for the apparently respected and admired musician was in fact a grotesque clown of a man who could not keep an appointment without a hailstorm of contradictory telegrams and who, as often as not, arrived at the theatre late as well as drunk so that Rosa felt embarrassed before the rest of the audience.

The point about them was that in one way or another they were all interesting. They made Rosa laugh or weep; if they bored her she soon ceased to be available; and yet they altered nothing of her

¹ Parvus, *Der Staat, die Industrie und der Sozialismus*, Berlin 1910. When he left for his fateful journey to the East she wrote regretfully, 'Parvus is off for three months to the "Orient" (he calls Belgrade and Sofia the "Orient"). I cannot imagine what he will do there but presume he feels the need to get some fresh air.' This affection, coupled with political admiration, outlasted Parvus's own gradual change of attitude. Even when she attacked him during the war in the *Spartakus* letters for his support of the German war effort, she never dealt with him as savagely as with opponents whose political position was far closer to her own. (See below, pp. 633-4.)

² According to Luise Kautsky and Blumenberg, Rosa's closer circle of friends believed that after the war she would marry Diefenbach. I have found not a scrap of positive evidence to support this; it may have been mere wishful thinking on the part of her friends—most people like the lives of their friends laid out in simple geometry.

basic loneliness, compounded from the convolutions of her most intimate private life, the political isolation, and her concentrated work for the party school. Every now and then she wished them all to the devil, only to open her doors once more a week or two later.

She also saw her family intermittently. One of her brothers met her in London in 1907 and another—her favourite—in Italy two years later. The elder sister, severely arthritic, spent some weeks with Rosa at Kolberg on the Baltic. Seized by sudden remorse, Rosa was determined to make her sister's stay outstandingly pleasant and, since she was almost immobile, accompanied her everywhere. The long break before the revolution was now made good. Her family in general and this sister in particular never did manage to understand fully what Rosa's political convictions were or what her party work was about—but they respected both.

[My sister] knows very little about scientific socialism but in her good nature complains bitterly about my brothers who are cowards and have given up all faith in the revolution. She at least believes in it as firmly as I do. At the same time she is foolish enough . . . to want to take the current number of *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny* which is lying on my table with her to Warsaw in her pocket and raised her eyebrows in disbelief when I refused.

In the midst of her stay in 'that hole' Kolberg, surrounded by her sister's buzz about her health, and with the lukewarm water of the Baltic lapping at her feet, Rosa wrote the complicated and polemical articles on the national question for the Polish review which represented the quintessence of her thoughts on this subject. No one but Rosa Luxemburg could have produced a highly complicated and theoretical article in such funny-postcard surroundings.¹

The political discomfort of Germany since her return was matched—indeed partly inspired—by a wave of irritation with all things German, one of a series which had kept breaking into Rosa's consciousness since 1898. It seems that she could hardly go abroad without feeling a sense of anticlimax on her return, and the longer she was away the stronger it was. The enthusiasm for Russia was not primary but derived, a dialectical contrast and not some sort of

¹ See below, p. 568; also Appendix 2, pp. 848 ff. For a period, Rosa's niece Jenny from England (the daughter of the brother who had emigrated to England a few years earlier) spent some time in Berlin and was a frequent visitor to Rosa's home. Rosa reports the engagement of this niece in 1912 to a 'nice young man' but without name. It may therefore well be that the last descendants of the Luxemburg family are living somewhere in England. (See above, Chapter II, pp. 50–52.)

mystical experience as German and Russian critics (Ryazanov, for example) believed. There was some excuse for this view, though. She encouraged her friends to learn Russian, 'which will soon be the language of the future'. To Konstantin Zetkin she wrote repeatedly that he should not take the German situation too seriously; since he was not himself German (he was Russian on his father's side) he could never be contaminated by the political dullness of the Reich. At the end of 1910 she had a chance discussion about Tolstoy with Karl Korn, a Socialist intellectual and critic; the latter's pedantic insistence that 'Tolstoy was not 'art' roused her to tremendous fury: 'There he stands in the street like a pot-bellied public lavatory [*pissrotunde*]. . . . In any Siberian village you care to name there is more humanity than in the whole of German Social Democracy.'¹ A longing to live somewhere else seized her once more. It was not possible, of course, in spite of—or because of—the unsatisfactory state of the German party; at least not until 'all accounts were settled'—a state of affairs as distant as judgement day. The only means of overcoming her depression was to 'throw myself into the thick of the fight and to drug my suffering heart with a real political set-to'. These words were written in the summer of 1910; the mass-strike agitation, quite apart from its effects on German Social Democracy, had its own stimulating and prophylactic effect on Rosa herself, and she was determined never again to stand outside political controversy.

Did she really enjoy the practical work of agitation and public speaking? Her judgement of the success of any public meeting was often as formal as her view of the 'masses'. The enthusiasm of the audience, the feeling of response, pleased and stimulated her, but all too frequently she translated these reactions into concrete political evidence to justify her policy. At the same time these meetings cost her much nervous energy; she would dash from place to place, spending all day travelling and then conduct her meetings in the evening, sometimes taking the train home at 2 o'clock in the morning after a post-mortem with the local party leaders going on right up to the station platform. She complained of 'leaden headaches', 'a skull bursting with tiredness', especially in the summer, complete inability to eat. At some moments she hated the whole thing: 'As usual I feel sick at the contact with this coagulated mass of

¹ Karl Korn was also the historian of the German Socialist Youth movement—*Die Arbeiterjugendbewegung*, Berlin 1923.

strange people.' Perhaps the facts should speak for themselves more than her own hurried statements which necessarily varied with her mood and state of health. After 1910 her determination to return to regular agitation was in practice maintained right until the end of her life, except when she was in prison. No doubt there was an element of duty here, but the scale of her efforts exceeded the minimum demands of party obligation, especially since she was in opposition to the party authorities and therefore owed no duty to anyone but herself and her own conscience.

In the summer of 1907 Rosa Luxemburg spoke repeatedly of chucking up everything: 'I would move instantly to the south and away from Germany if I had the slightest notion how to earn a living', she wrote to a friend. But the recipient did not take this too literally and neither should we; it was a recurring theme engendered by impatience, frustration, and the temperamental hatred of Germany and German attitudes which was never far below the surface. The disgust with German organization, though real enough, was also culturally fashionable; it was this which lent the Latin—or even Swiss—south the unmerited attraction of simply being different, above all for someone who really believed that she had fallen 'straight out of the Renaissance by mistake' into a most unsuitable century!

Suddenly, on 1 October 1907, all such talk came to an end, dispelled by an exciting new job which was to keep her busy for at least six months in every year. In 1906 the party had decided to found a Central Party School in Berlin in order to strengthen the work of the existing *Arbeiterbildungsschule*. This dilapidated institution carried on a form of general adult education for Socialist workers and its limited efforts since 1891 had been supplemented by party lecturers who continually travelled the provinces and gave circuit courses (*Wanderkurse*). The new creation was to be more of an élite school, to train suitable candidates from constituency organizations and trade unions who would in turn become teachers or activists themselves. Once more the SPD spawned a mirror image of a national function—higher education—the benefits of which Socialists had been unable to share adequately; the state within the state now extended its activity to this field too, as indeed it had to sooner or later.

The idea had been first mooted early in 1906: 'The Russian

revolution released the . . . flood of energy and mobility . . . and the desire for discussing fundamental questions, and . . . the resolutions at party congresses for planned measures of theoretical education increased accordingly', according to Heinrich Schulz, the SPD's educational expert.¹

The executive was perfectly happy with the propagation of theoretical revolution in a school as long as no one advocated it in practice. If you can't do, teach; this applied as much to revolutionaries as anyone else and would satisfactorily absorb the surplus froth of radical energy. In the autumn of 1906 a party educational commission was formed, consisting of seven members including Franz Mehring and Clara Zetkin; on 15 November 1906 the new school officially opened its doors. The whole plan was thoroughly debated at the party congress in Essen in 1907, after the first six months' course had taken place.

Luise Kautsky had first written about it to Rosa while the latter was still in Finland, as part of the gossip about the current SPD scene with which she kept her friend supplied. Rosa had sniffed suspiciously: 'What is it? Who is behind it?'² At first, to her chagrin, there was no place for her, though she was too proud to push her own candidature when Bebel went through a list of possible activities for her at the end of 1906.³ Yet she took an interest in its activities from the start. During the first season she persuaded her friend Clara Zetkin, a member of the supervisory body, to suggest to her colleagues that a course in the history of Socialism be included, which had not been intended in the original programme.⁴ The idea caught on at once. The course was taught by Franz Mehring who, with Schulz, was the main luminary of the new school.

But the Prussian police rendered Rosa an unwitting service. Hilferding and Pannekoek, two of the lecturers at the party school, were both foreigners: Hilferding an Austrian, and Pannekoek—the Astronomer, as he was known—a Dutchman. The police had frowned disapprovingly at the whole educational effort, which they considered more agitational than scientific; in order to make things doubly difficult, they presented the two foreign Socialists with an

¹ NZ, 1907/1908, Vol. II, p. 883.

² *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 133.

³ From Werner Blumenberg.

⁴ Dieter Fricke, 'Die Parteischule', in *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, Germany (East) 1957, Vol. V, No. 2, p. 237.

ultimatum just before 1 October 1907 when the party school was due to reopen for its second season—any further participation would be followed by immediate expulsion. Both Hilferding and Pannekoek accordingly withdrew and Rosa Luxemburg was engaged on the recommendation of Karl Kautsky. He himself was unable to teach as he felt he had insufficient time. 'In Rosa Luxemburg you will be getting one of the best brains in Germany', he told Schulz.¹

Rosa was, or pretended to be, reluctant, probably because she was only invited to fill a gap: 'The whole school interests me very little and I am not the type to act as a school ma'am.' Besides, the school might prove to be a dull and official affair, executive-inspired. Nevertheless she accepted; the income was, according to her, 'a magnetic attraction'. At short notice, therefore, she plunged into a spate of teaching. She held courses in political economy and in economic history, and taught 50 hours a month.

Though the only woman on the staff, she soon established a reputation and in addition found that she enjoyed the work thoroughly. As a rule the courses lasted from 1 October until the end of March or April, except in 1910 when Rosa ran off early in March to fan the flames of the suffrage agitation, and for two months after Christmas 1911 when *Reichstag* elections were taking place and staff as well as students issued forth like shock troops to help. Each course consisted of 30 members who were given an intensive programme during their time at the school. Altogether in seven courses 203 students passed through the party school at Lindenstrasse. The one thing upon which they were all agreed was the benefit they had received from Rosa Luxemburg's classes. She was a natural and enthusiastic teacher, clarifying the most complicated philosophical issues of Marxism with lively similes and illustrations, making the subject not only real but important. She took trouble with each one of the students and was prepared if necessary to carry on individual tuition after hours. A few became regular visitors to her flat and reliable supporters. The testimonials to her success were not confined to left-wingers. Wilhelm Koenen, until his death a senior civil servant in East Germany, recalled his own experiences at the school as a student in a letter to Dieter Fricke.² But similar praise came from a later right-wing member of the SPD, Tarnow.³

¹ Kautsky Archives, IISH.

² Fricke, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

³ *Vorwärts*, 2 December 1909. Rosa herself wrote to Clara Zetkin about this young man: 'Tarnow is the most gifted student, and has sloughed off a lot of the

Apart from anything else, her work at the school provided a regular and steady income of 3,600 marks per course, which by Socialist standards was a lot of money. In 1911 Mehring retired from active teaching for health reasons and Rosa took over part of his course in the history of Socialism as well. The school kept Rosa physically and intellectually busy until the war; the many references in her letters during this period are evidence of her absorption and interest. On 4 February 1908 she wrote to Dittmann that she could not now consider a lecture tour long arranged; the school came first. 'I have two hours lecturing every day. . . .' If a good radical speaker was required, would Dittmann not try her friend Clara Zetkin instead, who was—as luck would have it—staying with her at that moment?¹ While the school was in session Rosa thus lectured for two hours every day; very often teachers' conferences or extra work with the students went on into the afternoon. Otherwise Rosa would be home at lunchtime, somewhat exhausted and able to resume her own work or receive friends only after a rest or a brisk walk. The intensity of her teaching at the school is best shown by the fact that there were weeks on end when she and Mehring or Schulz met only in corridors or on official occasions and found it impossible to exchange two words in private.

Out of her work at the school eventually came two major works of Marxist analysis. One was the *Introduction to Political Economy*, the substance of her lectures turned into a first draft for a book which she was able to finish only in prison during the First World War.² For nearly four years she worked on it whenever she could, and made every effort to avoid other engagements. 'I have sworn by the beard of the prophet not to give a single lecture until I have my "Introduction to Political Economy" ready for the printers', she wrote to Pieck in 1908, again turning down a request from her recent ex-pupil to lecture in Bremen, where Pieck was party

revisionist influence from which he was suffering. I don't want to cede him to the unions, where he could eventually become a menace to us . . .' (IML(B) NL2/20, p. 85 (end 1908)). Rosi Wolffstein, later Rosi Frölich, wife of Rosa Luxemburg's biographer, who is still alive, was also a pupil of the school in the season 1912/1913. She has given me the benefit of her lively recollections of the party school and Rosa Luxemburg's courses.

¹ Rosa Luxemburg to Wilhelm Dittmann, 4 February 1908, Dittmann papers, SPD Archives, Bonn.

² *Einführung in die Nationalökonomie*, first published by Paul Levi as part of Rosa Luxemburg's literary remains in 1925. See below, pp. 828-9.

secretary.¹ Then in the autumn of 1911 one puzzling aspect of the large subject suddenly engaged her whole attention and grew to full proportions in its own right. This, a study of imperialism, began as an attempt to clarify for herself certain technical contradictions in the construction of Marxist economics, and in the end became *The Accumulation of Capital*, Rosa Luxemburg's most important book and the one for which she is most widely known.² Undoubtedly the constant polishing of ideas before her students helped Rosa greatly to clarify her own mind on the basic propositions of her political faith; 'only by sharpening the subject matter through teaching was I able to develop my ideas'.

The party school was not without its enemies, and these became more vociferous as the success of the school was assured. In fact attendance at the course did not appear to impose any particular attitudes on its students. Some of them later became Communists (Pieck—perhaps Rosa's most important student—Wilhelm Koenen and Jacob Walcher) but others, like Winnig and Tarnow, were to be prominent right-wingers. None the less, the revisionists in the party, particularly those from south Germany, sensed in the school an institutional means of propagating radical doctrines in the party. An attack was mounted on the whole concept in 1908. 'The school should go to the masses, not an élite creamed off into the school in Berlin', Kurt Eisner wrote in *Vorwärts*.³ Moreover, the trade unions did not care for the programme of the school and never filled all the ten places allotted to their nominees.

The whole question was dragged into the open at the party congress at Nürnberg on 13–19 September 1908. Two views were represented. One held that the school was there to help raise the general level of education among workers, the other that it should be an advanced teachers' and agitators' training college. Eisner led the attack, supported by Maurenbrecher, another southerner. The executive was anxious that Rosa should defend the school, and got her a mandate for that purpose. Bebel wrote to her twice to make sure of her attendance.

Rosa Luxemburg in a restrained and dignified speech admitted that she too had had doubts about the project at the beginning,

¹ Rosa Luxemburg to Wilhelm Pieck, 1 August 1908, Henke papers, SPD Archives, Bonn.

² *Die Akkumulation des Kapitals*, Berlin 1913; see below, pp. 530–47, 830–41.

³ *Vorwärts*, 22 August 1908.

'partly from natural conservatism (laughter), partly because a Social-Democratic party must always aim at the widest mass effect in its agitation'.¹ However, her doubts had been largely dispelled. She admitted that there was plenty of room for improvement with regard to the selection of students, the type of course given, and so on. She wanted more emphasis on the history of Socialism and less on the technical aspects of economics. This admittedly was in the interests of class consciousness. Then there was the question of what happened to the students after they returned to their local organizations.

The school suffers from the fact that the relationship of the party organizations to its students is not the right one. It should be altered radically. What has been happening is that party organizations have sent students to the school like scapegoats into the desert, have not bothered any more about them, have not given them any worthwhile jobs when they come back. On the other hand there is also the danger that too much is being demanded from students when they do get a job. Comrades say to them 'You have been to the party school, now show us instantly what you can do'. The students of the party school cannot fulfil such expectations. We have tried to make clear to them from first to last that they will not get from us any ready-made science, that they must continue to go on learning, that they will go on learning all their lives. . . . There is, therefore, plenty of room for criticism against the party school, but such criticism as Eisner has been making has no justification at all.²

Rosa exposed as tactical humbug the excessive respect for the sciences shown by the critics of the party school—should complicated subjects be popularized for the sake of giving party members a smattering of learning? This was absurd deference to the hated bourgeois academics. What they were really getting at in their demand for practical teaching was to debase the party school into a mere guild institute. The contrast between theoretical and practical learning was for Rosa as bogus as the contrast between strategy and tactics. The school existed precisely to fill a gap by teaching something that the normal school of practical life could not provide. By insisting that the party school should teach practical matters they simply ignored the capacity of workers to learn from their daily activities; in other words denied the whole basis of growing class consciousness as postulated by Marxism.

¹ *Protokoll* . . . 1908, p. 230.

² *Ibid.*

They have not the slightest conception of the fact that the working classes learn 'their stuff' from their daily life, in fact absorb it better than Eisner does. What the masses need is general education, theory which gives them the chance of making a system out of the detail acquired from experience and which helps to forge a deadly weapon against our enemies. If nothing else has so far convinced me of the necessity for having a party school, of the need to spread Socialist theory in our ranks, the criticism of Eisner has done it.

Thus the whole debate about the party school was once again only a channel for airing questions of general principles and tactics, and Rosa did not hesitate to extend the discussion from a mere critique of the school to cover a wider field. On the surface her own doctrines about the masses were being turned against her; she appeared to be defending the training of an élite against democrats who believed in outgoing mass education. But in fact the attack on the party school was really an attack on theory in general, based on the assumption that the masses had to be 'taught things', those things which they in fact learnt in the process of developing their political consciousness, while working and struggling. The congress overwhelmingly agreed with her, vaguely proud to have struck a blow for education. For the first time since she returned from Russia, Rosa had vociferous and general support from the delegates of the SPD. It was not soon to happen again.

At the Nürnberg congress she received strong support from one of her pupils of that year, Wilhelm Pieck, who waded in with far less sophistication than his teacher. 'All Eisner and his friends want is a mass of members instructed just sufficiently to be able to follow them, but not enough to enable them to think systematically for themselves.'¹ In the end Eisner, always the most courteous of opponents, elaborately bowed to Rosa Luxemburg and said: 'It obviously would not do me any harm to be given leave of absence by my Nürnberg comrades for six months and to sit at the feet of Comrade Luxemburg to learn some more science—and it would not do her much harm either.'²

The suggestions that Rosa Luxemburg had made at the congress

¹ *Protokoll . . . 1908*, p. 235. In those days Pieck was not only a great and uncritical admirer of Rosa Luxemburg, but a gallant Walter Raleigh too: in 1910 a bicyclist ran into her on her way to the school and it was Pieck who enabled her to make a rapid and invisible change of clothes while he stood guard over her modesty.

² *Ibid.*

for improving the party school were not mere rhetoric. She was constantly concerned to broaden the teaching and addressed several letters to members of the party executive on this subject:

... if you want my opinion the organization of the courses has been entirely justified, apart from the actual teaching programme [*Lehrplan*] which can still do with improvement. I am extremely glad that Comrade Schulz and I succeeded in introducing the history of International Socialism; now I am trying—and have made a formal proposal at the last teachers' conference—to include also the trade-union movement and its history in various countries.¹

This was a convenient means of bringing the trade-union students firmly into the grip of party policy—and counteracting the self-sufficient contentment of the union leaders. 'Compare all this with the activities of the trade unions' own school', she wrote, with its miserably slapdash six weeks' course—a jumble of bits and pieces. 'It is a mystery to me how practical men can throw their time and money out of the window in this way . . . from an educational point of view. Once more the "theoreticians" prove much more practical than the "practical" men. . . .'² Later, when she was under contract to *Leipziger Volkszeitung* and short of material, she translated these private expressions of triumph and self-satisfaction into an article attacking in public the blinkered and myopic educational efforts of the trade-union leadership.³ No wonder the union leaders did not hasten to send their members to fill their allotted places at the party school.

No doubt Rosa hoped that the students of their own volition would become a bastion against revisionism in the party. In this she was disappointed. In the course of 1910/1911 a big debate was organized under the auspices of Rosa Luxemburg and Franz Mehring to discover the opinions of the students on party policy. That particular course contained a large proportion of right-wingers, and both Franz Mehring and Rosa were very shocked by the vigorous defence of the whole revisionist position from a section of the students. They all deplored Social Democracy's isolation and lack of influence. Surely the real value of education and agitation was to gain concrete concessions and as quickly as possible? Rosa Luxemburg said to Franz Mehring afterwards that 'in that case I

¹ Rosa Luxemburg to Wilhelm Dittmann, 23 May 1911, in Dittmann papers, SPD Archives, Bonn.

² Ibid.

³ 'Gewerkschaftsschule und Parteischule', *LV*, 21 June 1911.

wonder whether the whole party school has really any point?'¹ None the less, she enjoyed working there and had every intention of carrying on for the foreseeable future. The closure of the party school during the war left a significant gap in her life.²

On the whole her relations with her colleagues were pleasant if somewhat distant. Cunow was for her 'the only real intellectual in our party, even if he lacks spirit and individuality'.³ She admired Schulz for his devotion to the school and his single-minded interest in its development, even though his tendency to call pointless conferences and his heavy-handed paternal good nature often got on her nerves. Mehring was more difficult; rightly or wrongly, she felt that behind the scenes he was agitating against her interests. Her relationship with Mehring remained edgy until it broke out in a public polemic in 1910 and was only patched up when she approached him during his severe illness at the end of 1911.⁴

In Rosa's calendar the chief political event of these years was the congress of the International at Stuttgart on 18–24 August 1907. It was a great occasion, a fitting successor to Amsterdam. For the first time the magnificent SPD was host on German soil. Rosa stayed with her friend Clara Zetkin; they spent much of the time together at the congress. She introduced her friend to Lenin who had come from Finland to head, with Martov, the delegation of the RSDRP, newly—and temporarily—united at the Stockholm congress the year before. The Russian revolution, and the long talks in Kuokkala, had brought Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg close together—a period of mutual esteem and collaboration that was to last until the battle between Jogiches and Lenin in the Russian party in 1911, and the split in the SDKPiL in the same year; even then, personal contact continued until Lenin moved to Cracow in the summer of 1912.⁵

Rosa Luxemburg and Julian Marchlewski represented the Polish Social Democrats. She was therefore at the congress as one of the loosely united Russian group, and not on behalf of the German party. This made it easier for her to take a stand against the official German resolution, and to speak against Bebel as a foreign equal

¹ Fricke, 'Parteischule', p. 246.

² *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 73, to Hans Diefenbach, 1 November 1914.

³ Cunow was another of those radicals who saw the national light during the war, together with Haenisch and Lensch. See below, pp. 461, 605, 633.

⁴ For this see below, pp. 461 ff.

⁵ See below, pp. 581, 591.

and not as a German subject. The German delegation was heavily loaded with trade unionists; membership of this delegation, with the usual German discipline of block voting, would have imposed an unwelcome strain on her. Both she and Marchlewski sat in the commission on militarism and international conflicts, which was in session throughout the congress and whose report was debated at considerable length during the last two days of the plenum. Marchlewski in addition represented the SDKPiL on the commission for colonial affairs.

The latter came up with an unexpected majority for a German proposal that 'colonial policy could in some cases have a civilizing influence on the colonies'.¹ A minority in the German delegation, led by Ledebour and Rosa Luxemburg's friend Emmanuel Wurm, tried to submit a resolution bristling with hostility to the principle of colonialism, but failed to get it accepted. In the end they had to vote against their own resolution after a majority of the German caucus had decided to do so—the penalty of party discipline. Marchlewski protested against the majority resolution in the name of the Poles and the Russians.²

But more important than the colonial issue—except as an indicator of the new trend—were the debates in committee and in the plenum on militarism and war. There were three positions. The German delegation, led by Bebel, did not really want to discuss the question at all, and certainly saw no need for any new resolutions. Already in March 1906 the SPD had failed to persuade the International Bureau to keep anti-militarism off the congress agenda—with Kautsky representing Rosa as delegate of the SDKPiL (she was in Warsaw and had given him her mandate).³ Kautsky had thus voted against his own German colleagues. The whole problem was closely connected with the sensitive issue of the mass strike—the only weapon of the proletariat that was deemed to be effective if war broke out—and it was opposition to the irresponsible propagation of that tactic which then and until his death governed Bebel's thinking. The majority of the French, under pressure from a vociferous syndicalist wing, believed in the mass strike as a panacea, and wanted a resolution to harness the lumbering cart of anti-militarism to their fast mass-strike horse once and

¹ *Protokoll, Internationaler Sozialistenkongress zu Stuttgart . . . 1907*, Berlin 1907, p. 24.

² *Ibid.*, p. 112.

³ See above, p. 347.

for all. Some of the leaders, for instance Jaurès and Vaillant, saw the need for some concessions to this view; already at the French Socialist (SFIO) congress at Limoges the year before, the party's policy had been packaged into one of those crisp French epigrams: '*Plutôt l'insurrection que la guerre.*' This then was the second view, heavily coloured by Jaurès's belief that Socialists would anyhow be able to prevent war, or soon stop it if it came, without too much detailed prescription beforehand. But he could not accept what he considered to be Bebel's negative pessimism. 'It would be a sad thing indeed if one could not say more than Bebel does, that we anyhow have no specific means of preventing strife and murder between nations; sad indeed if the ever-increasing power of the German working class, of the international proletariat, does not extend further than this.'¹ Beneath the differences of opinion on tactics was the old Franco-German rivalry; enthusiasm against discipline, action against concepts, epigrams against formal theses—a clash sharpened in public by temperamental antagonism.

The French view was carried to its extreme by Hervé who took up the old thread of opposition to war as the first, almost the only, task of the International, a thread which had been spun many years ago by the anarchist Domela Nieuwenhuis and which had been snipped off again and again by various International congresses. This concept called for an automatic world-wide general strike in case of war. It could be argued—and was—that this group longed more than anything to have their general strike and looked on war to some extent as an excuse for it, but the uncompromising extremities of this position also represented an extreme emotional hatred of war.² For Hervé, therefore, Bebel's caution was nothing but evidence of cowardice and an extreme lower-middle-class *Spiessbürgertum*.³

Rosa Luxemburg spoke on Wednesday, 21 August, in the name of the Russian and Polish delegations. Lenin, who spent a lot of time with her at Stuttgart, had realized early on that his position was much like hers, and that she could represent it with greater experience and chance of success. He was therefore quite content to remain silent himself and even offered her a Russian mandate for

¹ *Protokoll . . . Stuttgart 1907*, p. 89.

² A false impression as it turned out, since Hervé was one of those who rallied to the colours in 1914.

³ *Protokoll . . . 1907*, p. 85. *Spiessbürger* is a derogatory epithet for respectable, blinkered, collar-and-tie citizens.

the voting in committee.¹ In her speech Rosa had to tread carefully to avoid too close an identification with Hervé which she knew to be both theoretically mistaken and fatal in practice. At the same time German restraint had to be castigated.

When I heard Vollmar's speech, I said to myself, 'if the shadows of fallen Russian revolutionaries could be present, they would all say, keep your tributes but at least learn from us'. I have to disagree completely with Vollmar and regrettably with Bebel as well, when they say that they are not in a position to do more than they are doing at present [about mass strikes]. . . . I am a convinced adherent of Marxism and precisely for that reason consider it a great danger to give Marxism a stiff and fatalistic form, which in turn is responsible for such causes as Hervéism. Hervé is an *enfant*, but an *enfant terrible*. We cannot just stand with our arms crossed and wait for the historical dialectic to drop its ripe fruit into our laps. . . . Jena [the SPD congress of 1905] showed the SPD to be a revolutionary party by adopting a resolution to use mass strikes in certain circumstances. . . . True this was not intended as a weapon against war, but to achieve general suffrage. . . . [Therefore] after Vollmar's and Bebel's speech we have decided that it is necessary to sharpen the Bebel motion. . . . In part we actually go further than the amendment of that resolution by Jaurès and Vaillant; our agitation in case of war is not only aimed at ending that war, but at *using* the war to hasten the *general collapse of class rule*.²

The influence of Lenin was clear in the ending.

This was Rosa Luxemburg's only reported speech. But her amendment was adopted. The final resolution was therefore a composite one, made up of parts of the resolutions submitted by the Germans, by the moderate sections of the French—Hervé had no chance of success—and of the deliberate sharpening of both resolutions by the Luxemburg-Lenin addition. The amendment was adopted in the teeth of Bebel's opposition. It was not so much a compromise resolution as a compound one. It read as follows:

The Congress confirms the resolutions of previous International congresses against militarism and imperialism and declares anew that the fight against militarism cannot be separated from the Socialist class war as a whole.

Wars between capitalist states are as a rule the result of their rivalry for world markets, as every state is not only concerned in consolidating its own market, but also in conquering new markets, in which process

¹ Ibid., p. 101.

² Ibid., p. 97.

the subjugation of foreign lands and peoples plays a major part. Further, these wars arise out of the never-ending armament race of militarism, which is one of the chief implements of bourgeois class-rule and of the economic and political enslavement of the working classes.

Wars are encouraged by the prejudices of one nation against another, systematically purveyed among the civilized nations in the interest of the ruling classes, so as to divert the mass of the proletariat from the tasks of its own class, as well as from the duty of international class solidarity.

Wars are therefore inherent in the nature of capitalism; they will only cease when capitalist economy is abolished, or when the magnitude of the sacrifice of human beings and money, necessitated by the technical development of warfare, and popular disgust with armaments, lead to the abolition of this system.

That is why the working classes, which have primarily to furnish the soldiers and make the greatest material sacrifices, are natural enemies of war, which is opposed to their aim: the creation of an economic system based on Socialist foundations, which will make a reality of the solidarity of nations.

The Congress holds therefore that it is the duty of the working classes, and especially their representatives in parliaments, recognizing the class character of bourgeois society and the motive for the preservation of the opposition between nations, to fight with all their strength against naval and military armament, and to refuse to supply the means for it, as well as to labour for the education of working-class youth in the spirit of the brotherhood of nations and of Socialism, and to see that it is filled with class consciousness.

The Congress sees in the democratic organization of the army, in the popular militia instead of the standing army, an essential guarantee for the prevention of aggressive wars, and for facilitating the removal of differences between nations. The International is not able to lay down the exact form of working-class action against militarism at the right place and time, as this naturally differs in different countries. But its duty is to strengthen and co-ordinate the endeavours of the working classes against the war as much as possible.

In fact since the International congress in Brussels the proletariat, through its untiring fight against militarism by the refusal to supply means for military armament, and through its endeavours to make military organization democratic, has used the most varied forms of action, with increasing vigour and success, to prevent the breaking out of wars or to make an end to them, as well as making use of the upheaval of society caused by the war for the purpose of freeing the working classes: for example, the agreement between English and French

trade unions after the Fashoda incident to ensure peace and to re-establish friendly relations between England and France; the intervention of the Social-Democratic parties in the German and French parliaments during the Morocco crisis; the announcements prepared by French and German Socialists for the same purpose; the joint action of Austrian and Italian Socialists who met in Trieste to prevent a conflict between the two states; further, the emphatic intervention of the Socialist trade unions in Sweden to prevent an attack on Norway; finally the heroic, self-sacrificing fight of the Socialist workers and peasants in Russia and Poland in opposition to the Czarist-inspired war, to stop the war and to make use of the country's crisis for the liberation of the working classes.

All these endeavours testify to the growing strength of the proletariat and to its power to ensure peace through decisive intervention; the action of the working classes will be the more successful the more their minds are prepared by suitable action, and the more they are encouraged and united by the International. The Congress is convinced that pressure by the proletariat could achieve the blessings of international disarmament through serious use of courts of arbitration instead of the pitiful machinations of governments. This would make it possible to use the enormous expenditure of money and strength which is swallowed by military armaments and war, for cultural purposes.

In the case of a threat of an outbreak of war, it is the duty of the working classes and their parliamentary representatives in the countries taking part, fortified by the unifying activity of the International Bureau, to do everything to prevent the outbreak of war by whatever means seem to them most effective, which naturally differ with the intensification of the class war and of the general political situation.

Should war break out in spite of all this, it is their duty to intercede for its speedy end, and to strive with all their power to make use of the violent economic and political crisis brought about by the war to rouse the people, and thereby to hasten the abolition of capitalist class rule.¹

In forcing the amendment, and particularly by lumping Vollmar and Bebel together as representing much the same point of view, Rosa Luxemburg had issued a veiled declaration of war on the German leadership. For her the issue was still no more than the re-establishment of the 1905 position, now by authority of the

¹ Copied from the Appendix to James Joll, *The Second International*, pp. 196-8. This is based on the official German text printed in the congress protocol; a French text with insignificant variations was printed in Carl Grünberg, 'Die Internationale und der Weltkrieg', *Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und der Arbeiterbewegung*, Vol. I (1916), pp. 12-13. The Luxemburg-Lenin addition consisted of the last two paragraphs.

International congress. The regressive, prohibitive interpretations of the 1905 resolution, current since the SPD's congress of 1906, were in her view now reversed by higher authority. Far from something new, the position she adopted was essentially conservative, a return to known principles already stated. She would hold to this resolution as a meaningful expression of intent and disregard the realities out of which it had arisen, as would Lenin, even though she soon realized, as Lenin did not, that the 'good old tactic' was a myth, and a return to it undesirable. This was because Rosa ascribed an almost mystical sovereignty to the International—and a practical one too, the capacity for enforcing its decisions. But for once her vision was cloudy, there was no 'it'; the International at best could not be more than the sum of its constituent parts—of whose weakness she was well aware. When the war broke out, betrayal of the International thus became in her eyes the first and major crime of the main Socialist parties of Europe.

Knowing all that we know, with the roll-call of later history before us, it is easy to write off the Stuttgart declarations against war as self-stupefying rhetoric. And indeed it was a stew produced by several cooks with widely different tastes, cancelling each other out. Bebel's growing pessimism and fear, Jaurès's and Vaillant's (now collaborating) optimism that any crisis would produce its own solution—both helped to nudge the congress into the merest statement of good intentions. The Socialists of the Second International were curiously legalistic—no resolution, no commitment. Lenin noted with surprise and shock what Rosa already knew, that 'this time German Social Democracy, hitherto the invariable representative of the revolutionary conception of Marxism, wavered and even took an opportunist stand'. That was on the colonial issue. As regards the resolution on war, he was prepared to be even more charitable: 'Bebel's resolution, submitted by the Germans . . . suffered from the defect that all emphasis on the *active* tasks of the proletariat was missing. This made it possible to view the perfectly orthodox formulations of Bebel through opportunistic spectacles. Vollmar immediately turned this possibility into a fact. For this reason Rosa Luxemburg and the Russian Social Democrats brought in an amendment to Bebel's resolution. . . .'¹ Lenin was mistaken in differentiating thus sharply between Bebel's intentions

¹ *Proletarii*, No. 17, 20 October 1907, in *Sochineniya*, Vol. XIII, p. 64.

and Vollmar's misuse of them. He did not fully understand the process of change in the SPD—indeed he never understood the SPD at all. All he saw was an isolated lapse which, flavoured with an excellently contemptuous comment by Engels about the endless German capacity for becoming Philistines if not kept up to the mark by the French, he merely reported to his Russian readers.¹

Rosa Luxemburg made no further public comment on the congress. Like Lenin, she felt that their amendment to Bebel's resolution was a triumphant corrective to the wishy-washiness of the German executive. It was totally inconceivable that a resolution of the International should not in fact be what it purported: an expression of desire and intent on the part of Socialism's legitimately sovereign body—its general will. Whatever doubts she had about the behaviour of the SPD, about the influence of Vollmar, David, and the revisionists, they had all been settled by higher authority. And some important sections of the German party took the injunction seriously enough to call for concrete institutional measures; *Neue Zeit* proposed a strengthening of the International's permanent staff, to enable it to cope with the additional responsibilities laid upon it by the congress.²

The attitude of the International—and indeed of the various national parties—to war remains incomprehensible unless it is realized that in 1907 world war was a concept to Socialists but not a reality. There were wars in the Balkans from 1912 onwards, campaigns against Africans, skirmishes between colonial powers. There were several major incidents in the years after 1905 which are nowadays served up by historians as the inevitable *hors-d'œuvre* to the First World War. All this had only begun in 1907. In the same year as the International Socialist Congress, a conference met at The Hague to civilize future war by international agreement; behind the technicalities loomed a real consensus to regulate war out of existence. The millionaire philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie,

¹ 'Calendar for all for the year 1908' in *Sochineniya*, Vol. XIII, pp. 67-68. In his evaluation of the work of the congress he relied largely on Clara Zetkin's articles in her women's paper *Gleichheit*, to which Rosa had drawn his attention. But this again did not lead him to any profound analysis of events. Kautsky understood better what had happened when he said that the SPD had resigned its primacy in the International. As long as it was a matter of resolutions, Kautsky was sensitive enough to any manifestations of weakness or compromise.

² Robert Michels, 'Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie im internationalen Verbande', in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, Vol. 25, pp. 227-8 (July 1907). Also *NZ*, 1906/1907, Vol. II, p. 620.

attending on his own behalf and at his own expense, felt sure that he was preaching the supreme importance of peace to sympathetic ears, including the Kaiser's. Among the ruling classes there was optimism—and if Socialists mocked this assurance in public and referred to The Hague conference as a 'robbers' feast', it was an expression of disdain for all bourgeois governments rather than a gloomy prognosis of actual war.¹ In fact war was much like social revolution to the members of the Second International, the inevitable by-product of capitalist society, requiring constant postulation to generate protest but also capable of indefinite postponement as a physical event.²

In theory militarism was closely connected with war—by opposing one the party believed it was making the other impossible. But after thirty-seven years of peace and progress militarism was a much more real and immediate phenomenon than any abstract possibility of war. It centred round the very concrete type of Prussian officer, and his whole class and ideology. This was the impetus behind Karl Liebknecht's campaign, and behind the youth agitation which he advocated with the unexpected support of Dr. Ludwig Frank, a south German revisionist who happened to take a radical position about youth movements.³

But among the SPD leaders the moral agitation was often tinged with curious normative judgements about efficiency. At the 1907 party congress, and in the light of electoral defeat, Bebel and Noske both went as far as to suggest that if the unpleasantness of military service were ameliorated—less brutality, less Prussian drill—the army would actually become more efficient. This was 'improving' existing society with a vengeance, and the Left would have none of it; it was Isegrim all over again.⁴ None the less, humanitarian reasons certainly played their part in the Left attacks on militarism, in a way that had never been admissible in the economic field, when it came to considering tariffs as potential creators of jobs.

¹ The remark was made by an Englishman, Quelch, at the Stuttgart congress, and he was promptly expelled by the provincial government of Württemberg for his pains. *Protokoll, Internationaler Sozialistenkongress . . . 1907*, p. 32.

² Many modern historians consider that war was at least a 'probability' to the congress at Stuttgart (Schorske, *German Social Democracy*, p. 84) and that the famous resolution was a 'compromise of inaction' (Joll, *Second International*, p. 138). I have gone into this question at some length because I believe both points of view are wrong.

³ A short biography of this interesting figure is S. Grünebaum, *Ludwig Frank, Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklung der deutschen Sozialdemokratie*, Heidelberg 1924.

⁴ See above, p. 216.

The campaign of Frank's League of Young Workers of Germany and its paper, *Junge Garde* (Young Guard), bristled with details of military abuses of recruits, and this campaign was still going strong when Rosa Luxemburg took a hand in it in 1914.¹

For the moment, however, the 'orthodox' Marxists, centred round *Neue Zeit*, gave only qualified support to Liebknecht's and Frank's campaign. Their concern was with a broad offensive against society, system against system; they feared hysteria about this or that aspect of capitalism as a diversion from the final goal of social revolution. Ludwig Frank, with a south German dislike of Prussianization and more interested in democratic concessions than in a systematic confrontation with society, was not a welcome ally. It is perfectly possible to write the history of the Second International as a running conflict between advocates of the particular—the pet causes of the moment—and the general as represented by the forces of orthodoxy who constantly preached balance and the broad view and thus finally reasoned themselves into impotence. That the rebels, by being revolutionaries, also laid claim to totality—or have had it laid for them by later analysts—while the Socialist leaders were prepared in the event to settle for individual achievements against society, does not alter the fact that the appearance of total opposition, if reiterated consistently enough, achieves a reality of its own.²

The period 1907-1910 was one of retrenchment and disillusion, not only for Rosa Luxemburg but for German Social Democracy as a whole. The imperial government had a splendid *Reichstag* coalition, the Bülow bloc, from which only Catholics and Socialists were excluded; between such bedfellows there was no basis for joint opposition. Baffled in its probe for soft spots in the hostile face of society, the SPD concentrated on internal reorganization. The caricature of a pedantic bureaucracy, against which the French had railed whenever they were faced by the disciplined and united German contingent at International congresses—united at least when it came to voting—was fast becoming reality. Organization was striking firmly downwards from the centre into the remotest roots. The strengthening of the central party organizations after

¹ See Karl Korn, *Die Arbeiterjugendbewegung*, Berlin 1923, pp. 89-90. For Rosa Luxemburg's intervention, see below, pp. 481-5.

² See Georg Lukács, *Histoire et Conscience de Classe*, Paris 1960, pp. 65-66. For a fuller discussion, see also below, pp. 543-7, 631.

the 1905 Jena congress, especially the accession of additional secretaries, led to the operation of Parkinson's Law: with the new administrators came paid sub-officials and gadgets like telephones and typewriters.¹ When the party congress voted the necessary authority for this apparatus, most of the Left were keen enough; for them the SPD was then still the party of the 1905 mass-strike resolution, only awaiting the next revolutionary period. Organization was synonymous with more effective advance. Yet there were warnings. The great Max Weber said in a lecture:

One must ask which has more to fear from this [tendency to bureaucracy], bourgeois society or Social Democracy? Personally, I believe the latter; i.e. those elements within it which are the bearers of the revolutionary ideology. . . . And if the contradictions between the material interests of the provisional politicians on the one hand and the revolutionary ideology on the other could develop freely, if one would no longer throw Social Democrats out of veterans' associations, if one would admit them into party administration, from which they are nowadays expelled, *then* for the first time serious internal problems would arise for the party. Then . . . it would be shown not that Social Democracy is conquering city and state, but on the contrary, that the state is conquering Social Democracy.²

But Marxists were more politically than sociologically minded (and still are today); provided the policy was right—and it was up to the annual congress to supervise the executive on this point—they could see no conflict. The notion of a bureaucracy developing a will of its own and *for its own benefit* was unthinkable—and is still entirely unrecognized by Communists, at least officially. In the Soviet Union it has been drowned in the multiple wails over the personality cult and more effectively in frequent purges; as for the West, the 'managerial revolution' and all the literature about bureaucracy is simply ignored by Soviet analysts. Capitalists rule, the owners and not the managers, those who own rather than manage the means of production. So we cannot blame the SPD for not having our modern insights. And later the shocked and furious radicals were not wholly wrong when they rather narrowly put the blame on particular people and not on any general trend. The men who ran the party from 1907 onwards, men like Molkenbuhr,

¹ For this organizational development see Schorske, Chapter V, pp. 116–45, and quoted sources.

² Address to the Verband für Sozialpolitik, 1908, quoted in Schorske, pp. 117–18.

Ebert, Scheidemann, and Braun, were efficient, down-to-earth—and completely unrevolutionary. For them revolution merely meant self-destruction, both functionally and personally—and they knew it.¹

This did not imply that democracy disappeared in proportion to the rise of the bureaucracy. Ebert has been called the German Stalin and so he was—at least as far as mentality and outlook were concerned, though he was not a cruel man. Nor was the deliberate maintenance of democratic forms wholly a farce. Decisions were not usually taken in committee and then merely submitted to party congresses for certain and jubilant ratification. The process was much more sophisticated. A multitude of minor but in the end significant decisions took place mostly in the interstices of party life which the congress did not touch, the manifold minor matters affecting local administration and control. At the top, congress resolutions continued to be binding; no one before 1914 would have ventured to suggest that these were a mere formality. Often the executive had to exercise all its skill to get its majority, as in 1911. But the strong tradition of supporting the executive, unless there were very cogent reasons of conscience or principle, usually prevailed; a tradition, moreover, of voluntary discipline, of conviction. There were no three-line-whips in the SPD, and little sense of compulsion. In short, a classic example of Max Weber's notion of routinized charisma.

In fact there was no apparent conflict between the tasks of the Social-Democratic Party and its administration. Only when the whole atmosphere changed during the war and the role of the party with it, was the foundation of the SPD finally found to rest not—as Rosa Luxemburg supposed—on the masses, but on a concrete structure of bureaucracy. If the situation of August 1914 had by some miracle taken place in 1900, there would have been confusion followed by a genuine realignment of opinions. By 1914, however, it was considered natural for the leadership to propose and for the party on the whole to follow. This was not, of course, equivalent to adopting the Communist tactic of deliberately pre-empting and manoeuvring members' wishes; the attitude of the SPD during the war was possible only because the bulk of the members supported

¹ For an analysis of party structure and its effect on the role of the SPD, see J. P. Nettl, 'The German Social-Democratic Party', *Past and Present*, No. 30, April 1965, pp. 74-86.

the leadership. The acceptance of legitimacy in the existing structure of control is in itself a positive expression of intent, just as much as if the policy adopted had been the result of a referendum. There was no question of blind, Nazi-type obedience.

Rosa Luxemburg took no part in these debates. She was quite uninterested in the details of organization—an inferior preoccupation. She did not object to the growth of the party bureaucracy, since this was essentially part of the general growth of the party, but neither did she really observe its progress. The notion that there could grow up an intermediate body of positive opinion between the members and the leaders was quite foreign to her—and of course to everyone else except a few sociologists.¹ Her few writings of the period before 1910 show no trace of any interest in this problem. Rosa Luxemburg had become something of a spectator on the German party scene. In the present atmosphere there was little room for her particular form of activity. Her letters show this clearly—teaching and reading, love and sunshine, and above all, solitude, are the prevailing motives. There are few comments on politics, though a good many on people. In fact, when discussing the forthcoming SPD congress in 1909 (which she did not attend) she started off with the excuse that ‘no new tactical problems or questions involving any theoretical principle are up for discussion [at Leipzig]’, and complained that ‘the numerous resolutions do not show . . . a very lively picture of the party’s mental state’.²

It fell to Karl Kautsky to knead the listless dough of these years into an apparently cheerful doctrine in *The Road to Power*.³ This book represented the height of Kautsky’s dialectic achievements, since it combined a complete negation of practical revolution with a strict emphasis on revolutionary attitudes. He faithfully reflected the current mood; indeed, he seized on the general disillusionment, not only within the SPD but throughout imperial Germany. There

¹ It is arguable whether Robert Michels’s unique analysis of the growth of bureaucracy and oligarchy was pure and disinterested sociological analysis or was originally triggered off by his own political disillusion and his distinct dislike of the party’s power apparatus. (*Zur Soziologie des Parteiwesens in der modernen Demokratie*, Leipzig 1911; English translation, *Political Parties*, New York, 2nd. ed. 1959; also his previous article, ‘Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie. Parteimitgliedschaft und soziale Zusammensetzung’ in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, 1906, Vol. XXIII, pp. 471–556.)

² *LV*, 11 September 1909. Lack of controversial material was a rare admission for Rosa Luxemburg. Having accepted the commission for this article, she confided in a friend: ‘I really have no idea what on earth to write about.’

³ *Der Weg zur Macht*, Berlin 1909.

was constant talk of scandals in the Emperor's circles, and in the political life of the main parties.¹ Kautsky took the moral decay of society and elevated it into a revolutionary factor. As society itself decayed, the Social Democrats had only to grow in strength and to remain firm to their revolutionary principles of uncompromising hostility—and simply take over at the given moment when the existing structure collapsed. The only provision was that the SPD remain true to its principles, and keep itself clean from the corruption around it. In effect the doctrine of *The Road to Power* was nothing more than Kautsky's arguments against revisionism, decked out in a new outward-looking and more revolutionary form. Instead of being an internal party matter only, doctrinal purity and the resultant combat-readiness of the party now had immediate relevance to what was going on outside.²

Kautsky saw the revolution as self-generating; it needed no physical action of the type envisaged by Rosa Luxemburg in her mass-strike doctrine. The necessary conditions for revolution were that confidence in the existing régime be destroyed, a majority of people be decisively opposed to it, and that there should be a well-organized party in opposition to harvest this discontent and speak for it, and to provide as a substitute for the ruling régime a visible focus round which the loyalties of the population could gather.³

Modern non-Communist research is more and more inclined to see a continuous process in Kautsky's thinking, in which certain fundamental ideas are endlessly reproduced in different circumstances. According to this view there was no significant difference between the Kautsky of 1898—even of 1891, when he wrote the Erfurt programme—and the Kautsky of the five years prior to the war and the war itself.⁴ But to contemporaries *The Road to Power* appeared as a revolutionary document—the word 'revolution' appears in it much more frequently than in any previous writing—and

¹ One of these rumours was that the Kaiser had been for a number of years in the hands of a crazy and irresponsible *camarilla*. See Johannes Ziekursch, *Politische Geschichte des neuen deutschen Kaiserreiches*, Frankfurt 1930, Vol. III, pp. 190-2. Similar rumours had, of course, circulated for years about the Tsar in Russia and were a normal accompaniment of all court rule, particularly where the Crown had arbitrary power and the court had influence. Even today such rumours appeared a few years ago with regard to the Dutch royal family, and the English, too, are not always immune.

² Karl Kautsky, *Der Weg zur Macht*, pp. 107-18.

³ Ibid., p. 64.

⁴ See Matthias, *Kautsky*, pp. 187-8, 197. Modern Communist research, on the other hand, takes the opposite view: of a treacherous reversal in 1914. The years 1909-1914 were left vague and indeterminate at least until Stalin began his monumental 'improvement' of history in 1930. See below, pp. 810 ff.

the SPD executive certainly had strong reservations about it. It is difficult to reconcile the statement of one scholar, that 'the activity of Kautsky cannot be separated from that of Bebel . . . Bebel, the unquestioned political leader of the party, and Kautsky, its leading ideologist, were always in agreement about the basic tendency of their views, in spite of occasional differences of opinion',¹ with the irritated and censorious letters that passed between the executive and Kautsky when his book was in proof. Thus Kautsky wrote to his friend Haase: '. . . Things are getting more and more extraordinary . . . either the executive must tell me once and for all which bits it insists I should alter, or else they must leave me alone to publish as I think fit.'² In the end the executive did insist on the removal of certain offensive passages—the same fate that had befallen Rosa Luxemburg's very different mass-strike pamphlet.

We have no evidence of any reaction by Rosa Luxemburg to *The Road to Power*. It was the kind of statement of which she would have approved whole-heartedly ten years earlier. But now its negative, almost quietist, acceptance of developments instead of emphasis on the need for conscious forward movement, might well have been distasteful to her. Yet later, when she and Karl Kautsky had fallen out and Rosa was looking through all his previous work with a critical eye, there are no uncomplimentary references to *The Road to Power*. The fact that Kautsky was notoriously in trouble with the executive may have been justification enough.

It is even more likely that Rosa never read *The Road to Power* at the time, at least not until her controversy with its author the following year. Since Easter 1907, when Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Kautsky had sat together on the shores of Lake Geneva planning the forthcoming issues of *Neue Zeit*, the whole basis for Rosa's co-operation with Kautsky had crumbled completely, leaving only the outward appearances of the old relationship and the false intimacy of addressing each other '*per du*'. It was part of the critical dislike with which Rosa Luxemburg viewed all things German. By 1908 she began to find the Sunday lunch sessions and occasional evenings at the Kautskys' house a bore: 'Newspaper gossip at table, Jewish jokes by Bendel [Kautsky's son Benedikt] and far too much gluttony by all concerned.' On 27 June 1908 she wrote to a friend: 'Soon I shall be quite unable to read anything written by Karl

¹ Matthias, *Kautsky*, p. 172.

² Karl Kautsky to Hugo Haase, no date [1909], C432, IISH Archives.

Kautsky. . . . It is like a disgusting series of spiders' webs . . . which can only be washed away by the mental bath of reading Marx himself . . . however wrong-headed his views on Hungarians, Czechs, Slavs, etc.' Was it the comparison with Marx himself, a confrontation which so few Marx commentators have been able to survive, which began to show up the mechanical and lifeless quality of Kautsky's writings to a sharp critic like Rosa Luxemburg, who was anyhow full of recent revolutionary experience? In her search for lecture material she was re-reading Marx and Engels's literary remains, and particularly the articles in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*; her comment: 'A lot of nonsense and much out of date, but what courage in making independent judgements . . . what concrete facts . . . compared with the boring, featureless constructions of history in the abstract which one finds with Karl Kautsky. . . .' By the summer of 1909, when Kautsky came to join her in Italy complete with flea-powder and all the travelling paraphernalia reminiscent of the Duke of Newcastle, Rosa was reaching down into the animal kingdom for metaphors to apply to her friend—he had become a beast of burden, a donkey.

There was of course a more important source of friction. Things were not smooth between Karl and Luise Kautsky. Karl *chez lui* was heavy-handed and arbitrary and Luise, a far more sensitive person than her husband, had to fight for her personal independence. Rosa encouraged this, partly because she liked Luise much better than Karl and resented his philistine lack of feeling in artistic matters, but also as a reaction from her own experience with Leo Jogiches. Rosa quite unconsciously began to take a subtle hand in the marriages of her friends, encouraging wives to assert themselves against their husbands especially where the husbands also happened to be political opponents of Rosa Luxemburg.¹ In the autumn of 1908, Rosa noted rather simply that Karl 'hates my influence on Luise, who is increasingly emancipating herself from him in spirit'.

This emancipation did not take in place a vacuum. Luise became romantically attached to Karl's brother Hans, a painter of talent and with more personality and temperament than Karl. Rosa indignantly refuted Karl's suggestions that she was encouraging this relationship but, though she may not have intended to do so, her emancipatory influence on Luise certainly contributed to it. 'KK is quietly furious with me because he thinks I am somehow

¹ For another instance during the war, see below, p. 672.

responsible for the relationship between Luise and Hans. 'This hurts me but I am too proud to say a word. It is painful for me to see how exclusively and continually Karl is preoccupied with this business.' Certainly various plans hatched between Rosa and Luise over these years to go on holiday together were negated by Karl, if only to the extent of insisting on accompanying them.

Beneath the political discussions and party gossip in the Kautsky household there was a lot of tension and Rosa, to say the least, was not a mere spectator. The pre-conditions for a row existed before 1910. The venom with which the party argument was conducted on both sides was charged with all these personal matters. When the explosion came in 1910 the apparently solid structure of twelve years' close collaboration just collapsed. To mutual friends and colleagues in the SPD, who had not been aware of the changes in their personal relationship behind the scenes or of Rosa's disillusion with Kautsky's status as writer and thinker, the polemics of 1910 could only be explained by Rosa's poisonous temperament—and Kautsky himself was not going to disturb this assumption.

These then were years of self-sufficient privacy and much study for Rosa Luxemburg. But as a little anecdote shows, she was as temperamental in retreat as in the most public agitation. Konrad Haenisch (shortly afterwards Rosa's friend and disciple, later a renegade supporter of the war and Prussian Minister of Culture after 1918) happened to be living for a brief period in the flat next to Rosa Luxemburg. He was woken up one night by the sound of a murderous brawl. He ran to the rescue—'minimally clad', the pompous raconteur gleefully informs us—only to find that Rosa was the aggressor. She had a young woman by the shoulders and 'shook her like mad, yelling: "You goose, you stupid goose, Ricardo . . . I keep telling you, Marx only read Ricardo's theory of ground rent in 1856".' Haenisch assured the victim that in such matters Frau Luxemburg's accuracy was unimpeachable, Rosa embraced her mutilated opponent, and 'bloodshed was happily avoided'.¹

In the summer of 1909 Rosa Luxemburg made an unusually long trip to the south. She spent some time in Swiss libraries working on her history of Poland, a project that she had not touched for many years.² From there she moved to Italy, breaking through the barrier of the Alps 'on to the sunny and superb Italian plains'.

¹ Eduard Engel, *Menschen und Dinge. Aus einem Leben*, Leipzig 1929, p. 214.

² *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 141, dated 1 May 1909.

Here I am in *Genova superba* as the city calls itself, while the people of Tuscany have a different opinion and say that all one finds here are *mare senza pesce, montagne senza alberi, uomini senza fede e donne senza vergogna* [seas without fish, mountains without trees, unfaithful men and shameless women]. I agree with the Tuscans, with only this difference: I also find the *uomini senza vergogna*, at least in the shops where they always cheat and always manage to smuggle a few false coins into my change.¹

Rosa had now discovered the south with a vengeance, and with the same uncritical joy as so many generations of Germans. The Goethe myth of the south has penetrated deep into their romantic attitude to Italy; what was outrageous and unacceptable in Germany—patent dishonesty, inefficiency, irresponsibility, even the loss of Rosa's valuable mail—were noted but excused in the Italians, for it was but a small penalty for so much sunshine and song. Rosa had all the northern optimism of transalpine acceptance. She stayed in Italy for nearly three months and became determined to visit Corsica the following year.² Her letters were long, amused, and strangely uncritical. All the old-fashioned Victorianism of a great Socialist and revolutionary on holiday abroad came to the fore.

First of all the frogs. As soon as the sun sets, frog concerts, such as I have never heard anywhere, begin on all sides. . . . Frogs—all right as far as I am concerned, but *such* frogs. . . . Secondly the bells. I love church bells, but to hear them ringing every quarter of an hour . . . it is enough to drive anybody crazy . . . and thirdly—thirdly Karl, when you come to Italy, do not forget to take a box of insect powder with you. Otherwise it is wonderful here.³

These letters from Italy are a curious testimonial to Rosa's moral stamina, for their gaiety was more artificial than real. While she was writing to the Kautskys about the joys of sunny Italy, she was heart-breakingly releasing her friend Konstantin Zetkin from his relationship with her because she suspected that it was stifling him. The task of Rosa Luxemburg's biographers is made so much harder by this rigid self-discipline which kept friendships in strictly divided compartments and never let the affairs of one relationship spill over into another, either between person and person or between person and politics.

¹ Ibid., pp. 142-3.

² The plan to visit Corsica with her friend Konstantin Zetkin was put off each year with increasing determination to carry it out the next; in the end Rosa went alone (probably 1912). Even in prison during the war Rosa was once more planning to go with Sonia Liebkecht.

³ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 153.

X

DAVID AND GOLIATH, 1910-1911

By the end of 1909 the cold anti-Socialist front in German politics was breaking up. The Bülow bloc began to fall apart on the question whether to introduce direct taxation to meet the growing bill for armaments. Most of the chauvinistic assertion, which had overwhelmed Social Democracy at the 1907 elections, had dwindled away two years later. In addition, for the first time since 1905 the Prussian suffrage question had come up again, and a parliamentary attack on the three-class system of elections in Prussia was being mounted in the *Landtag*. The two problems were connected. The Conservative leader in the *Reichstag* stated that his party would not vote for financial reform and direct taxation because they did not wish to 'surrender the power of taxing property in such a broad way . . . into the hands of a parliamentary body elected by equal suffrage'.¹

The revisionist section of the SPD, which had hammered on the defeat of 1907 as a warning against political impotence, now saw in the break-up of the Bülow bloc an opportunity to re-establish Socialist influence in the *Reichstag*. The merger in March 1910 of various middle-class progressive groups into the new *Fortschrittliche Volkspartei* (Progressive People's Party) was held to be a sign of good times, the focus for a bourgeois radical party such as existed in France but had hitherto been sadly absent in German politics. Here finally was a coherent ally for the SPD, or at least for such of its members as believed in alliances.

The issue now facing the SPD was a complicated one: on the one hand, an alliance with the emerging middle-class opposition to the government in order to agitate jointly for direct taxation and suffrage reform; on the other, the continued refusal on principle to support any official measure proposed by the imperial government, and thus indirectly to vote for the continuation of the hated system of indirect levies on consumption. To vote with the arch-conservative Junker interest, or to vote with the equally hated

¹ *Reichstag debates*, 1909: CCXXXVII, 9323.

government? Either way the party was ensnared—either into a ridiculously rigid position or into political participation in *Reichstag* manœuvres. The radicals, foreseeing and accepting the dilemma, put forward the slogan of ‘No new taxes, but reduction of armaments’—the old stand on opposition for opposition’s sake, on all fronts.¹ They felt that propaganda, the magical solvent, must make it clear to the people that in refusing to support the government measures, the party was not accepting responsibility for the old system of taxation; in calling for a reduction of armaments it was attacking imperialism at its most sensitive point. Paul Singer, joint chairman of the party who spoke against his own executive on this occasion, felt that the SPD would thus be kept free from involvement, with its principles unimpaired—just as Kautsky had stipulated in *The Road to Power*.² *Neue Zeit* pitched in on the side of Liebknecht and the radicals; even Parvus’s radical but rusty pen was dipped into fighting ink once more—and for the last time. But the executive feared that the SPD would lose in popularity at the next elections if it did not support a change in the system of taxation, and with Bebel’s written blessing from Zürich its view as usual prevailed.³

Rosa Luxemburg did not participate in these debates. She published almost nothing during 1909 and did not attend the 1909 congress at Leipzig. There was the difficult question of mandates; no pressing invitation from the executive this time, no whip from Bebel. They did not need her services. And Rosa was not sorry. ‘I am living at home as I live in public, completely self-absorbed, so much so that when I am out and about I have to remember where and who I am’, she told a friend during this period. In any case her views on budget voting were amply on record. Already at the 1908 congress she had asked whether the mass of members supported the SPD because of the ‘tips’ that were thrown to it by society or because they supported the total negation of the system. During the anti-Socialist laws there had been no tips, and still the party’s mass support had grown steadily. ‘The bourgeois reform parties and the socially inclined nationalists (the Progressives) show clearly where you get to when you depart from this path, when you believe that the masses can only be bought off with concessions;

¹ *NZ*, 1908/1909, Vol. II, pp. 838 ff.

² *Protokoll . . . 1909*, p. 364.

³ Partly for health reasons, the elderly Bebel now spent an increasing amount of time in Zürich, centre of the former SPD emigration, where his married daughter lived.

you finally lose the confidence of the masses and the respect of your opponents, you gain nothing but you lose all.¹

Although the debate at Nürnberg had been mainly concerned with the perennial problem of budget voting in the southern states, Rosa Luxemburg never hesitated in stating tactical considerations in the form of general principles, applying to all times and places. Her views thus coincided precisely with those of the radicals in 1909. A year later, when Rosa had re-entered the political lists, she took the opportunity in retrospect of condemning the party's stand over the tax laws in no uncertain terms.

Thus the break-up of the Bülow coalition in 1909 reopened some of the fundamental issues of Socialist policy, of which the fiscal question was only a part; it raised the whole problem of co-operation with potential bourgeois partners—and, indeed, of engaging in 'politics' at all. Given that co-operation was possible, could other old Socialist aims, like suffrage reform in Prussia, also be achieved by such an alliance? It was the same situation that had faced Belgian Socialists in seeking collaboration with the Liberals six years earlier, when Rosa Luxemburg had castigated them mercilessly.² Indeed, it was the old revisionist question posed in a new and more seductive way, now that Kautsky had formulated his doctrine of subtle decay in a society which ten years earlier had still seemed unshakeable.

The taxation crisis, though unresolved, brought about a change of Chancellor and government. Bethmann-Hollweg replaced Bülow, and the new government now relied on a coalition of Conservatives and Centre, with both Liberals and Progressives in opposition together with the perennial wallflower, Social Democracy. Hopes were strong that the new Chancellor would himself make proposals for Prussian suffrage reform. In Hessen a new suffrage bill was introduced into the provincial diet but this unexpectedly turned out to decrease rather than improve working-class representation. The first public SPD protests against it brought into action sympathetic movements in Brunswick, which also had a three-class suffrage system. Next came Bremen and Mecklenburg. A ring of agitation had already been formed around Prussia when the Prussian SPD called a provincial congress at the beginning of January 1910.³

¹ *Protokoll . . . 1908*, p. 363.

² See above, pp. 243 f.

³ Schorske, *German Social Democracy*, p. 172.

Following the spirit of co-operation with the Liberals which had pervaded the party congress in 1909, Bernstein and his friends prepared a careful campaign to guide the tactic at the Prussian congress in the same direction.¹ But unexpectedly the Prussian spirit was much more militant. The idea of collaboration with the Liberals for a parliamentary suffrage campaign was unceremoniously thrown out. Instead the congress called, not for a parliamentary campaign, but for a 'suffrage storm'.

How, the radicals asked, could a successful campaign in parliament be launched when that parliament itself was so heavily and unfairly weighted against Socialist representation? Already the National Liberals were showing their hand; far from supporting a major campaign for equal manhood suffrage, it appeared that they were not even prepared to vote for such a measure if proposed in the legislature. The hopes for a 'popular front' following the break-up of the Bülow coalition had quickly faded, perhaps they had been an illusion all along; almost before the potential partners realized it, the usual polarization had again taken place. The middle classes turned sharp right, and the SPD more sharply to the left. This time the executive found itself almost alone. Instead of adopting the middle-of-the-road position of the old revisionist controversy, a majority of the executive—though the co-chairman, Paul Singer, was with the radicals—had to be taken in tow by the revisionists. And there were good reasons for it. So many previous debates had taken place over theoretical concepts, but this time there was a live issue and a very real threat of action to get something done. It was 1905 all over again, but the centre of the storm was now in Germany. The executive was forced to look to its defences, not only to its theory.

The dates are important. On 4 February 1910 the government published the Bethmann-Hollweg draft for Prussian suffrage reform. It satisfied no one. It tinkered with the system but did not alter it; the main provision was that a few groups—particularly academics—were moved up slightly from the bottom to the middle section of voters. Social Democrats and a few Progressives protested violently. *Vorwärts* rummaged in its arsenal of revolutionary phrases and called the bill a brutal and contemptuous declaration of war.

¹ *SM*, Vol. XIII, No. 3, pp. 1655-71.

Almost immediately demonstrations broke out in Berlin and the Prussian provinces. On 10 February the Chancellor and Prussian Prime Minister—the offices were vested in one and the same person—spoke in the Prussian *Landtag* in support of his proposals and was greeted by ‘*pfui*’—that most expressive of German epithets—from the benches on the Left. But even his half-baked measure did not pass into law unscathed. After some political bargaining the *Landtag* passed the bill on 16 March, but it was amended in the upper house (*Herrenhaus*) and the two houses became locked in disagreement. Thereupon the government withdrew the bill altogether, and things were right back at the beginning again.

Meantime the Socialist demonstrations went ahead. Each Sunday there were visibly more people in the streets than the week before. On 13 February the Berlin police president, von Jagow, threatened reprisals in a brusque edict in which he made the old-fashioned comment that the streets were exclusively reserved for traffic. There were clashes, and in Frankfurt on 27 February the first casualties. On 6 March the SPD scored a bloodless prestige victory by announcing a ‘suffrage promenade’ in sarcastic conformity with police instructions. Having drawn the forces of law and order to a park on the outskirts of Berlin, the promenade in fact turned into a massive gathering right in the centre of the town, with the police arriving breathlessly only at the end of the proceedings.¹ The Conservatives, however, took the incident very seriously, and called for reprisals.

Coinciding with these demonstrations were a series of strikes, trials of strength organized by the trade unions in the mining and building industries. It was never quite clear who was on strike and who was locked out; the fact remains that the year 1910 had nearly 370,000 workers involved in stoppages.² The two movements began to overlap in March, and the demonstrations were swelled by half-day strikers giving their open support to the suffrage campaign. Clashes became more frequent in Berlin and in the provinces. It was what Rosa Luxemburg had defined as a typically revolutionary situation: interaction of economic and political movements, a spirit

¹ The incident is described at length by Paul Frölich in Rosa Luxemburg, *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, pp. 496–8, and *Vorwärts*, 6–8 March 1910. In due course it became a landmark in the SPD’s calendar of its own revolutionary past, a sad yet comic German anniversary to match the 22nd of January 1905 in Russia. The SPD acutely felt the lack of a truly heroic chronology.

² Schorske, p. 180, note 32.

sufficiently aggressive among the workers to need large-scale troop movements in the coal-mining areas, and here and there the demand for a showdown. The lessons of 1905-1906 had apparently not been wasted after all, and demands were being made for the use of the mass strike as incorporated into the Social-Democratic programme at the 1905 Jena congress.¹

For Rosa Luxemburg the dog days were over. She was more than ready to take up her pen in support of a movement which conformed so precisely to all her predictions. Not only her pen; for the next three months she spoke continuously all over Germany in support of the suffrage campaign. She was so much in demand that at one stage she had to suspend her course of lectures at the party school.

... From the 'war front'... Day before yesterday, Tuesday, the 15th March, 48 evening meetings were arranged [all over Berlin] with the clear intention of providing some sort of action on the morning of the 18th. The speakers were all fourth and fifth rate, mostly trade-union officials! What is more, *Vorwärts* put out an advance prohibition on all street demonstrations after the meeting. I heard by accident at the party school on the 12th that they were short of a speaker in the fourth electoral district, I accepted at once, and so made my speech that same evening. The meeting was bursting at the seams (about 1,500 people), the mood excellent. Of course, I let fly good and proper, and this got a storm of agreement. Hannes [Diefenbach], Gertrud [Zlottko], Costia [Clara Zetkin's son] and Eckstein were all there; the latter, so he told me, had become converted to my view since yesterday.

Today got a telephone invitation from Bremen, a written one from Essen, to address meetings on the mass strike. Am seriously wondering if I should not chuck the school and move out into the country, to stoke up the fires everywhere.²

Next she toured the south. On 10 April she was back in Frankfurt to speak to a very large rally on 'the Prussian suffrage campaign and its lessons'.³ From there she moved to the Ruhr and spoke in mid-April in Essen and Dortmund under the aegis of Konrad Haenisch, a frustrated radical editor seething in one of the re-

¹ See Heinrich Ströbel's article in *Vorwärts*, 5 January 1910.

² Rosa Luxemburg to Luise Kautsky, 17 March 1910, in 'Einige Briefe', *IISH Bulletin*, 1952, Vol. VII, pp. 41-42.

³ *Der Preussische Wahlrechtskampf und seine Lehren*. This speech was re-issued as a pamphlet under the same title (Frankfurt 1910).

moter outposts of Social Democracy. This embattled meeting led to friendship and further collaboration.¹ Everywhere it was always the same theme: the suffrage struggle and how best to fight it. No wonder doing began to seem so much more exciting than teaching. All her letters testify to large crowds, enthusiasm, a universal desire to act.² But at the same time she was murkily conscious of the restraining hand of the executive. This was to be the crucial question in the later polemics. We do not know exactly what evidence she had, only that it left her convinced that the executive was secretly sabotaging the demand for action as early as the end of February.³ By the end of April she was back in Berlin.

In February, before she set off, she had written a challenging article which she called 'What Next?' ('Was Weiter?'). In this she analysed the confluent sources of radicalism in the present movement and proposed the next steps to be taken by the leadership. These consisted in encouraging the growth of the nascent mass-strike movement as much as possible, while launching, on the political side, an agitation for a republic; this would help to radicalize the masses further and sharpen the impending conflict between Socialism and society. In view of the subsequent controversy it is important to remember that this was never intended to be a practical demand capable of achievement, but simply a means of keeping the spring-loaded agitation fully taut. She always believed that it was the duty of Socialist leadership to set the agitational tasks just higher than the immediate practical possibilities. This, rather than any organizational function, was the leadership's role in Social Democracy. It was the same principle that she would try to make effective in the German revolution during the last three months of her life.

Vorwärts sent the article back to her on 2 March with the following comment: 'We have regretfully to decline your article since,

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 24.

² Apart from letters quoted and published in the Collections already cited, see *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya*, 1931, Nos. 2/3, pp. 119-34, containing nine letters from Rosa Luxemburg to Leo Jogiches between 1 March and 15 August 1910. These are of course part of the complete collection of her letters to Jogiches in IML (M) and were republished in *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya* as an illustration of the attitude of the German Left towards the mass strike (see Foreword by Vaks, pp. 119-24; also *Die Internationale*, August 1931, No. 6, p. 277).

³ 'During my journey to the Rhineland I got hold of a marvellous document about the famous gag on the discussion . . .', Rosa Luxemburg reported to Leo Jogiches. At the same time she repeated that 'the party executive is doing its best to kill the entire discussion'.

in accordance with an agreement between the party executive, the executive commission of the Prussian provincial organization (of the SPD), and the editor, the question of the mass strike shall not be elaborated in *Vorwärts* for the time being.¹

The mass strike was the central theme of the moment and Rosa wanted the article to appear in the SPD's *journal officiel*. She sent it next to *Neue Zeit*, where she knew that she had a pre-emptive right to the statement of her views. Kautsky took the article. He described it as 'very attractive and very important', but he also reserved the right to disagree with its conclusions and announced that he would do so publicly in due course, having no time just then. However, he refused absolutely to publish the section dealing with republican agitation. For a start, this 'set out from a wholly mistaken premise [*Ausgangspunkt*]. There is not a word in our [party] programme about the republic.' Though he constantly reiterated that there was no point in going over the well-known Marxist objections to any specifically republican agitation, he nevertheless took the trouble of writing several pages on the subject, quoting the warnings of both Marx and Engels against the distortion of dialectic totality through any over-emphasis on a limited and purely political aim.²

But Kautsky did not publish the article after all, and thereby loosened the first stone of an avalanche of recrimination between himself and Rosa Luxemburg which was to bury their long and friendly collaboration under an impenetrable mountain of abuse and misunderstanding. The exact reasons for his refusal never did emerge—at least in a version on which everybody could agree. Kautsky claimed that he would have published the article, possibly after some delay, but in the meantime decided to return it to her for reconsideration. 'I hesitated for quite a time . . . but left Comrade Luxemburg in no doubt that I thought the article a mistake. . . . The thought of publishing [it and my polemical reply] for the delight of our numerous common enemies was repugnant to

¹ 'Die totgeschwiegene Wahlrechtsdebatte', *LV*, 17 August 1910. The correspondence relating to these events gradually emerged in the course of the polemics, as both Kautsky and Rosa Luxemburg began to publish selected chunks of their private correspondence. As so often in the past, *Vorwärts* was unable to maintain its attitude unequivocally in the face of later criticism. In the supplement of 9 June the editors complained that 'all the talk of a ban on discussion of the mass strike and of the concept of the republic is [nothing but] ill-informed gossip'.

² 'Die Theorie und die Praxis', *NZ*, 1909/1910, Vol. II, pp. 566-7.

me . . . I tried to get her to renounce the appearance of her article.¹ Whether he acted on his own or under pressure from the party executive is not clear either. Rosa was convinced that the 'higher powers' of the party were behind it all, and that Kautsky merely applied their orders 'in his own sphere of power, the *Neue Zeit*'. Kautsky's letter to Rosa Luxemburg, with which he returned the article, has never been published—if indeed there was such a letter.²

Subsequent polemics clearly show that he was astonished by the unexpected fierceness of Rosa's reaction to his return of her article. But his attempts to play the whole thing down—he had not wanted to 'forbid discussion of the mass strike'; he merely thought the 'presentation of the republican arguments ill-advised'—were promptly seized upon by his embattled opponent, and exposed as ill-informed and inaccurate excuses. They were certainly made to seem like it. Thus he believed, until Rosa corrected him in public, that she had voluntarily withdrawn the remarks about the republic from publication after getting his unfavourable comments, and that consequently her accusations of cowardice against *Neue Zeit* were merely stones thrown in glass houses.³ He was unaware that she had published her advocacy of republican agitation in a separate article elsewhere. On 17 March, a week or so after Kautsky's original refusal, Rosa wrote to Luise: 'The article which Karl refused has been improved by me (I have made it clearer and sharper), and has already appeared in the *Dortmunder Arbeiterzeitung* (Konrad Haenisch). Leipzig and Bremen have already reprinted, and I hope others will follow.'⁴

In another letter to Konrad Haenisch, Rosa Luxemburg referred

¹ Ibid., pp. 335–6.

² Rosa Luxemburg, *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, p. 502; *NZ*, 1909/1910, II, 336. Frölich (pp. 200–1) tried to have it both ways. He followed Rosa Luxemburg and the orthodox Communist line of the 1930s as well; according to him, Kautsky 'gave way to party leaders', but his attitude none the less 'symbolized his own political *volte-face*'.

Writing to Jogiches early in March 1910, Rosa Luxemburg enclosed a letter from Kautsky on the subject, but this may of course simply be the one of which she herself later published an extract in *Neue Zeit* (see above, p. 421, n. 2.) and which was his original reply when she first sent him the article. Rosa herself was convinced that Kautsky himself retracted the offer to publish under pressure. She had no doubt that there was at least an unofficial round-robin by the executive about the mass strike, and on the whole I accept the evidence which supports this view.

³ *NZ*, 1909/1910, Vol. II., p. 337; Rosa Luxemburg's correction, *ibid.*, p. 568.

⁴ Rosa Luxemburg to Luise Kautsky, 17 March 1910, in 'Einige Briefe', *IISH Bulletin*, 1952, Vol. VII, p. 41.

only to the 'passage about the republic which he [Kautsky] did not want to accept . . . and can you imagine, K now accuses me of "deliberately passing him by"'.¹

Her reference in the same letter to Kautsky's 'incomprehensible botch-up' (*merkwürdiger Schwupper*) probably provides the clue to all the acrimony. There was the refusal to publish—not for the first time (see above, pp. 192-3), though never on as important a matter of principle as this. There was the disagreement on tactics—also not for the first time. Her respect for Kautsky's person had long gone by the board. But in addition Kautsky had not bothered to follow the fate of her article, had simply dismissed the matter after his refusal to publish, and had then attacked her in print—from behind, so she resolutely maintained. Worse still, he had taken to heart neither the vitality of the mass-strike movement nor the fact that this was her hobby-horse romping home with the colours of history on it. Such ignorance and lack of interest from a collaborator of twelve years' standing was unforgivable.

Never before had Rosa written with such fury about a fellow Socialist and former friend: '[Karl Kautsky] this coward who only has courage enough to attack others from behind, but I'll deal with him.' She continued for some months in this vein. The personal issue began to flag only in the following year, and Karl Kautsky was removed to the flaccid pantheon of Rosa's political opponents, to be pitied as much as condemned. 'One should feel sorry for him rather than be angry with him, after all he is only trying to defend himself in an extremely messy situation.' None the less, echoes linger; the name Kautsky could still on occasions rouse her to vituperation as few others could.²

In any case Rosa Luxemburg was determined not to be silenced, either in speech or in print.

Everything is going splendidly; I have already had eight meetings and six are yet to come. Everywhere I find unreserved and enthusiastic agreement on the part of the comrades. Karl's article calls forth a shrugging of shoulders; I have noticed this especially in Kiel, in Bremen, in Solingen with Dittmann. . . . Tell him that I well know how to estimate the loyalty and friendship involved in these tricks, but that

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 27, dated 8 November 1910.

² Compare the same touchiness on Lenin's part (below, p. 424) as well as Trotsky's. Seldom has such a mild man caused so much fury.

he has put his foot into it badly by so boldly stabbing me in the back.¹

Though greatly stimulated by personal pique, there was definite political purpose in Rosa's attitude. 'Let us hope that the whole discussion and its continuation at Magdeburg [the party congress in September 1910] will stimulate our friends and needle them into keeping on their toes against the "powers that be" [*Instanzen*]. In any case I considered it my duty to the party to proceed with ruthless openness.'²

When she received her article back from *Neue Zeit*, she had at once sent it elsewhere. The bulk went to Konrad Haenisch, who published it in his paper under the original title 'What Next?' on 14 and 15 March. She accompanied the manuscript with a summary of the situation as she saw it.

The party executive and the General Commission [of the trade unions] have already gone into the question of the mass strike and after long negotiations [the party] had to give in to the position of the trade-union leaders. In view of this the party executive naturally believes that it has to take in its sails, and if it had its way, would even forbid any *discussion* of the mass strike! For this reason I consider it urgently necessary to carry the topic into the furthest masses of the party. The masses should decide. Our duty on the other hand is to offer them the pros and cons, the basis of argument. I count on your support and that you will publish the article immediately.³

The article was no less than the beginning of a totally new—at least in the eyes of the executive—policy for German Social Democracy.

Our party must work out a clear and definite scheme how to develop the mass movements which it has itself called into being. . . . Street demonstrations, like military demonstrations, are only the start of a battle . . . the expression of the whole of the masses in a political struggle . . . must be heightened, must be sharpened, must take on new and more effective forms. . . . If the leading party lacks determination, [and fails to provide] the right slogan for the masses, then at once there will be disappointment, the drive disappears and the whole action collapses.⁴

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, pp. 156–7, dated 13 April 1910.

² *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 27.

³ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 26, to Konrad Haenisch. The letter clearly refers to the offer of the original article and is therefore wrongly dated by the editor as Summer 1910, when it should be approximately 10 March 1910.

⁴ 'Was Weiter?', *Dortmunder Arbeiterzeitung*, 14 March 1910.

For the first time Rosa Luxemburg openly advocated a new role for the party leaders—not as rulers, not as a party government, but genuinely as *leaders*, as the ‘advance guard’ of the proletariat in Lenin’s sense, but without the Jacobin element of control. Once more it was precisely the policy that Rosa Luxemburg was to follow when she found herself in a leading position after the German revolution.

The means with which she proposed to intensify mass action was, of course, the mass strike. In her anxiety to avoid the appearance of propagating an anarchist panacea—the particular bogey of both party and trade-union leaders—she over-emphasized the spontaneous element, thus going back to some extent on her previous insistence on the role of the leadership in guiding the movement. ‘Even within the class party of the proletariat every great and decisive movement must stem, not from the initiative of a handful of leaders, but from the determination and conviction of the mass of party members. The decision to carry to victory the present Prussian suffrage campaign . . . “by all means”—including that of the mass strike—can only be taken by the broadest sections of the party.’¹

Two factors thus determined Rosa Luxemburg’s attitude. On the one hand there was the need to push the party authorities by applying pressure from below, a pressure moreover that was objectively justified by events. In her article, and throughout the next few months, she pointed again and again to the fact that radical pressure was at the bottom of the party hierarchy, among the masses—a direct application of the Russian lesson of 1905-1906 as expressed in *Mass Strike, Party and Trade Unions*. The other factor, which again led to emphasis on the membership as opposed to the leaders, was the need to distinguish between her conception of the mass strike and the old anarchist idea of it as an exercise planned by the *illuminati*, a once-for-all panacea to be applied at the word ‘go’. She was never able to make the distinction valid in the eyes of her contemporaries, and even later commentators have all too readily identified Rosa Luxemburg’s notion of the mass strike with anarchosyndicalism.²

¹ Ibid., 15 March 1910. For an analysis of this ‘spontaneity’ and its importance, see below, pp. 532 ff.

² For instance: ‘Her politics were animated by a species of syndicalistic romanticism . . .’, George Lichtheim, *Marxism. An Historical and Critical Study* London 1961, p. 319. See also below, p. 498.

The contentious passage about the republic was offered on its own to her old friends at the *Volkswacht* in Breslau, where it appeared on 25 March 1910.¹ Kautsky's strictures on this section of her argument at least had the effect, not of making her withdraw it, but of separating it from the mass-strike analysis, with which it was in fact little concerned. But, though the slogan was different, the argument was ultimately the same: the need to extend the aims of agitation and to heighten political as well as economic demands as the revolutionary possibilities sharpened; in other words, not to drag after events but to precede them. Cleverly, the article was so shaped as to present the Prussian suffrage question as an attack by society on Social Democracy, not the other way round. Thus all along Rosa could speak, not of Socialist initiative, but of response.

[The forces of reaction can be attacked] in the clearest, most potent and most lapidary form if we emphasize those political demands in our agitation, which concern the first point of our programme, the demand for a republic. This has hitherto played a small part in our agitation . . . hitherto the working-class struggle in Germany was carried on not against this or that manifestation of the class state in particular, but against the class state as a whole; it was not splintered into [an attack on] militarism, monarchism and other lower-middle-class 'isms', but . . . presented itself as the deadly enemy of the existing order. . . . Precisely because the dangers of a republican illusion have been avoided so thoroughly by forty years of Social-Democratic preparation, we can readily today accord this plank of our political programme a higher place. . . . By emphasizing the republican character of Social Democracy we shall have one more opportunity to elucidate our general attitude in a comprehensive and popular manner . . . in the teeth of the united camp of all bourgeois parties.²

Both articles are broader in perspective and more radical in tone than the personal polemics which followed. The reason is simple. They were written in a period of mass demonstrations, and were to provide a means of maintaining the ever-heightening popular feeling. They applied to the present and not the past. The later polemics were both retrospective—less immediately relevant—and

¹ 'Zeit der Aussat', *Volkswacht*, Breslau, 25 March 1910.

² *Volkswacht*, Breslau, 25 March 1910. In the process of editing the article for separate publication, she had clearly taken into account Kautsky's criticisms of her original draft—hence the derision of any dangers to the over-all SPD programme that might be contained in her ideas.

recriminatory. Rosa Luxemburg was sensitive to popular mood—not only in terms of analysis but also in terms of tactical attitudes. Unlike Kautsky, who was basically a popularizer and an analyser, Rosa adjusted the substance and tone of her remarks to her particular purpose, whether tactical, polemical, historical, or whatever. This makes it more difficult, but also more interesting, to contrast her writings with those of Kautsky on one side and Lenin on the other, for their style and purpose hardly varied—different though they were. They had their style and they stuck to it—whereas Rosa was a writer of scintillating variety.

After these two articles, there followed a two months' break while Rosa stumped up and down western Germany making speeches and 'stoking the fires'. While she was away Kautsky exercised his option of disagreeing with her.¹ This criticism of an article he had tried to stifle was the stab in the back. He analysed the general situation quite differently from Rosa Luxemburg. 'The excitement of the masses is not nearly sufficient for such an extreme course . . . but it was certainly great enough for the stimulus provided by Comrade Luxemburg to produce isolated attempts, experiments with the mass strike which were bound to fail.'²

Unwilling to criticize a tactical proposal without benefit of a theory to cover the facts, Kautsky—for such was his way—went on to produce a doctrine to suit the occasion. It was *The Road to Power* brought to bear on the events of 1910. He used a military metaphor. The mass-strike enthusiasts were willing to do battle at all times and in all places, but the final choice would be the enemy's. The result could only be defeat and discouragement. He took as his model the Roman general, Fabius Cunctator, who had defeated Hannibal, and from this example he evolved a modern version of the strategy of attrition (*Ermattungsstrategie*). Let the street demonstrations go on by all means, but at the present level; for the moment there was no excuse for driving the movement artificially forward into a head-on clash with society. Instead let the party turn its mind to the coming *Reichstag* elections, where the fruits of the present radical sentiment could better be harvested—in terms of a greatly increased vote. Sooner rather than later the SPD would get that absolute majority which Kautsky had postulated as one of the conditions for what he called revolution. 'Such

¹ 'Was nun?' (What Now?), NZ, 1909/1910, Vol. II, pp. 33-40, 68-80.

² Ibid., p. 336.

a victory must result in nothing less than catastrophe for the whole ruling system.¹

Rosa replied as soon as possible after her return with a major piece of theoretical delineation between herself and Kautsky.² What had become of Kautsky, 'the theoretician of radicalism', the man who had only very recently written that, 'since the existence of the German Reich the social, political and international contradictions have never been stronger and might . . . very possibly create conditions under which a mass strike with the support of the unions could topple the existing régime'? Was it merely the desire for an empty victory—over unimportant anarchist illusions about the mass strike, the 'hollow trumpetings of Domela Nieuwenhuis, which no one took seriously'? It was not her or anyone else's agitation that had produced the call for mass action, but the situation itself. And why was Kautsky speculating about Roman history in the middle of a proletarian mass action? Caution was if anything the job as well as the besetting sin of the official leadership; not the task of a distinguished and respected Marxist thinker. 'As a brake, Comrade Kautsky, we don't need *you*.' There was perhaps still a chance that his lapse was temporary, that like many others he had become besotted with *Reichstag* elections. Let him grasp this last opportunity to achieve revolutionary rehabilitation!³

The dreary and increasingly personal polemic dragged its way across the pages of *Neue Zeit*. As the editors pointed out, Rosa Luxemburg could hardly complain that she was not given enough space; in spite of the fact that she had found it necessary to go elsewhere for her major tactical expositions, she none the less occupied one fifth of the space of *Neue Zeit* in the course of 1910.⁴ She turned more and more to a Leninist type of offensive against Kautsky, throwing both his writings and his letters into the arena. Personal polemics and Socialist tactics became hopelessly mixed up. Rosa's early puzzlement at Kautsky's attitude gave way to resent-

¹ Ibid., p. 77.

² 'Ermattung oder Kampf?' (Attrition or Collision?), *NZ*, 1909/1910, Vol. II, pp. 257, 291 (27 May, 3 June 1910).

³ An amusing sideline to these polemics was the argument about Roman history. Rosa quoted Mommsen, the great German historian of Rome, against Karl Kautsky and then wrote round to various friends for a copy of the book on which Kautsky had based his own interpretation of Roman history to see if the text could not provide a further opportunity for a crushing reply.

⁴ Editorial note to 'Zur Richtigstellung', *NZ*, 1909/1910, Vol. II, p. 756.

ment and exasperation as the editor of *Neue Zeit* elaborated his own views at greater length.¹

Then in the summer a new element entered the debate. The southern SPD leaders, particularly Wilhelm Keil in Baden, took advantage of the disarray in the hitherto solid radical front. Having been the party scapegoat for so many years, they now at last went over to the offensive. Either reform or revolution, they wrote mockingly; but don't dither, choose.² They themselves naturally opted for reform with wicked pleasure. The SPD executive in Baden, already notorious in the party for its annual support of the provincial government's budget, now issued a public declaration to the effect that this policy would continue come what may. This was grist to Kautsky's mill. Instead of arguing with Rosa Luxemburg and struggling with the delicate and difficult question of revolutionary action, he could revert to the old euphoric state of concern with internal affairs, with maintaining the purely conceptual purity which he held to be so important. In a Social-Democratic 'government' whose power depended on the maximization of exclusiveness and of abstention from society, Kautsky was the Home Office's Public Relations Officer *par excellence*. In July he suggested to Rosa Luxemburg that their debate might conceivably be put back—and he hoped forgotten—in order to 'avoid anything that appears as a quarrel in the Marxist camp . . . [in view of the Baden declaration] it is the duty of all revolutionary and really republican-minded elements in our party to stand together and push aside our differences in order to make a common front against opportunism.'³

Rosa Luxemburg refused. She was no longer interested in the dreary pleasures of beating frayed and dusty southern carpets when far more important issues were available. This refusal to join in the southern witch-hunt produced a further spate of acid comments. Kautsky elaborated his disappointment in an article wittily entitled 'Between Baden and Luxemburg', in which he accused Rosa Luxemburg of insisting on polemics about her own second-rate

¹ The summary of Kautsky's polemics was in *NZ*, 1909/1910, Vol. II: 'Was nun?', pp. 33-40, 68-80; 'Eine neue Strategie', 332-41, 364-74, 412-21; 'Zwischen Baden und Luxemburg', 652-67; 'Schlusswort', 760-5. Rosa Luxemburg's polemics against Kautsky, *NZ*, Vol. II: 'Ermattung oder Kampf', pp. 257, 291; 'Die Theorie und die Praxis', pp. 564, 626; 'Zur Richtigstellung', p. 756. Mehring's polemic, *NZ*, Vol. II: 'Der Kampf gegen die Monarchie', p. 609, 29 July 1910 (though Rosa was not mentioned by name) and Rosa's reply, 'Der Kampf gegen Reliquien', *LV*, 9 August 1910.

² Wilhelm Keil in *SM*, Vol. XIV, No. 3, p. 1186.

³ *NZ*, 1909/1910, Vol. II, p. 564.

preoccupations when there was vital internal work to be done.¹ It was the most important of Kautsky's polemical formulations of the period, for it exposed the real difference between him and Rosa, which was to carry them into bitterness and contempt for each other right through the war. 'When we look at the Duchies of Baden and Luxemburg on the map we find that between them lies Trier, the city of Karl Marx. If from there you go left across the border, you come to Luxemburg. If you turn sharp right and cross the Rhine, you reach Baden. The situation on the map is a symbol for the situation of German Social Democracy today.'² By implication Kautsky's own centre position was identified with that of Marx. He never for one moment gave up the belief that his views were the only orthodox expression of Marxism. It was this central location of Marx more than anything that eventually earned him the lasting and lively hatred of the Bolsheviks, who had long ago carried Marx off to the left.

But Rosa was not the one to cede vacant ground to her opponents. She was perfectly willing to bring the situation in south Germany within the scope of her argument. But unlike Kautsky she did not think of Prussia and Baden as two separate problems with only a decision of priority to be made between them. For Rosa Luxemburg the whole Baden question was not only a chronic drug-resistant symptom of the old revisionist disease, but was linked directly to the more interesting question of a static or an advancing party tactic. It was no use merely to condemn or weep over breaches of SPD discipline when something much bigger was at stake. For the situation in the south, far from being an isolated evil, was causally connected with the state of the party as a whole.

When does the party bother with what happens in the south? When a world-shaking scandal takes place in the matter of the budget—but the party as a whole *never* bothers with the daily activities of the party leadership, of the caucus in the provincial parliament, of the press in the south. . . . For twelve years already the party has been on the defensive against all revisionist tendencies and merely plays the role of the night watchman, who only appears and sounds the alarm when there is a disturbance in the street. The results show that by these means the evil cannot be removed. . . . Not through formal prohibitions or through discipline, but only by the maximum development of mass action whenever and wherever the situation permits, a mass action which

¹ NZ, 1909/1910, Vol. II, pp. 652–67.

² Op. cit., p. 667.

brings into play the broadest masses of the proletariat . . . only in this way can the clinging mists of parliamentary cretinism, of alliances with the middle classes, and the [rest of such] petit-bourgeois localism be got rid of.¹

Though this was the same situation which was agitating Kautsky, she presented it in a form from which he could take little comfort.²

Relations between Rosa and Kautsky were now so bad that she no longer wrote to *Neue Zeit* directly, but used her young friend Hans Diefenbach to act as an intermediary; the unfortunate but loyal youth wrote a series of stiff and awkward notes to Kautsky to inquire whether further replies on her part would be published or not.³ As far as Rosa Luxemburg was concerned, the great pillars of SPD ideology had turned out to be nothing but a heap of sophistries attractively glued together, which had now fallen apart under the pressure of the suffrage campaign. The whole concept of revolution, indeed the very use of the word by Kautsky, proved to be meaningless; it had only to come into contact with a real revolutionary situation to break down into its constituent syllables, so many daring sounds without real meaning. Rosa never quite recovered from this eye-opener. For behind the particular failure lurked a more general one: if the leadership were not serious about this, how much more of the whole programme of defiance would prove to be merely words? So the contrast between leaders—individuals with evident human failings—and the happily anonymous and solid masses, was sharpened by the experience of the suffrage campaign and its consequences. The greater her disillusion with the definable 'establishment', the more she emphasized the prophylactic role of the conceptual masses—until in 1914 they too let her down, and she had to resort to a concept of the masses in its own way almost as arbitrary as Lenin's very different concept of the proletariat.

The break with Kautsky also meant that Rosa's main supporter in the party had become her enemy. Bebel could now count on Kautsky for his assistance in keeping the wretched woman quiet. 'Dear Rosa must not be allowed to spoil our plans for Magdeburg . . . I shall see to it that the dispute will be relegated . . . to

¹ 'Die Badische Budgetabstimmung', *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, August 1910.

² For a further discussion of Rosa Luxemburg's writings on the Baden question, see below, pp. 438-40.

³ Hans Diefenbach to Karl Kautsky, no date (presumably Autumn 1910), IISH Archives, D VII, 425.

obscurity.¹ Victor Adler rejoiced. He had 'sufficiently low instincts to get a certain amount of pleasure from what Karl was suffering at the hands of his friend. But it really is too bad—the poisonous bitch will yet do a lot of damage, all the more because she is as clever as a monkey [*blitzgescheit*] while on the other hand her sense of responsibility is totally lacking and her only motive is an almost perverse desire for self-justification. Imagine', he wrote to Bebel, 'Clara already equipped with a mandate and sitting with Rosa in the *Reichstag*! That would give you something to laugh about, compared to which the goings on in Baden would look like a pleasure outing.'² Mehring, too, supported Kautsky. He saw nothing in Rosa's suggestions but a confusion of tactics; anchored in his knowledge of the Marxist texts, he agreed with Kautsky that by raising the issue of the republic, the Socialist aims of the revolution would be forgotten.³ Rosa did not hesitate to polemicize against Mehring as well; the result was that she once more fell out with the old man, and this breach was not repaired until his severe illness eighteen months later.⁴

Such support as Rosa had came from an odd and motley group, and not always because they fully agreed with her proposals. Clara Zetkin was completely loyal as always; Konrad Haenisch found this an excellent way of baiting the local bureaucracy in the Ruhr which he so hated. In Bremen Pannekoek and Henke gladly threw the local organization behind any radical agitation. Her friend Marchlewski, who had again taken up his German party activities after his return from Poland, supported her whole-heartedly. But now drawn up on the other side were all the radicals of 1909, the entire editorial board of *Neue Zeit*, including Rosa's friend

¹ August Bebel to Karl Kautsky, 6 August 1910, IISH Archives, D III, 140.

² Victor Adler to August Bebel, 5 August 1910, in Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel*, p. 510. But Bebel was not going to eat humble pie before any 'we told you so' from Vienna. 'All that "Rosary" isn't as terrible as all that [compared to the] unbridled opportunism of the south Germans . . . with all the wretched female's squirts of poison I wouldn't have the party without her', he replied tartly. Bebel to Adler, 16 August 1910, *ibid.*, p. 512.

One of the results of Rosa's agitation in the first half of 1910 had been a suggestion that she and Clara Zetkin might be considered as SPD candidates for the *Reichstag* elections of 1912, a suggestion that found some echo among her friends (Dittmann papers, SPD Archives, Bonn), but which the executive managed to squash without much difficulty. Rosa herself showed no interest in the idea at all, especially as her contempt for the SPD leadership increasingly focused on its parliamentary representatives.

³ *NZ*, 1909/1910, Vol. II, p. 610.

⁴ 'Der Kampf gegen Reliquien', refused by *NZ* and published in *LV*, 9 August 1910. See also below, p. 463.

Emmanuel Wurm (henceforth to be degraded to *Würmchen*), her colleagues at the party school, and of course the executive and most of the bureaucracy of the party. Rosa Luxemburg's role was the loneliest of all in any self-regarding political party—that of an individual! The fact that freedom of expression was a cherished right only made her loneliness more obvious.

Abroad, too, the majority of Socialists supported Kautsky; the Austrians, the PPS, and the Belgians sent him letters of encouragement. Even the Bolsheviks, of all the principal parties of the International the most likely to back Rosa Luxemburg, expressed non-committal surprise. For Lenin, Karl Kautsky was still the fountain-head of Marxist orthodoxy. Leo Trotsky, self-appointed broker among the Russian factions and with his own sources of information in each group, wrote to Kautsky at the end of August 1910:

A few words about your polemic with Rosa Luxemburg. In this matter, as in everything else, the Russians are split in their view. The Mensheviks declare themselves perfectly in agreement with you, but are trying to interpret your point of view as a 'change' from your previous tactical intransigence to . . . Menshevism! According to my friend Kamenev who has just come to see me from Paris, the Bolsheviks, or more correctly Lenin (no one else speaks for them), are of the opinion that you are quite right in your judgement as to the present political situation, but that the nature of the agitation which Lux [*sic*] is carrying on could be both very useful and important for Germany. In order to get unqualified approval for your point of view, Lenin suggests that you put up a motion at the next party congress demanding sharp agitation and pointing to the unavoidable nature of revolutionary struggle [in the future]. I at any rate have not met a single Comrade—even among the Bolsheviks—who has come out openly for Luxemburg [*der sich mit Luxemburg solidarisch erklärt*]. As far as my humble self is concerned, I think that the governing tactical factor with Luxemburg is her noble impatience. This is a very fine quality, but to raise it to the leading principle of the [German] party would be nonsense. This is the typical Russian method. . . .¹

Trotsky was perfectly right. It was the Russian method, openly advocated only since 1906.

Kautsky was not above accepting other people's formulations which fell conveniently into his lap. He may have used this one to develop another of those attractive antitheses when he came to

¹ Leo Trotsky to Karl Kautsky, 21 July 1910, IISH, D XXII, 68.

analyse, in 1912, what was then already known as the Marxist 'Centre'. The middle position was the only correct position for the German party. On each wing he saw two distinct types of impatience, both disastrous. On the left there was rebel's impatience (as suggested by Trotsky, though Kautsky never acknowledged any debt for the phrase). This meant pre-empting the natural development of the revolution everywhere, and bringing about the catastrophe he had predicted in *The Road to Power* by artificial and premature means. Interestingly, Trotsky was also the first to identify the 'Russian' origin of Rosa's attitude. It goes back beyond that date of course—to 1898; her whole style of argument, her passion for action, was always more Russian or Polish than German. Was this the clue which Kautsky and his friends picked up at the beginning of the war, when they accused Rosa of being pro-Russian?

Diametrically opposite on the right wing of the party was the 'statesman's impatience' of the revisionists, which also wanted action but of a different kind—action *in* society and not against it. Kautsky recognized that the source of these two kinds of impatience was identical even though the objects were different. Both sprang from an inability to find satisfaction within a static and isolated Socialist world. There was a strong if unconscious element of self-defence in Kautsky's attitude. He was the intellectual king in a Socialist world which had become real only through the organization of the SPD, through the power and policy of the executive and its local bureaucracy. Without organized isolation Kautsky's importance as a theoretician would be finished; there would no longer be anyone to whom his formulations applied. And so it happened. After the war, with the SPD executive absorbed into society, Kautsky found himself relegated to the role of a has-been without ever really knowing why. Ironically, it was only the hatred of Lenin and the Bolsheviks for their former hero Kautsky, echoed by the German Communist Party, that kept him alive.

Though Kautsky saw the two opposing forms of impatience as simultaneous forces, trying to pull the party from its balanced seat in the saddle of history, he could not resist the usual Marxist temptation of presenting his analysis as a dialectic, in terms of time: statesman's impatience dominated in the period of prosperity and conciliation between 1895 and 1907, while rebel's impatience, in his view, took over thereafter. But his dating—which was any-

how unnecessary to his argument—also happened to be wrong. The radical swing in the party was directly connected with the early part of the Russian revolution and could be dated from 1905, not 1907. However, the earlier date would have identified Kautsky too closely with the radical wing, and made it difficult for him to claim a continuous 'central' position.

Like so much of Kautsky's thinking, the 'two impatiences' were seductive but over-simplified conceptions. Rosa Luxemburg's impatience was a state of mind, a reaction to a replete and self-satisfied ideology, but not in itself a policy. In spite of every wish to hurry on the revolution, she never gave way to any optimism about its short-term success. The important but subtle difference between Kautsky and Rosa Luxemburg was not so much about the *timing* of Socialist revolution but over its *duration*. He saw it as a cataclysm, as did most of the members of the Second International—whether real or abstract; while Rosa Luxemburg was the first to develop a theory of revolution that was not so much spontaneous as long drawn out.¹ At the same time Rosa shortened the period of waiting for the revolution to begin, while Kautsky prolonged it. On the face of it the difference between them might seem no more than a quibble—was the suffrage agitation preparatory to, or part of, 'the revolution'?—but in fact revolutionary doing and preparatory waiting were manifestations of two different ideologies. Kautsky failed to understand Rosa Luxemburg because he had been converted to the view which his friend Victor Adler, and Bebel too, had always preached, that her motive was personal ambition. From 1910 onwards he joined the chorus of those who believed that what she wanted was a splinter party, however small, in which she could dominate. It was one of those half truths which are the stuff of tragedy, and which prevent politics from becoming a science.

The polemics had pre-empted the realities, like hyenas which fill the empty battlefield with their howling. The suffrage campaign finally collapsed in May. The government withdrew its reform bill and the SPD executive tightened the reins. All that Rosa Luxemburg could hope for was to raise the whole issue at the coming party congress at Magdeburg. Perhaps the resonance of the

¹ Not to be confused with Parvus's and Trotsky's idea of a permanent or internationally self-generating revolution. Before 1914 Rosa merely thought of revolution as a lengthy process rather than a short and sharp event, without any special assumptions about its form or extent. See below, pp. 541-3.

previous months might still enable her to challenge the executive retrospectively, to call for a public accounting. But the realities had changed. After May the polemics no longer had anything but purely personal significance.

In the event, Rosa Luxemburg never got an opportunity to challenge the executive at the congress—her intention had been foreseen and the executive found means of forestalling any post-mortem on the suffrage campaign. Instead discussion was concentrated on the more congenial question of south German revisionism, especially the Baden declaration. August Bebel, that master tactician, did his best to shunt the whole question of executive policy into a discussion of future tactics rather than past activities. He was not going to let Rosa Luxemburg spoil his congress.¹ When it became clear that some discussion of the suffrage campaign was inevitable the executive, in accordance with well-established practice, put forward a harmless resolution on the subject in its own name. Using the strongest words to condemn the iniquitous electoral system in Prussia, it pledged the party to use 'all the means at their disposal in the suffrage struggle until complete political equality has been achieved'.² Thus the executive speakers could adroitly reply to their critics that the official resolution was in fact more thorough-going and revolutionary than their own; by calling for the use of 'all the means', the tactic was kept flexible as hitherto. Nor was this wholly cynical; many delegates followed Kautsky into the self-delusion that the SPD hovered over the issue, not like a tired and dusty cloud but like a hawk, waiting alertly to pounce at the first sign of social catastrophe.

Rosa Luxemburg and her motley group of supporters dissented from this tranquil self-satisfaction. As soon as the executive resolution had been put up, they offered their own, which emphasized the need for 'bold and thorough mass action of the working population, using every means, among them the political mass-strike'. They called for elaboration and propagation of the mass-strike notion in the party press and at meetings.³

How fluid the combination of radicals was at this time can best be seen by the fact that the resolution was in the names of Rosa Luxemburg, Konrad Haenisch, a number of later centrists, and a considerable number of unknown delegates. Clara Zetkin, who

¹ See above, pp. 431-2. ² *Protokoll . . . 1910*, p. 178 (Resolution No. 91).

³ *Protokoll . . . 1910*, pp. 181-2 (Resolution No. 100).

warmly supported the resolution from the floor, did not sign it. The situation was symptomatic for the future. Henceforward Rosa Luxemburg would have to rely on different supporters for different issues; with only a very small nucleus of radicals as a steady base.¹

Rosa Luxemburg had to make substantial alterations in her resolution in order not to have it lost. The phrase 'propagate the mass strike' was struck out even before she could speak on its behalf, and her critics were easily able to convince the congress that even 'elaboration' of the mass strike was nothing but propaganda and agitation under another guise. In the end the whole of the second part of the resolution calling for the specific discussion of the mass strike was also reluctantly lopped off by the sponsors. Only the harmless first part—after critical textual comparison with the wording of the Jena resolution of 1905—was passed. It was almost total defeat.

All that remained was to use her speech on the resolution's behalf in order to put forward her ideas. Her unexpectedly mild persuasive tone showed how tenuous the radical position was at the congress. Her proposals were educational rather than critical. 'We must give the masses . . . a clear and calm assurance from the start: you are not defenceless against the frivolous provocations of armed reaction, we have means with which to answer such provocation in an extreme case, and these means are the withdrawal of labour, the political mass strike.'²

Anxious to obtain some consensus of agreement, Rosa Luxemburg reserved her only public polemic, not for the executive but for the anarchists. Flogging a dead horse in public was an accepted form of political sadism. She poured scorn on the notion that she was propagating the mass strike as a miracle means of achieving a quick victory. This of course was what the trade-union leaders feared most; by reassuring them Rosa hoped that some of the

¹ Schorske sees the threefold division of the SPD during the war already reflected in the line-up from 1910 onwards. This seems to be far too schematic. Even the prominent circles of the later Left, Rosa Luxemburg, Clara Zetkin, Franz Mehring, Pannekoek, Marchlewski, and others, were not always unanimous in their attitude. Liebknecht was an occasional supporter. When Rosa Luxemburg took a relatively 'popular' stand, as in the Morocco question in 1911, she obtained much more support than in the debates of 1910 and 1913, and many of those who supported her in the one year did not support her again in the other. For an elaboration of this analysis, see J. P. Nettl, 'The German Social-Democratic Party as a political model', *Past and Present*, No. 30, particularly pp. 71 ff.

² *Protokoll . . . 1910*, pp. 427, 428.

sentimental, instinctive horror of the mass strike might be allayed. 'Making the rounds with the general strike idea *à la* Nieuwenhuis has not produced one significant success, no one has taken the slightest notice. And the country where the general strike has been least applied is France, where the syndicalists talk about it incessantly.'¹ But even this reasoned and restrained argument did no good. When she said that only the masses—and their willingness to fight—could ultimately decide whether a mass strike is or is not to take place, a prominent trade unionist answered her indignantly that only the properly constituted authorities could plumb the mood of the masses. Besides, the only people competent to make such a decision were the General Commission and the party executive—and formally he was of course perfectly correct.² All sorts of other arguments were brought to bear. It was claimed that the SPD party congress had no right to dictate either to the Prussian party organization or to the trade unions. Indeed the latter, basing themselves on the Mannheim resolutions of 1906, vigorously opposed even the mention of the words 'mass strike' in public. The idea that the masses might be left leaderless in their willingness to go ahead—which for tactical reasons Rosa Luxemburg had only adumbrated as a remote possibility and not as a recent historical fact—was indignantly refuted. 'Such an idea only proves that Comrade Luxemburg has not worked in an organization and has no knowledge of how such things work.'³

So nothing new emerged, and there was evidently nothing to be gained by restraint or sweet reason. Rosa Luxemburg would not forget it. The congress was radical only when it came to attacking the budget voters in the south, for this was good old party stuff, internalized thunder and lightning. Rosa, too, joined in this annual witch-hunt, but she gave it the same special twist as in her earlier writing. The stale question of internal discipline was put in strict dialectical harness, compressing the policy of alliance with middle-class parties in the south with the suffrage agitation in the north. To the Kautsky formulation of 'either—or', Rosa replied 'both'.

Wherever they are rightly condemned, the events in Baden are noticeably treated in the main as a major breach of discipline . . . pleasing as this firmness might be, it is none the less essential to point out that with this the question is not by any means exhausted. . . .

¹ Ibid., p. 428.

² Ibid., p. 441 (speech by Leinert).

³ Ibid., p. 442.

We cannot expel the delegates in the provincial parliaments and simply ignore the party organizations behind them. . . . Something far sadder than breach of discipline is at stake, a confusion between policies of middle-class reform and the Social-Democratic class struggle. . . . The second root of the Baden errors is in the excessive reliance on parliamentarianism at the expense of mass agitation. . . . Here we are talking about the possible ill effects of the Baden policy on the next *Reichstag* election, when the very existence or death of Social Democracy in the future is at stake. . . . Recently an imposing mass action in the Prussian suffrage agitation was simply broken off in order to enable us to devote ourselves to these elections in the coming year. In north Germany we have this mania for *Reichstag* elections to which the entire internal party life is sacrificed; in the petit-bourgeois south this same cult of parliamentarianism comes out as a suitably distorted caricature.¹

She followed the same line as the congress, though more politely. If every question were turned into an over-all vote of confidence, criticism of any action by the leadership became impossible—and though her remarks were about the Baden party Rosa clearly meant the SPD as a whole.

Even if we ignore the fact that the actual achievements of the 'practical' policy in Baden are nothing but miserable and artificially inflated details [*Lappalien*] . . . the question still remains, what has all this to do with voting for the budget? . . . Wherever our comrades appeared before the workers to justify themselves for their budget voting, they presented their entire parliamentary activities as justification . . . and not merely the budget vote. . . . If the questions had been put individually in local assemblies [of workers] these would have been in a position to judge solely on the question of refusing or supporting the budget, and their answer might have been quite different. When one is talking to the Baden working classes and turns to them with the same arguments with which any German Social Democrat normally appeals to the class interests of the proletariat, you get the same echo as with the workers in all other parts of Germany.²

These comments stung. The south German contingent, sensing her general unpopularity, shouted her down and she was unable to complete her speech. The revisionists had become the executive's bailiffs, a fact which was not lost on Rosa and which she, from a temporary position of strength, was able to use against the executive a year later.

¹ 'Die Badische Budgetabstimmung', *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, August 1910.

² *Protokoll* . . . 1910, pp. 305-6.

Nothing shows more clearly than these debates how far Rosa Luxemburg's whole conception had moved away from the party's ideology. Where once she too had pilloried the south Germans simply as revisionists, she now saw the situation in the south as an extreme symptom—a 'suitably distorted caricature'—of the SPD as a whole. Revisionism was essentially a matter of internal party theory and tactic, while revolution and the road to it were part of the dynamic relation between party, masses, and society—and much more important. This was the lesson of the Russian revolution applied for the first time in a purely German context. Party unity, at one time the main plank of the majority against the revisionists, now took second place. The question of open disagreement within the party was openly posed and answered—in the affirmative. It is not surprising that the executive and the 'theoretical revolutionaries' clustered around *Neue Zeit* were quite unable to accept or even understand such a radical departure from sacred principles. There was no room in the SPD for unabashed innovations; change had to come through the back door disguised as the child or at least the nephew of the 'good old tactic'. It was precisely this pretence which stuck in Rosa Luxemburg's throat. What had been tacitly permitted to the revisionists had at least to be allowed to the radicals as well, without any threat of expulsion—not *tu quoque* but *aut nos!*

'Very well, alone.' Rosa Luxemburg did not possess the nexus of political friendships which had always kept Bernstein within ear-shot of the power centre even after the party had condemned his views. To the large majority of German Socialists she seemed an extremely quarrelsome female who did not hesitate to round on former friends if they dared to disagree with her. But she was stimulated rather than put off. Since 1907 she had become much more self-sufficient. If need be she would dispense with political friends altogether. There would be no more compromise; she could raise her standard much higher—only those who measured up to it would be admitted to the inner circle of friends. Otherwise she preferred to deal with relatively non-political people like Hans Diefenbach.

At the same time she was back in the maelstrom of politics after an absence of nearly three years. Her barn-storming in the early months of 1910 produced a flood of invitations to address meetings,

which she accepted or refused according to her mood and the time available. She disliked too many interruptions to her teaching courses at the school, to which she had, of course, returned. Her health, too, troubled her intermittently. But for any important subject she was always willing to give up weekends to address meetings. Any suggestion that Social Democracy was likely to be misrepresented by unsuitable speakers always brought her hotfoot on to the scene.¹

The standard of public speaking in the SPD was weighty but dull. Local party officials had difficulty in obtaining interesting visitors from Berlin; members of the executive were usually busy and exceptionally pedestrian as speakers. Rosa Luxemburg had the reputation of drawing large crowds and always created an atmosphere of excitement and euphoria which was becoming the rare exception at party meetings. As a result she benefited from a curious political symmetry: as she lost her influence with the executive and the party leaders, she was more than ever in demand at the periphery of party life. Did this situational facility contribute to the development of her 'democratic' views? But the enthusiasm of local officials and members was deceptive; Rosa frequently mistook the response of her audience for genuine radical fervour. Her trade-union critics were right when they accused her of being totally unfamiliar with organization and its peculiar problems; she really had no conception of the dullness and routine in the lives of people like Dittmann in Solingen, Henke in Bremen, or Haenisch in Dortmund, and of the warm welcome which local branches extended to any interesting or distinguished speaker, especially a woman who could speak of revolution at first hand.

Nearly all her meetings struck her as 'grandiose'; if such was the spirit then it was high time to make up for her fallow years. 'I have promised myself in future to agitate far more than in the last seven years', she wrote in the summer of 1910. In typical Luxemburg style she was determined to carry the war right into the enemy's camp. In August 1910 she attended in person the Baden party congress at Offenburg—at which the offensive decision to support that year's state budget was taken. When Adolf Geck—another radical

¹ Thus she was anxious to accept an otherwise most inconvenient invitation to a fraternal meeting in Leipzig with Guesde and Vaillant, representing the French Socialists, during the 1911 Morocco crisis. About a series of such meetings in Berlin she wrote indignantly that 'it is a scandal that all we get from France are representatives of the anarchists instead of the real Social Democrats'.

lost in a desert of revisionism—offered her a series of public meetings she accepted enthusiastically. She addressed four of these and only interrupted her tour reluctantly to attend the International congress at Copenhagen. As soon as this was over she returned for a further six meetings, until she had to flee to Berlin to recover from an ‘excess of strange hands and faces’.¹

The SPD executive viewed these activities with a jaundiced eye, not to speak of the Baden party leadership who considered Rosa their particular enemy. Bebel, whatever his private views, was far too skilful a politician to be influenced by personal considerations. In 1910, when he wanted something from her, he could still be ‘*zuckersüss*’ (sweet as sugar); he confessed, at least in private, that he would rather put up with her than any revisionist. But a year later a further incident took place which for all practical purposes ended the personal contact between Bebel and Rosa Luxemburg for good. ‘Nowadays Comrade Bebel can only hear with his right ear’, according to Rosa’s own medical aphorism.²

In the summer of 1911 another international crisis suddenly blew up, the most serious to date. Under the personal direction of the Emperor, the German Foreign Office was anxious to flex its muscles in order to intimidate France. What Palmerston had been able to do with impunity for England in the middle of the nineteenth century, the German government now copied—was Germany after all not entitled to parity? On 1 July 1911 the cruiser *Panther* was sent to Agadir in Morocco to ‘protect’ local German interests. Camille Huysmans, the secretary of the International Socialist Bureau, sent a round-robin to all member-parties asking for their reaction to the impending crisis; these differed considerably except for a general desire to play it cool. Some favoured a general conference of delegates to the International Bureau, others a meeting of the representatives of the countries immediately involved; the rest failed to suggest anything.³

¹ Her original attempt to get Merker, the Baden party secretary and a young disciple, to organize meetings had foundered on his gloomy prognostications of failure. The invitation from Geck was an unexpected windfall. She left Merker in peace until in 1913 she returned to the attack and he actually organized a number of meetings for her which nearly ended his party career. Adolf Geck in time became a close friend of Rosa’s, one of the many to whom she served as a shoulder on which he could pour out his political and financial troubles.

² Reported by Friedrich Stampfer, ‘August Bebel’ in *Die Grossen Deutschen*, Vol. III, p. 559.

³ The correspondence with the various national parties was reprinted as an appendix to the protocol of the SPD Congress: *Protokoll . . . 1911*, pp. 464 ff.

In Germany the correspondence was dealt with by Herman Molkenbuhr, a senior party official. Bebel was again in Zürich, now his second home. In his reply to Huysmans, Molkenbuhr stressed the factors tending to peace, and pointed out that mutual class-interests made a war between two capitalist powers unlikely. 'These arguments served to disguise the fact that the SPD's preoccupations were elsewhere—with the forthcoming *Reichstag* elections. 'The executive was strenuously concerned to make good the defeat of 1907, to prove Kautsky's theorem that votes were more effective than mass strikes. In these circumstances Molkenbuhr's letter was reasonable, though lacking in sophistication.

If we should prematurely commit ourselves to such an extent, and allow the Morocco question to take precedence over matters of internal policy, so that effective electoral weapons can be used against us, the consequences will be unforeseeable. . . . We must not allow internal developments—fiscal policy, agrarian privileges, etc.—to be pushed into the background. But that is precisely what would happen if we preach the Moroccan question in every village. All we would achieve is merely to strengthen the counter-tendency.¹

Towards the end of July England officially took a hand in the crisis and this produced just the chauvinistic reaction in Germany which Molkenbuhr had feared. Bebel wrote to Huysmans that if necessary a meeting of the Bureau might well be called if things should really reach an extreme state. But the executive admitted later that, if at all possible, it preferred to avoid a special meeting of the International Bureau on this issue.

In the party itself there was a certain amount of spontaneous reaction to the crisis. Meetings were called, especially in Berlin, and were well attended.² The crisis moved on towards its climax in the last week of July without any very resolute indication of policy from party headquarters.

Suddenly a lurid light was thrown on the matter from a totally unexpected quarter—Rosa Luxemburg. As representative of the SDKPiL in the International Bureau, she had received Huysmans's letter as well as a copy of Molkenbuhr's reply. On 24 July, at the very height of the crisis, she published the latter, together with a stinging attack on Molkenbuhr's arguments. The internal views and attitudes in the SPD executive were now public property—

¹ Ibid., pp. 466-7.

² *Vorwärts*, 4 July 1911.

precisely what Rosa Luxemburg desired. For primarily she was not concerned with the international crisis at all.

It is possible to maintain different points of view regarding the necessity or otherwise of a conference of the International Socialist Bureau as a result of the Morocco affair . . . but the attitude of the German party to the Socialist-sponsored efforts in other countries clearly has not been exactly encouraging. Therefore it is all the more interesting to examine the reasons which have brought our party to take this line. Improbable as it may seem, these are once again—consideration for the impending *Reichstag* elections.¹

She admitted that it was probable that government circles and the right-wing parties would use the Morocco affair to whip up nationalist sentiment. For that very reason it became all the more necessary to counter this with widespread agitation to 'expose to the masses the miserable background and dirty capitalistic interests which are involved'. Success or otherwise in terms of votes was of secondary importance. 'The real purpose of the *Reichstag* elections is to enable us to spread *Socialist education*, but this cannot be achieved if we narrow the circle of our criticism by excluding the great international problems, [but rather we must] advance condemnation of capitalism to all corners of the world . . .'² The favourable situation in which the SPD was entering the *Reichstag* elections was not a political accident, but 'the fruit of the entire historical development inside and outside Germany, and the advantage of *this* situation can only be lost if we continue to regard the entire life of the party and all the tasks of class struggle merely from the point of view of the ballot slip'.³

It all sounded extremely self-confident, almost brazen, coming from someone who only the year before had apparently been cut down to size. Yet on the day after the article had gone off to the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, Rosa wrote to a friend that 'she had no idea if she had done right' in sending it. While she had no doubt that her view was correct, the self-confidence of the style was more apparent than real. There was after all no one now whose advice she could seek.

This eruption was followed a month later by a specific criticism of the agitational leaflet on the Morocco crisis which the SPD had finally issued, more to calm the critics than to raise any substantial

¹ *LV*, 24 July 1911.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

public protest.¹ This time Rosa did not hesitate, for she had found out that the official appeal had been written by none other than Karl Kautsky. Once more the party was treated to a Kautsky-Luxemburg polemic with Rosa now wearing the jousting colours of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* and Kautsky as the official spokesman of the party in *Vorwärts*—for the first time since 1905.²

At the beginning of August Bebel came back from Zürich in a fury. The executive knew that this time there was no diverting the discussion into soothing generalizations about future policy. A sharp personal conflict was inevitable, and the executive decided to turn defence into attack by launching a personal campaign against Rosa Luxemburg just before the congress, so that this aspect should be uppermost in people's minds. A circular was sent to all delegates in which the executive's case on Morocco was repeated, with a respectable batch of documents annexed; Rosa Luxemburg was accused of indiscretion, disloyalty, and breach of party discipline. Bebel coolly evaluated the prospects of conflict. 'Probably I shall have an argument with the Lux. at Jena. No doubt you will be pleased', he remarked to Victor Adler.³ And at the congress he performed superbly, in a tone of simple, homely confidence, conjuring up an atmosphere reeking of old comradely loyalties which went far deeper than the present discontents, and which Rosa and her like were subtly precluded from sharing.

Yes indeed, comrades, some of you seem discontented with your government and find that it has not done what it should and ought, that the fires will have to be stoked to drive it forward . . . it is nothing but a sign of vitality when the party bestirs itself and shows its dissatisfactions. . . . But on the whole you have generally been satisfied with us; after all you have always re-elected us. . . .⁴

As far as the International was concerned, 'if there is one nation—and I say this without wanting to offend any other—which has always done its damndest for the International at all times and as a matter of priority, then it is the German party'.

¹ 'Unser Marokko-Flugblatt', *LV*, 26 August 1911. The executive's manifesto is in *Vorwärts*, 9 August 1911.

² Rosa Luxemburg, 'Um Marokko', *LV*, 24 July 1911; 'Friedensdemonstrationen', *LV*, 31 July 1911; 'Die Marokkokrise und der Parteivorstand', *LV*, 5 August 1911; 'Unser Marokko-Flugblatt', *LV*, 26 August 1911; 'Wieder Masse und Führer', *LV*, 29 August 1911; 'Zur Erwiderung', *LV*, 30 August 1911. Karl Kautsky in *Vorwärts*, 4 August, 5 August, 29 August, 30 August 1911.

³ Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel*, p. 539.

⁴ *Protokoll . . . 1911*, p. 173.

... It is clear that Comrade Luxemburg committed a serious indiscretion when she published Comrade Molkenbuhr's letter in *Leipziger Volkszeitung*. . . . If negotiations are ever to reach a successful conclusion, then discretion is a matter of honour for all concerned. Moreover, Comrade Luxemburg seriously misled other comrades by publishing Molkenbuhr's letter without its first sentence, and by claiming that the letter expressed the opinion of the party executive.¹

In the best British tradition, Cabinet solidarity was being sacrificed under pressure and some of the blame at least was allowed to fall personally on Molkenbuhr's shoulders, but not a quarter of what Bebel unloaded on to him in private.²

The tactic now was to annihilate the political person of Rosa Luxemburg.

Now you know what to make of the fighting methods of Comrade Luxemburg. She did the same thing to Kautsky last year. I told him then, when he let himself be dragged into a public debate: 'you would have done better to have put your pen away for the duration.' Comrade Luxemburg did not hesitate to publish Kautsky's purely private letters. From that moment on I swore—not so much to cease writing to Comrade Luxemburg, which would be impossible—but never to write anything of which she might later be able to make use. . . .

He rounded on her directly at the end—for the rules of debate at SPD congresses were none too strict in requiring speakers to address the Chair. 'That is the result of your behaviour. You have managed to get us to agree with the opinion which the International Socialist Bureau has of you. It was I, as I said, who advised them against their original intention [of not sending you any more correspondence].'³

Rosa Luxemburg conducted a spirited defence of her own position, and counter-attacked strongly on the question of principle. There was little difficulty in answering the charges of misrepresentation. By quoting Bebel's own words she showed that his version of favouring a Bureau meeting could not be substantiated. 'If

¹ Ibid., p. 216.

² When Adler wrote to Bebel that as far as he could remember, Molkenbuhr's letter had been very sensible, though obviously not intended for publication, Bebel replied that 'things would never have got so far if Molkenbuhr were not a miserable hack. . . . I made things clear enough to him, but what is the use if one is far away, and only hears of things much too late, and when one's answers and suggestions are bound to be overtaken by events.' Adler to Bebel, 7 August 1911; Bebel to Adler, 9 August 1911, in Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel*, pp. 538–9.

³ *Protokoll* . . . 1911, pp. 216–18.

my eyes do not deceive me [these quotations] show a negative intention, but I never dare not to believe anything which the party executive asserts; as a faithful party member I accept the old saying *credo quia absurdum*—I believe it precisely because it is absurd.’¹

The question of indiscretion, though less important, had to be pursued at greater length.

I do not only dispute the fact that it is an indiscretion on the part of a party member to take issue in public with the activities of the party executive in the interests of the entire party, but I go further and declare: the party executive has been guilty of neglect of duty, of not putting the whole case before us. It was its duty to publish the correspondence and to submit it to the criticism of the party. Quite honestly we are not dealing simply with formalities, but with a big question; whether the party executive has been guilty of neglect or not, protest actions against Imperialism or not. . . . If Molkenbuhr’s conception [of what was to be done] was not that of the party executive—and I accept this in view of the latter’s statement—then I ask what was it that induced you to do nothing in the meantime when something should have been done.²

Nor was this the first time. Rosa Luxemburg—she had a tenacious memory—harked all the way back to the China crisis of 1900 when, in the middle of the revisionist controversy, she had already made a mild protest against the executive’s unwillingness to agitate publicly against imperialism.³

Then too the party executive did not produce the right action at the right moment. Is it really so improbable to assume that the reluctance to act this time was again on account of the *Reichstag* elections? Do we not hear year in year out about the need to consider the *Reichstag* election as a reason for everything which is done or not done? . . .

In closing I want to say that in the entire Morocco affair the party executive is not the prosecutor, but the defendant, the one who has to justify itself for the sins of omission. (Quite right.) Its unhappy situation could not be made clearer than in the statement of Comrade Müller. In my whole life I have never seen a picture of such pathetic confusion. (Laughter—Bebel: ‘Take it easy’.) This is why I did not take your accusations badly, I forgive you and offer you the fatherly advice . . . (Bebel: ‘Motherly advice’—great amusement), do better in future!⁴

¹ *Protokoll* . . . 1911, p. 204.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Protokoll* . . . 1900, p. 116.

⁴ *Protokoll* . . . 1911, p. 204.

Having dealt with the personal side, Rosa tried to speak next day on the broader international question. The executive had followed the government's official line in ascribing the seriousness of the crisis mostly to Lloyd George's intervention in a purely Franco-German clash of interests. 'But this is quite irrelevant. On the contrary, I maintain—and I think everyone with me except perhaps Molkenbuhr—that it was not this or that speech by an English minister, but the fact that a cruiser was sent by the Germans to Agadir, that is to say the factual interference of the German Empire in the Morocco affair, which should have been the moment for us to develop our protest action against the Morocco danger.'¹ Here for the first time then was the germ of the notion that the main enemy is at home, a view which was to be developed during the war and immortalized by Liebknecht in his famous slogan.²

But it would have been too much to expect the personal aspect to be settled on the first day. As the congress went on, Rosa Luxemburg and Bebel got more and more in each other's hair. 'If you would just listen and not interrupt me constantly', she said to him amid general disapproval. And to his reference regarding their future correspondence, she replied: 'This precaution is quite unnecessary. You, Comrade Bebel, know as well as I do that the letters we write to each other are not normally fit for public reproduction. (Great amusement.)' Finally Rosa Luxemburg brought out the weapon which circumstances had placed in her hand the year before.

I have had at least one satisfaction. During your speech, Comrade Bebel, did you perhaps notice from where you got your great ovation? (Laughter.) The applauding hands were all Bavarian and from Baden. (Great disturbance. Shouts—'Is that so bad?' 'Cheek, unbelievable.' 'That is what we call party unity.') . . . I don't grudge you your laurels from the south, you have richly earned them. (Applause and hisses.)

And hisses were rare in the fraternal SPD!

This time, however, Rosa Luxemburg was not alone. Moral sentiment ran deep where militarism and war were concerned. A strong undercurrent of revulsion against cowardice tumbled away the barriers which divided people in more practical matters. Apart from her newly-won friends of the year before, many future centrists and friends of *Neue Zeit*, and even some right-wingers

¹ *Protokoll* . . . 1911, p. 247.

² See below, p. 642.

like Eisner and Frank, leapt to her defence. Ledebour, the cross-eyed Don Quixote who strongly disliked her person and her policies, for once defended her vigorously.

No one has to answer here except the executive. As I prophesied a snare has been prepared for Rosa Luxemburg out of the publication of her letter. All this is merely being used to disguise the real heart of the matter. Comrade Luxemburg and I have often been in conflict; as I know Comrade Luxemburg—and as I know myself—we shall be in conflict many times yet, in the course of a long and fruitful career for the party—I hope. . . . Such mass demonstrations against war and warmongers as have taken place are not the achievement of Müller and the executive . . . the main credit must go to Rosa Luxemburg for her criticism and to her alone.¹

The row did not stop in the German party. Under pressure from the SPD executive, the International Socialist Bureau examined the implications of Rosa Luxemburg's action. Huysmans had been in Berlin on 30 July, where he had again received Bebel's views on the unlikelihood of war—and on the evil behaviour of Comrade Luxemburg. According to Bebel, 'the only war over Morocco will break out at home'.² Persuaded that the status of the German party was at stake, Camille Huysmans rather unwisely suggested that Rosa Luxemburg might be barred from access to private correspondence, other than that which concerned the Polish party directly. He did not realize that his private musings would also become public property, for Bebel did not hesitate to use such useful ammunition. Rather unctuously he pointed out that it was only due to him that this prohibition was not put into effect—and thus in turn committed his own breach of confidence.

The suggestion of sanctions against Rosa Luxemburg in the International Bureau was a pure red herring; the Bureau was not entitled to take such action, and Rosa Luxemburg knew it perfectly well. 'Huysmans is the employed secretary of the International Bureau who carries out our work and has hitherto done so splendidly. The decision as to who gets copies of information from the International Bureau is not within his competence, but is a matter for the Bureau itself, of which I am a member—and I would like to see the Bureau that would dare to cut me off from its information.'³ As to Huysmans's statement that Rosa Luxemburg had committed

¹ *Protokoll* . . . 1911, pp. 212-13.

² Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel*, p. 539.

³ *Protokoll* . . . 1911, p. 205.

an indiscretion, and not for the first time, this was ironed out at the meeting of the International Socialist Bureau in Zürich shortly after the congress on 23 September 1911. Rosa Luxemburg asked him sharply if he had really said all this to Bebel. He awkwardly admitted it, but stated that the proceedings of the Jena congress, which he attended, had convinced him that he had expressed himself badly because of his poor command of German. All he had wanted to say to Bebel was that indiscretions had indeed taken place but were not necessarily all due to her.¹ This unexpected involvement in the factional struggles of the SPD was painful and bewildering. The *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, which had carried Rosa's articles, also had a position to defend and published a cutting reply to Huysmans's awkward attempt to extricate himself.²

The official last word on the matter was spoken in a communiqué by the International Socialist Bureau. 'After the agenda had been dealt with, a few questions of a private nature were raised. In particular it was decided that all communications from the Secretariat to the members of the Bureau must be treated as confidential, except those published by the Secretariat itself.'³ So honours were even. The motion of censure on Rosa Luxemburg in the International Socialist Bureau had been officially withdrawn, while she conceded to the majority that she had sinned in form and in future would not publish private correspondence relating to BSI affairs. Both Lenin and Plekhanov were among those in favour of maintaining discipline.

The Jena congress was one of those rare occasions when an event outside the party shook groups and individuals out of their usual alignment. The issues were profound and emotional: bureaucracy against membership, executive against democracy—but all overlaid with the issue of war and peace. Many of those who supported Rosa did not subscribe either to her activities the year before, or to her oppositional tactics in the coming years. By raising the issue himself, Bebel had perhaps performed a useful service; many of the accumulated resentments in a party with great hopes but little immediate prospects could be shaken out and everybody disperse feeling better. An occasional explosion was salutary as long as it could be contained; the SPD was not yet ready for a strait-jacket.

¹ *Vorwärts*, 27 September 1911.

² *LV*, 28 September 1911. For Rosa's relationship with the Leipzig paper at the time, see below, pp. 460–1.

³ *Bulletin Périodique du BSI*, Brussels 1912, No. 8, pp. 129 ff.

Rosa Luxemburg

by

J. P. NETTL

In Two Volumes

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

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Photographs by courtesy of: International Institute of
Social History, Amsterdam; Zakład Historii Partii, KC
PZPR, Warsaw; SPD Archives, Bonn.



Rosa Luxemburg, about 1907

XI

IN OPPOSITION, 1911-1914

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

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

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

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

³ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 28.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁴ *LV*, 16 June 1911.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

² *LV*, 1 March 1912.

³ *LV*, 2 March 1912.

⁴ *LV*, 4 March 1912.

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

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

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

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

¹ *Vorwärts*, 25 February 1912.

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

³ *LV*, 15 March 1912.

⁴ *Protokoll . . . 1912*, pp. 141–2.

⁵ *NZ*, 1912/1913, Vol. I, p. 628.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³ Loc. cit., 18 September 1911.

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

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

¹ *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, 7 September 1911.

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

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

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

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

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

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

² See Grünberg, *op. cit.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

² See below, pp. 609, 617.

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

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

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

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

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

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

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

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

¹ *Protokoll* . . . 1913, p. 292.

² *Ibid.*, p. 544.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ *Protokoll . . . 1913*, pp. 543-4.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ Kautsky Archives, IISH.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Commenting on the increase in unemployment, Rosa Luxemburg wrote:

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

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

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

¹ *Gleichheit*, 1 January 1912.

² *SDK*, 27 December 1913.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁴ *Vorwärts*, 24 May 1914.

⁵ *SDK*, 6 June 1914.

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

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

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

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

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

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

² *Ibid.*, p. 691.

³ *SDK*, 16 June 1914.

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

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

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

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

² *Ibid.*

³ *LV*, 21 February 1914.

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

⁵ *LV*, 23 October 1914.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ *Vorwärts*, 5 July 1914.

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

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

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

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

¹ *Volksrecht*, Freiburg, 9 March 1914.

² See below, pp. 594–6.

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

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER XI

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

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

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

¹ From *Vorwärts*, 22 February 1914.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And now sentence me.

XII

RETURN TO THE OFFENSIVE – THE TRANSITION TO A NEW THEORY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

² See above, pp. 295–8.

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

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

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

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

¹ Ibid., p. 414.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 413.

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

⁵ *Protokoll . . . 1910*, p. 429.

⁶ *Protokoll . . . 1913*, p. 291.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ 'Massenstreik', p. 443.

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

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

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

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 437–8.

² *Ibid.*, p. 442—my italics.

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

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

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

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

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

² 'Massenstreik', p. 442.

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

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

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

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

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

² ‘Massenstreik’, p. 445.

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 446.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ 'Massenstreik', p. 436.

² Ibid., pp. 458-9.

³ Ibid., p. 444.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

One aspect of Rosa Luxemburg's historical argument was

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

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

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

¹ See below, pp. 558, 581.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ See above, pp. 427 ff.

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

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

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

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

¹ Ibid., p. 513.

² Ibid., p. 513—my italics.

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

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

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

¹ Ibid., p. 511.

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

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

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

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

¹ Ibid., p. 531.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, p. 592.

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ Ibid., p. 288.

² Cf. below, pp. 707-8.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

² *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, p. 165.

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

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

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

² *LV*, 6 May 1911.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, p. 179.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ See above, p. 433.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

1917

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

XIII

POLES AND RUSSIANS, 1907-1914

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Rosa Luxemburg's self-portrait, painted about 1911

Freunde 15. XI. 12

Werter Gesonnte Heuße!

Ihre Brief v. 9 d., in dem Sie mich
auffordern, in der Bremer Bürgerzeitung
gegen Radek, zu polemisieren, hat
mich nicht wenig verwundert. Sie
spielen darauf an, dass ich Ihnen
so einen Jahr, als Sie fragen, ob
ich Bleiben noch bei wäre, geant-
wortet habe, die seien ein großer
~~Witz~~ Daraus handelt es sich
um einen Artikel verfaßt von
Lathen Artikel, den Sie ange-
blich zu meiner Verteidigung auf-
veröffentlicht hatten, also um
einen persönlichen Tritt, den Sie
mir angethan hatten. ~~Ihre per-~~
~~sonliche~~ Kränkungen habe ich
sehr geringe Empfindlichkeit und
sehr kurze Gedächtnis. Jetzt
handelt es sich um etwas ganz
anderes. Ihr Blatt hat ~~schon~~
seit Kurzem wieder sehr persönlich

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ *Protokoly*, p. 290.

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

³ See above, pp. 509–13.

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

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

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

¹ See above, pp. 380–1.

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

³ Above, pp. 396, 403, note 1.

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

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

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

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

² Ibid.

³ See above, pp. 133, 376.

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

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

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

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

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

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

³ Jogiches letters, 10 July 1909, IMI, (M). For the school, see Schapiro, *The CPSU*, p. 111.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rather than this, Rosa Luxemburg almost preferred Pilsudski who at least had a programme and not merely a bundle of tactics.³

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

² Unpublished letters, ZHP, Warsaw.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ Ibid., p. 117.

² Ibid., p. 114.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

² See above, pp. 378-84.

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

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

¹ Jogiches letters, IML (M).

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

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

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

² Jogiches letters, IML (M).

by her own increasingly oppositional stand in German party affairs.

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

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

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

² See below, pp. 598–9.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

² Sobczak, loc. cit.

³ ZHP, Fund 179, No. 623.

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

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

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

¹ L. Schapiro, *The CPSU*, p. 120.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

² See above, p. 470.

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

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

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

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

¹ *Vorwärts*, 14 September 1912.

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. The Central Committee has no right to decide or to announce who belongs to the RSDRP or not. The [Polish] Central Committee has no connection with and does not belong to our party, whose Central Committee I represent.
2. The split has already been in existence since Hanecki *was excluded* from the Polish Central Committee in 1910.⁵

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

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

² *Ibid.*, p. 176.

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

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

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

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

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

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

² *Sotsial-Demokrat*, 25 January 1913.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But it was circumstances more than any effective action by

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ See below, p. 747.

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ See J. Ciszewski, 'Wspomnienia z roku 1918', *Z Pola Walki*, Moscow 1928, Nos. 7/8; also *Z Pola Walki*, 1938, No. 4, pp. 39–63.

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

XIV

THE WAR

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

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

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

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

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

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

³ Carl Grünberg, loc. cit.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³ See Schorske, p. 294, n. 26.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

² Letter to Konstantin Zetkin, end of 1914.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ *Selected Works*, Vol. II, p. 561.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ Letter to Konstantin Zetkin, January 1915.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁴ *Die Internationale*, 15 April 1915, p. 10.

out by the criminal police department, not the state prosecutor's office. The *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, with good official connections, reported that the arrest was due to the fact that Rosa Luxemburg—'the red Prima Donna'—had organized meetings in Niederbarnim.¹ Karl Liebknecht spoke in the Prussian *Landtag* in support of his 'close party friend'. 'It shows the nature of our *Burgfrieden*, the peace on the home front. [But] we don't even bother to complain that this highly political—in a party political sense—sentence imposed in peace-time should suddenly be carried out in spite of the *Burgfrieden*. . . . I know that my friend Luxemburg can only feel honoured by this execution of judgement, just as I do. . . .'² Liebknecht's great one-man propaganda campaign had begun; for the first time speeches in the *Reichstag* and *Landtag* were really being made 'through the window', not to convince the listeners in the room but the readers and listeners outside. The role which the old SPD caucus had publicly acknowledged but never in practice accepted was now carried out by one man, with a lonely and thorough obstinacy of which the Earl of Strafford would have been proud. With Rosa Luxemburg behind bars, his main intellectual stimulus had gone. He was now more alone than ever.

However much she may have told her personal friends that she wanted time to write and think, it was a most unfortunate moment from a political point of view to be immured in prison. 'Half a year ago I was looking forward to it, now the honour falls on me much as an Iron Cross would fall on you.'³ Rosa's attitude to the practical aspects of political life was always somewhat equivocal; she disliked the physical pressure of meetings and multitudes, yet at the same time these were a concrete manifestation of her fundamental political beliefs—democracy, the people in action. But at this moment her removal from the political scene was too great a blow to the opposition to be supported with her usual equanimity. Still, *Die Internationale* was ready; now in prison would come 'the study of the war' which she 'naturally' wanted to

¹ See *Vorwärts*, 20 February 1915.

² *Berichte über die Verhandlungen des Preussischen Haus der Abgeordneten*, XXII Legislative Period, II Session 1914-1915, Berlin 1916, Vol. VII, column 8754.

³ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 74, letter to Hans Diefenbach, 1 November 1914.

write, and at last perhaps the outline of the book on economics from her school lecture notes.¹ The study of the war became *The Crisis of Social Democracy*, known more generally as the *Junius-broschüre* because of the pseudonym Junius. She also wrote an answer to the critics of her *Accumulation of Capital*—another job that had had to be left for an unexpected period of peace and quiet in the midst of war.²

Rosa always loosened up in prison, as though her political personality were normally held together only by the pressure of life. It was almost as if everything now had to grow to fill the political vacuum, and the component parts of her personality became separated from each other in the process. Rosa the recluse, the thinker, the botanist, and the literary critic emerged and floated away as extensions of Rosa the woman. There was a sudden upsurge of letters to friends, all carefully tailored to suit the personality of the recipient. To her housekeeper, Gertrud Zlottko, Rosa wrote roughly in unsentimental peasant tones: 'Your resigned tone really doesn't go down with me. . . . Pfui, Gertrud, no point in that! I like my people to be gay. Work is the order of the day; do your bit and for the rest don't take things to heart. . . . Keep your spirits up.'³ To Luise Kautsky she was 'a perpetually serious person from whom people always expected something

¹ Ibid. She never did the latter; only the outline remained and was published with a few comments and additions by Paul Levi in 1925 (*Einführung in die Nationalökonomie*). See below, pp. 828–9.

² In a letter to Dietz, the party publisher, written after her return to prison for the second time in July 1916, she outlined her literary plans for the duration of the war as:

'1. A complete work on economics with the title *Akkumulation des Kapitals* consisting of the original work together with an appendix, *Eine Antikritik* [a reply to criticisms], and

2. A series of entirely popular essays under the collective title, *Zur Einführung in die Nationalökonomie* [Introduction to Political Economy], and

3. I am in the process of translating the Russian book by Korolenko, *Die Geschichte meines Zeitgenossen* [History of my Contemporary] into German.'

(Rosa Luxemburg to J. Dietz, 28 July 1916, from the Barnimstrasse prison.) The letter is marked as 'answered on 14.8.16'; from other evidence we know that Dietz turned down all her suggestions. The letter was printed as an appendix to Max Hochdorf, *Rosa Luxemburg*, Berlin, n.d.

The Korolenko translation was published elsewhere during the war, but both the 'Antikritik' and the 'Introduction to Political Economy' had to wait until after Rosa's death. The 'Antikritik' first appeared as an appendix to a new edition of the *Accumulation of Capital*. (See *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, pp. 177–8, E. Wurm to Frau Dr. Luxemburg dated 6 January 1916, turning down her offer in the form of an article for *Neue Zeit*.)

³ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 185, dated 25 May 1915. To help keep these spirits high, Rosa drew funny pictures for her on the tops of her letters and encouraged the other woman to do the same.

clever—worse luck . . . I have to have *someone* who believes me when I say that I am only in the maelstrom of world history by accident, in fact I was really born to look after a chicken farm. You have to believe it, do you hear?’¹

Not a line of her letters was wasted. Even the normal routine letters from prison include a factual account of her life (especially factual in this letter which was smuggled out, again through Mathilde Jacob):

. . . After two weeks I got my books and permission to work—they didn’t have to tell me twice. My health will have to get used to the somewhat peculiar diet, the main thing is that it doesn’t prevent me working. Imagine, I get up every day at 5.40! Of course by nine at night I have to be in ‘bed’, if the instrument which I jack up and down every day deserves the name.

But political pepper was freely strewn about too. ‘You’re probably delighted by Haase, for whom you always had a soft spot . . . he’d never have found that tone if Karl L[jieb knecht] hadn’t given him a dig in the ribs, which shows that it can be done.’² Already the octopus grip of Rosa’s personality made itself felt in her letters. Rosa’s feeling for and hold over her friends was to grow prodigiously during the isolation of the long months behind bars.

But there was always another important aspect to her activities: her practical contact with the struggle outside. Following the effort of the previous months, this was at its lowest ebb during the first nine months of 1915. Germany seemed to be winning the war, and a number of SPD members began to feel the itch of Germany’s civilizing mission in French revolutionary terms, as something to be carried forward on bayonets. At the same time the SPD executive inevitably mounted a counter-attack against the party opposition—what remained of the old, and what had begun to manifest itself of the new. In Württemberg the *Land* organization had simply taken over the opposition *Schwäbische Tagwacht* as

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 172, dated 18 September 1915.

² *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 140, letter to Marta Rosenbaum dated 12 March 1915. The latter was one of those people all too rare in the SPD—endlessly kind yet without any obsessive or contentious political views of her own to regulate and get in the way of friendship. Rosa herself later referred to her correspondent as ‘my dear Marta with the golden heart’ (*ibid.*, p. 169, 4 January 1919). Out of the agreeable and helpful acquaintance of 1915 there grew within a year a very close friend for whom Rosa even found time in the hectic last weeks of her life, and whom she trusted absolutely. See also Benedikt Kautsky’s introduction, pp. 17–19.

early as November 1914 and, in view of the success of the coup, the Reich executive supported it gladly.¹ Elsewhere, too, the last embers of independence on the part of local papers were stamped out as far as possible. *Vorwärts* was harder to tackle. The party's arbitration tribunal, the Control Commission, was well left of centre; its senior member was still Clara Zetkin and 'it was no use appealing from the devil to the devil's own grandmother . . .'.² But the executive merely bided its time before launching a coup against the remaining recalcitrants on the paper; restraint in publication was no longer enough, the government wanted genuine and enthusiastic support for official policy. The French and English examples of Socialist partnership in war-time government, which the SPD executive quoted with so much envy, were unfortunately misleading. No real share of power, at local or central level, was ever offered by the German government, only verbiage and trappings; but in the absence of spontaneous enthusiasm for the government the need for disciplined labour support was all the greater.

Against the monolithic majority the opposition could only muster individual protest, the impact of private conscience; to start with, a whole opposition group was a rare accident in any locality. Between Luxemburg and Liebknecht on the one hand and the executive majority on the other, stood the 'Centre'. These men were unhappy about the majority's unanimous certainties but they were also repelled by the violence, the doctrinaire intransigence, of the Left which seemed to them to ignore all war-time reality. They too were by no means a homogeneous group.³ Some, like Bernstein and Eisner, opposed the executive only because they were convinced, English-type pacifists. Others were more revolutionary but they felt they must wait for conditions to approximate once more to their beliefs. All were deeply attached to party unity. In March 1915 came a still more severe test of loyalty versus orthodoxy than in August or December 1914; for the first time the *Reichstag* was now voting, not the special war credits but the normal annual budget, the obstacle at which the SPD had always balked as a matter of

¹ W. Keil, *Erlebnisse*, Vol. I, pp. 306-7; also Ossip K. Flechtheim, *Die Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands in der Weimarer Republik*, Offenbach 1948, p. 13.

² Scheidemann, *Memoiren*, Vol. I, p. 268.

³ For a contemporary account see Eugen Prager, *Die Geschichte der USPD*, Berlin 1922.

course. War or no war, this was the occasion for the traditionalists to speak their mind. Liebknecht was joined by Otto Rühle in his negative vote, but thirty others now abstained. A special amendment to the old rule of unanimity had been accepted by a reluctant executive on 3 February 1915, to avoid further defections to Liebknecht. Most of the centrists still saw Liebknecht as a cantankerous crank, of the same lurid hue as Rosa Luxemburg in her fight with Kautsky in 1910. Opposition there might yet have to be, they argued, but not this way; not deliberate provocation to which there could be only one effective reply. In August 1915 once more there was the same grouping over the same vote, except that Rühle now abstained instead of voting with Liebknecht; the latter was alone again.

In April *Die Internationale* came out; a philosophy to clothe the action. In the strongest tone Rosa Luxemburg's leader 'Der Wiederaufbau der Internationalen' ('The Rebuilding of the International') laid down what would have to be done, and not done.

The new version of historical imperialism [as amended by the leadership of the SPD] produces an either/or. Either the class struggle is the all-powerful *raison d'être* for the proletariat even during the war, and the proclamation of class harmony by the party authorities is blasphemy against the very life interest of the working classes. Or the class struggle even in peace-time is blasphemy against the 'national interests' and the 'security of the fatherland'. . . . Either Social Democracy will get up before the bourgeoisie of the fatherland and say 'Father, I have sinned' and change its whole tactic and principles in peace-time as well. . . . Or it will stand before the national working-class movement and say 'Father, I have sinned' and will adapt its present war-time attitude to the normal requirements of peace. . . . Either Bethmann-Hollweg [the German Chancellor] or Liebknecht, either imperialism or Socialism as Marx understood it. . . . The International will not be revived by bringing out the old grind [*die alte Leier*] after the war. . . . Only through a cruel and thorough mockery of our own half-heartedness and weaknesses, of our own moral collapse since 4 August, can the re-creation of the International begin and the first step in this direction can only be the rapid termination of the war.¹

August the 4th could no longer be forgotten or forgiven; it must be burnt out from the party, along with those responsible. As a functioning organism of Social Democracy the Second Inter-

¹ *Die Internationale*, April 1915, pp. 6-7.

national was dead; its leaders had betrayed it. But the idea was alive as long as there were a few people who maintained its principles untarnished.

'The genuine International as well as a peace which really corresponds to the interests of the proletariat can only come from the self-criticism of that same proletarian conscience, by the conscious exercise of its own power and of its historic role. . . . The way to power of this sort—not paper resolutions—is simultancously the way to peace and to the rebuilding of the International.¹

It was here that Rosa Luxemburg differed from Lenin. He saw the collapse not only in terms of a few treacherous leaders—though that too²—but because the whole loose federal structure of the International had contributed to its undoing. The passion for size, for unity at all costs, had destroyed the real unity of discipline and of thorough adherence to revolutionary principles. There could be no question of reconstituting the old International under new leaders; a *different* International was required, containing only those who accepted its tight organization as well as its new ideals.³

Lenin's view was simpler, less sophisticated, than Rosa Luxemburg's complicated cataclysm. In his own mind he had long equated opportunism in matters of principle with opportunism in organizational questions; the failure of the SPD and of the International was simply due to a particularly virulent strain of the old, old disease of opportunism. Although shattered at first by the events of 4 August, he quickly recovered. Unlike Rosa Luxemburg, who groped for new and deeper causes hitherto unknown for a moral and political cataclysm on a unique scale, the mere understanding of which taxed her great powers to the full, Lenin was merely pre-occupied by the *size* of the problem; its nature was familiar enough. He made his diagnosis and through it passed on to the remedy—a split, a new organization; his old precepts for organizational integrity had been triumphantly vindicated. It was satisfying to have been proved right so completely. Thus, while Rosa Luxemburg

¹ Ibid., pp. 9–10.

² ' . . . the claim that the masses of proletarians turned away from Socialism is a lie; the masses *were never asked*, the masses were misled, frightened, split, held down by the state of emergency. *Only* the leaders could vote freely and they voted *for* the bourgeoisie and *against* the proletariat.' (Lenin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXI, p. 405.)

³ See Lenin's report on the Zimmerwald Conference, 5–8 September 1915, in *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXI, pp. 350–5; also *Sozialdemokrat*, Geneva, Nos. 45/46, 11 October 1915.

suffered acutely, Lenin was cheerful and relaxed. Perceptively he commented on the *Juniusbrochüre*—of whose authorship he was not then aware:

One senses the outsider who, like a lone wolf, has no comrades linked to him in an illegal organization, accustomed to thinking through revolutionary solutions right to the end and to educating the masses in that spirit. But these shortcomings—and it would be entirely wrong to forget it—are not personal failures in Junius but the result of the weakness of the *entire* German Left, hemmed in on all sides by the infamous net of Kautskyite hypocrisy, pedantry, and all the 'goodwill' of the opportunists.¹

Blandly he assumed that Junius's violent rejection of official SPD policy must inevitably lead to his own conception of revolutionary civil war.

Junius nearly gets the right answer to the question and the right solution—civil war *against* the bourgeoisie and *for* Socialism; however, at the same time he turns *back once more* to the fantasy of a 'national' war in the years 1914, 1915 and 1916 as though he were afraid to speak the truth right through to the end. . . . To have proclaimed the programme of a republic, or a legislature in continuous session, the election of officers by the people etc. would have meant *in practice*—to 'proclaim' the *revolution*—[even though] with an *incorrect* revolutionary programme.

In the same place Junius states quite correctly that you cannot 'make' a revolution. Yet the revolution was on the programme [of history] in the years 1914–1916. It is contained in this womb of the war, it would have *emerged* from the war. This should have been *proclaimed* in the name of the revolutionary classes; *their* programme should have been fearlessly developed. . . .²

As though Junius's scream of anguish were no more than an interesting formulation of some highly theoretical problems of Marxism in the pre-war *Neue Zeit*, Lenin produced a leisurely and unconcerned review of the pamphlet, praising its violent rejection of social patriotism but attacking its blanket rejection of all nationalist aspirations. None the less, Lenin recognized the Junius pamphlet for what it was, the first lengthy and coherent reckoning—in a revolutionary sense—with the policy of the SPD.

In one respect Lenin was bound to acknowledge Rosa Luxemburg's superior and earlier perception. In a letter to Shlyapnikov in October 1914 he admitted: 'Rosa Luxemburg was right. She

¹ Lenin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXII, p. 305.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 302–3.

realized long ago that Kautsky was a time-serving theorist, serving the majority of the party, serving opportunism in short.¹ It was a curious admission, for Kautsky had so long been Lenin's weak spot. Both he and Trotsky had admired him greatly. The latter had frequented his house for some years after 1907, and had written him flattering letters of support; Lenin too had appreciated his support in the matter of the Schmidt inheritance, though this had not prevented him from threatening Kautsky with legal action when his interests demanded it. Both had found Rosa's quarrel with him absolutely unjustified at the time.² Now they too discovered what Rosa had long known, that Kautsky used Marxism like plasticine, to soften the contours of an imperialist war. Lenin turned violently and very personally against him, and thereby exaggerated his importance all over again.³ When Clara Zetkin was in Moscow in 1920 they had trouble with the lift in Lenin's apartment which instantly induced him to exclaim angrily: '[It is] just like Kautsky, perfect in theory but lets you down as soon as it comes to the point.'⁴ Even after the revolution, Lenin still went on writing Kautsky out of his system.

Rosa, on the other hand, soon realized the isolation and declining importance of her former friend. In *Die Internationale*, under the pseudonym 'Mortimer'—she was a good historian—there was a review of Kautsky's latest book, under the heading, 'Perspektiven und Projekte'.⁵ Where she had attacked him violently in her leading article for differentiating between Socialist policies in peace and war, her review was much less personal and finical.⁶ With brief

¹ *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXXV, p. 120; also Frölich, p. 236.

² See above, p. 433.

³ Lenin's later polemics against Kautsky—which are by implication polemics against his own earlier adulation—are many and bitter. Everything Lenin hated in the USPD was turned into a personal indictment of Kautsky. Perhaps the best description (with which Lenin would no doubt have agreed) of Kautsky's Marxism was by Parvus: 'Marx's ideas, Kautsky's style, and the whole thing brought down to the level . . . of popular description, all the wholesome guts knocked out of it. Out of Marx's good raw dough, Kautsky made *matzes*.' (*Die Glocke*, Vol. I (1915), p. 20.)

⁴ Clara Zetkin, *Reminiscences of Lenin*, London 1929, p. 13.

⁵ *Die Internationale*, pp. 70–75. The book reviewed was Karl Kautsky, *Nationalstaat, Imperialistischer Staat und Staatenbund*, Nürnberg, 1914.

⁶ Karl Kautsky, 'Die Internationalität und der Krieg', *NZ*, 1914/1915, Vol. I, p. 248. This was the article in which Kautsky had first announced the proposition that the Socialist International was a suitable instrument for peace-time but could not as a matter of principle function satisfactorily in war-time; this argument more than any other earned him the undying hatred of the Left even though he had done no more than he always did, which was to state and observe the obvious as a general proposition of Marxism.

contempt, she summarized his views—such hardy annuals as his praise for national states and democracy, and his resuscitation of the idea of a European union. She pilloried his distinction between nice and nasty capitalism, between Switzerland and Germany.¹ Twenty years of Kautsky's theoretical elaboration were paraded in quick, mocking review, as though she and Kautsky had never met, as though there was no war going on; it was as remote an argument as their first polemic over Poland in 1896. Their public relationship ended as it had begun, impersonally, over matters of abstract theory. With the exception of a few fleeting references in future articles and in her private correspondence with Luise Kautsky, she never bothered with him again. Her political fire was concentrated elsewhere. The real leaders of the centrist opposition were not Kautsky, Eisner, and Bernstein, but Haase, Dittmann, and Ledebour, a fact which Lenin did not realize until the end of 1917.

If Lenin's views, as expressed in his articles at the time and in the policy statements of the Zimmerwald Left, are mentioned here at some length, it is an admitted piece of hindsight. The history of the German Left since the beginning of the First World War has been so firmly in the grip of Bolshevik party history (and still is) that a factual Lenin-Luxemburg confrontation becomes essential. One can either ignore Communist party historiography or correct it. Ignoring it means to accept the flood of polemics from Russia after 1918 as a sudden act of God, without historical cause. Yet it must be said that until 1917 the opinions of the Bolsheviks on the war had practically no influence on Rosa Luxemburg and her friends; for purely physical reasons they were probably unaware of what was being said in Switzerland. The only personal contact was with Radek's friend Knief in Bremen, which first found some local expression in the pages of the *Bremer Bürgerzeitung* and from June 1916 in the weekly *Arbeiterpolitik*. Then there were the two meetings, at Zimmerwald near Bern in September 1915 and at Kienthal at Easter 1916. At the first conference there were ten German delegates, six from the centre under Ledebour and Hoffmann, three from Rosa's and Liebknecht's group which took the name of the defunct paper, 'Internationale', and Julian Borchardt, representing a minute splinter group and its paper *Lichtstrahlen*. Lenin proposed a new International and the thesis: "Turn the

¹ *Die Internationale*, pp. 74-75

imperialist war into civil war'. For this he got seven votes against thirty, and among the Germans only Borchardt supported him. He gave way under the pressure of his friends, and a compromise resolution was issued calling in general terms for class war against an annexationist peace and condemning those Social Democrats who supported the war. But Lenin went on trying behind the scenes; the Zimmerwald Left was a potential splinter group. The importance attached to its views in Germany can best be judged by the fact that the *Spartakus* letter of November 1915 which reported the conference, devoted precisely one sentence to Lenin and the Bolsheviks.¹

At Kienthal the next year Lenin was prepared to break up the conference if the German centrist delegates again insisted that they could not be bound in their actions at home by any conference resolutions. Hoffmann proposed that the International Socialist Bureau, which had now moved from Brussels to 'The Hague, be called upon to meet, but this proposal was lost, with the two *Spartakus* delegates, Bertha Thalheimer and Ernst Meyer, also voting against it.² In the end a compromise was found which specifically called upon 'the representatives of Socialist parties' at once to abandon the support of all belligerent governments and specifically to vote against war credits. In the course of the debate the German delegate from Bremen, Paul Frölich, criticized both the centrist group in the *Reichstag* and the 'Internationale' opposition for their continued refusal to make a clean organizational break with the SPD.

The later Communist claim that the radicals had moved significantly towards the Bolsheviks by April 1916 is true only in part.³ They never joined the Zimmerwald Left, and the idea of a new

¹ *Spartakusbriefe*, p. 81. See also Arthur Rosenberg, *Geschichte des Bolschewismus von Marx bis zur Gegenwart*, Berlin 1932, p. 81. The Zimmerwald literature is vast; for a recent summary see F. Tych, 'La participation des partis ouvriers polonais au mouvement de Zimmerwald', *Annali dell'Istituto Giangiacomo Feltrinelli*, year IV, 1961, p. 90. See also O. H. Gankin and H. H. Fisher (eds.), *The Bolsheviks and the World War. The Origins of the Third International*, Stanford/London 1940, especially the bibliography.

² See Ernst Meyer, Introduction to *Spartakusbriefe* (first edition), Berlin 1926, Vol. I, p. 7. Bertha Thalheimer was the sister of Rosa's old protégé August Thalheimer (see letter to Konrad Haenisch, 24 April 1910, in *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 25).

³ See Ernst Meyer, loc. cit. The claim became increasingly emphatic in later German and Russian works, till in 1930 Stalin ordered a reversal and the systematic denigration of the role of the non-Bolshevik Left in Europe. See below, pp. 810 ff.

splinter International, however pure, repelled them. In November 1914 Rosa Luxemburg could still write to Camille Huysmans: 'I congratulate you on the solution which you found for the Ex-ecutive] Committee [to move to Holland]. I beg you to keep at it and to stay at your post in spite of all attempts which might be made to take away your powers or to persuade you to give them up.'¹ By 1915 she had accepted the collapse of the old International. In her polemics against Kautsky in the *Juniusbroschüre* she specifically mocked the hope of simply forgiving and forgetting. She called for a clean reconstructed International in the *Juniusbroschüre*, one from which the old elements had been purged. The difference was between the expulsion of undesirables from a tarnished but still essential organization and the creation of a totally new one. Even at the end of the war she still could not face the creation of a new International under the auspices of the victorious Bolsheviks. Probably the question belongs to that large undefined area of problems which only the real, the physical revolution could and would solve.² Meantime organizational wire-pulling was so much irresponsible self-deception.

In such a situation the individual opinions of delegates mattered more than in a disciplined party with a defined policy; at Zimmerwald and Kienthal the German delegates voted according to their consciences rather than any briefs; and Rosa's conception of the radical conscience mainly consisted in having no truck with either official SPD or centrist policies. In collaboration with Liebknecht, she had worked out some guiding principles to be submitted to the first conference at Zimmerwald. They did not in fact reach the conference, either officially or privately; the last-minute arrangements for the meeting, the need for secrecy, above all the difficulty of communicating from prison, prevented the draft from being completed in time, which annoyed Rosa considerably. They were later printed as an illegal handbill, and first appeared as an appendix to the *Juniusbroschüre* in 1916.³ As might have been expected, the outline was not a programme or even a recommendation for specific policies, but a declaratory statement of principles—an international Socialist's Bill of Rights. As such, they served as a

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 67, dated 10 November 1914 (in French). None the less, she opposed any attempt to call a meeting of the Bureau. Letter to Karl Moor, above, p. 609, note 5.

² See below, pp. 782-3, note 2. ³ See below, p. 631, note 1.

masthead to the *Spartakus* letters, and provided, if not a platform, at least an affirmation of faith round which the Left opposition could rally.

If they seem to be vague statements of principles rather than specific slogans or demands, and to avoid anything which might resemble a Bolshevik platform around which to assemble supporters, Rosa Luxemburg, who did all the drafting, had nevertheless to fight for such specific points as there were. Liebknecht wrote that her draft contained 'altogether too much mention of discipline, not enough spontaneity'; it was 'too mechanical and centralistic'. Rosa accepted many of his minor suggestions for rewording, but on the question of international discipline—her own version was anything but harsh even by contemporary standards—she remained adamant.¹

The correspondence between Rosa in prison and Karl at the front illustrates the nature of their relationship, and that of the whole *Spartakus* leadership; much more like the old SDKPiL than the SPD. Once more Rosa emerges if not as the leader at least as the main inspirer of the Left opposition and of its ideas. The quality of intellectual self-discipline, of commitment rather than control, unmistakably bears her stamp. It was she who coaxed Liebknecht, not to act, which he could do on his own, but to think and formulate, she who flattered Mehring and soothed Clara Zetkin. After approval by Liebknecht and Mehring, Jogiches got the theses printed and they were adopted by the meeting of *Spartakus* members on 1 January 1916.

Rosa Luxemburg had completed the *Juniusbrochüre* in prison by the end of April 1915 and succeeded in smuggling it out, though owing to the difficulties of finding a printer, it could not be published until early the following year. 'On her release from prison early in 1916 she found the manuscript still untouched on her desk.'² It took her three more months to bring it out. At first she insisted on using her own name but was dissuaded; the pseudonym finally chosen was meant to illustrate an historical parallel with the English eighteenth century. The pamphlet reflected the atmosphere of early 1915, when revolutionary Socialists were in a vacuum of despair and self-abasement, as yet unfilled by any alternative

¹ Ernst Meyer, 'Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Juniusthesen', *Unter dem Banner des Marxismus*, Year I, 1925/1926, No. 2, p. 423.

² Frölich, p. 245.

policy. Its title predicted its content, the history of a disaster.¹ But apart from her historical stalking of the origins of the war—Rosa carefully dissected the claim that Germany was fighting a defensive war—she also examined the causes of Socialist failure. The *Juniusbrochüre* is a curious mixture of scholarship and passion, unusual for Rosa Luxemburg in that it is almost entirely *negative*. Where she used to slash the surrounding jungle to make room for the construction of her own ideas we now get—nothing; only an epitaph sufficient unto itself. To this extent it is not ‘history’; her evidence never builds up to a case but comes and goes as required like witnesses on subpoena. At the same time Rosa had the magic touch of making her material come alive; it sings and shouts and convinces because of the author’s passion and historical self-confidence. Like the later essay on the Russian revolution, it was a private purgative as much as a political tract. We must not forget that both were written in prison.

This pamphlet also contains one of Rosa’s clearest and most heartfelt statements of proletarian ethics. She never set out deliberately, like Plekhanov or Kautsky or even Lenin, to discuss one subject today, another tomorrow—the ant-heap approach to Marxism. The whole point of Luxemburgism—if there is such a thing—is not this or that variation from Bolshevism or any other neo-Marxist doctrine, but the totality of its approach at all times.² Ethics are very much part of this totality, but unconscious ethics, not lectures about how to behave. The *Juniusbrochüre* positively bristles with an indictment of imperialist ethics: brutal, hypocritical, in which lives are the cheapest and most expendable commodity of all, especially proletarian lives.

The railway trains full with reservists are no longer accompanied by the loud acclamations of the young ladies, the soldiers no longer smile at the populace out of their carriage windows; instead they slink silently through the streets, their packs in their hands, while the public follows its daily preoccupation with sour faces. In the sober atmosphere of the

¹ Junius, *Die Krise der Sozialdemokratie*, Zürich 1916, reprinted in 1920 with an introduction by Clara Zetkin. Quotations are taken from the original edition. The work has also been reprinted in Rosa Luxemburg, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, pp. 258–399. When *Die Krise der Sozialdemokratie* came out in 1916 there were appended to it 11 propositions and 6 policy headings which had all been adopted as a programme by the ‘Gruppe Internationale’ on New Year’s Day 1916; above, p. 630.

² As Georg Lukács has so perceptively stated in *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, Berlin 1923. See below, pp. 794–5.

morning after, another chorus takes the stage: the hoarse cries of the vultures and hyenas which appear on every battlefield: ten thousand tents guaranteed to specification! A hundred tons of bacon, cocoa, coffee substitute, instant delivery but cash only, hand grenades, tools, ammunition belts, marriage brokers for the widows of the fallen, agencies for government supply—only serious offers considered! The cannon fodder inflated with patriotism and carried off in August and September 1914 now rots in Belgium, in the Vosges, in the Masurian swamps, creating fertile plains of death on which profits can grow. Hurry, for the rich harvest must be gathered into the granaries—a thousand greedy hands stretch across the ocean to help.¹

The Junius pamphlet welds the general to the particular. In Rosa Luxemburg's persuasive historical style the reader is helped over the small steps of historical fact and hustled at one and the same time over much larger assumptions. Having exposed the lie of the defensive war, Rosa Luxemburg went on to state a general proposition: 'In the era of imperialism there can be no more [justified] national wars' since 'there is complete harmony between the patriotic interests and the class interests of the proletarian International, in war as well as in peace; both demand the most energetic development of the class struggle and the most emphatic pursuit of the Social-Democratic programme.'² In the last resort it was a matter of personal commitment to the world around her. There is no tragedy without commitment; no negation, even, without it. The opposite of love—and hate—is indifference, abstraction. Lenin, disengaged, sat in Switzerland and shrank Rosa's general propositions to their particular context and relevance—and then attacked them in that context. And not for the first time: in their polemics two years earlier Lenin had attacked her views on the national question by treating it, not as a universal proposition, but in the context of the constitution and tactics of his party. It is unprofitable to ask whether Rosa's negation of any wars of national defence did or did not apply to emergent colonial nations in Africa and India, since the pamphlet was not written with these in mind. The denial of all national wars at this stage was intended to prevent any more attempts to prove that Germany was engaged in a war of defence; to kill the argument not with denials, but by destroying the foundations on which it rested. Just as Polish self-determination was wrong because all self-determination was wrong, so the

¹ *Die Krise der Sozialdemokratie*, p. 3.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 82, 97.

war was not a German war of patriotic defence because such things no longer existed. An excessive claim? Perhaps, but Rosa Luxemburg always put up the maximum stake. Lenin enlarged tactics into a philosophy, while Rosa reduced philosophy to a tactic.

The Junius pamphlet was the last item Rosa was able to smuggle out of prison for some months. She probably had the assistance of an unknown member of the staff, and was later to have help again at the Wronke fortress. 'Perhaps her treatment now became more severe as a result of an encounter that she had with an insolent detective who came to examine her. What actually happened is not quite clear but Rosa Luxemburg put an end to the interview by throwing a book at his head and for this she received further punishment.'¹ In November 1915 the newly-labelled *Politische Briefe* (Political Letters) put out by the 'Gruppe Internationale' once more contained a piece which, though of necessity anonymous, came unmistakably from Rosa's pen.² It was a farewell to yet another former friend, Parvus, who had gone to Turkey in 1910 and had now returned as a mysterious millionaire, settling first in Denmark and then in Berlin. There he appeared once more on the political scene with his own newspaper, *Die Glocke*. The interesting thing—which made him particularly suspect to his former friends—was that he succeeded in collecting round him a group of former left-wing journalists who had all become patriots during the war—Cunow from *Vorwärts*, Lensch from *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, and Konrad Haenisch, a particular admirer of Parvus and later to become his biographer. Revolution in Russia and hatred of Tsarism, which had always moved him strongly, now became an almost exclusive mania; he may not have liked the Prussians, but they seemed sent by history to fulfil his personal ambition. His contemptuous indifference to means, his unorthodox appearance and morals, had by now made him incomprehensible to the majority of Socialists, some of whom had long suspected that he might be mad. Through his money and his newly-found entrée to the German Foreign Office, he made at

¹ Frölich, p. 242. It is safe to assume that Frölich heard of these incidents from Rosa Luxemburg herself. However, since an almost identical incident took place on 22 September 1916 (see below, p. 651, and note 3), to which Frölich does not refer, it may be that he mixed up the two.

² The attribution is mine. The later *Spartakusbriege* are attributed to their various authors by Ernst Meyer in his edition, and following him by the editors of the new edition, *Spartakusbriege*, Berlin (East) 1958.

least Scheidemann take his views seriously. With Kautsky, whom he despised as mealy-mouthed, he immediately fell into a literary duel. In prison Rosa read his plan for aborting the Russian problem through revolution and devoted a special article to it, even though space in the illegal publications of *Spartakus* was precious.¹

Rosa, perforce, totally rejected the conception of German militarism as midwife to a Russian revolution for two reasons. One was ethical—no good could come from evil, and this war was evil on a hitherto unmatched scale. It was the same negation as in the *Internationale* and the *Juniusbrochüre*. Moreover, the dictates of morality applied particularly to newly-hatched millionaires.

Since Parvus presses himself on everyone's notice with his [revolutionary personality] we will say this to him: whoever regards war against Russia as the sacred duty of the proletariat would be taken seriously if he were in the trenches. But first to make a fortune during a war in which many thousand German and Russian proletarians are being killed, and then to sit in the safety of Klampenborg in Denmark and run from there a limited company for the exploitation of the [dialectic] connection between these two national proletariats—for this superior revolutionary role we have little understanding.²

The other reason was perhaps more interesting. To the trained expert the recognizable dialectic process of history does not permit accidents. Instead of Parvus's conception of a Russian revolution born out of a defeat by German arms—not far off Lenin's notion, and perfectly justified as events would prove—Rosa foresaw two alternative consequences of such defeat, neither of them revolutionary. One was that the Germans would let the Russians off lightly and return to the old concept of a Triple Alliance (*Dreikaiserbund*). The second alternative was a real defeat, pushing Russia out of Europe and towards the East, a solution bound to be

¹ 'Die Parvusiade', *Spartakusbriefe*, p. 68. My interpretation of Parvus is based on Winfried Scharlau, *Parvus als Theoretiker*, and Z. A. B. Zeman and W. B. Scharlau, *The Merchant of Revolution*, London 1965, a full-length biography of this important *condottiere* figure in German and Russian revolutionary Socialism. In the spring of 1918, Parvus sent a message to Lenin via Radek in Stockholm, offering to come to revolutionary Russia but, according to Radek, Lenin refused: 'We need not only good brains but clean hands.' (Though there is no impeccable source for this story, it became accepted tradition in post-war left-wing circles; see M. Beer, *Fifty Years of International Socialism*, London 1937, p. 197.) Certainly Parvus played a considerable, and only recently documented, part in obtaining German facilities and money for the Bolsheviks in the summer of 1917.

² *Spartakusbriefe*, p. 72.

followed by a new revanchist war some years later, with proletarian energy meanwhile diverted into the licking of national wounds.

Now both these theses were historically valid, as well as perfectly possible. But for the victory of the Bolsheviks, either one might well have resulted. But in the event she was wrong, while Parvus, who had a curious elemental feel for the realities of power and weakness but no political ability to focus them on to any sustained policy, was proved absolutely right. And yet, as in 1898 and in 1905, his disdainful prophesies of history's later commonplaces made him politically impossible. For Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht *realpolitik* was the personal and theoretical willingness to accept the full consequences of any situation; clarity and thoroughness were their respective mottoes; but for Parvus even more than Lenin the word meant a complete subordination of means to end—and a much wider perspective of means than those classically reserved to the proletariat, including bourgeois means, criminal means, sexual means, any means. Lenin could not swallow Parvus either, but he might have said to him in 1915 what Auer had said to Bernstein more than fifteen years earlier: 'One doesn't say such things, one simply does them.'¹ Even words by themselves can have the force of deeds, as Lenin knew, and not only if they are carried out in action.

The tone of Rosa's article shows curious restraint, the sarcasm much milder than that reserved for Kautsky or for Haase. Even five months later, when Parvus finally returned to Berlin with an official fanfare of welcome, Rosa wrote to Clara Zetkin, more in amazement than in anger: 'Imagine, a Russian twice evicted from Prussia, once each from Saxony and Hamburg, gets citizenship in the middle of the war with the vociferous support of the police. Most odd. The bastard [*Lump*] has registered as a childless bachelor!'² Did some of the old amused affection for 'Fatty' linger still? Rosa had now lost many old political friends; Parvus, Kautsky, Lensch, Haenisch, Dittmann, Stadthagen, Wurm—all had become opponents. From her foreign friends she was cut off. This left Jogiches and Marchlewski in Berlin. The latter was arrested in January 1916 before Rosa herself came out of prison.³

¹ Above, p. 156.

² Rosa Luxemburg to Clara Zetkin, 30 April 1916, IML (M), Fund 209, photocopy IML (B), NI.2/20, p. 131.

³ He was released early in 1918 under the exchange arrangements of the Brest-Litovsk treaty, and went to Russia, where he joined the Bolsheviks.

Clara Zetkin had been taken into custody in June 1915 and was only released early in 1916 on account of severe ill health. She spent some time with Rosa in Berlin during the first months of 1916, the last time the two friends were to see each other. The second echelon of the new Left consisted of a younger generation to whom Rosa was never personally close. Mehring, now 70, was an old, if delicate, friend. Rosa's relations with Liebknecht were politically close and destined to become closer still, but they were never personal friends. She admired his courage and despised his slapdash existence. To Hans Diefenbach, before whom no political pretence was necessary, she described the war-time Liebknecht:

You probably know the manner of his existence for many years: entirely wrapped up in parliament, meetings, commissions, discussions; in haste, in hurry, everlastingly jumping from the underground into the tram and from the tram into a car. Every pocket stuffed with notebooks, his arms full of the latest newspapers which he will never find time to read, body and soul covered with street dust and yet always with a kind and cheerful smile on his face.¹

But his courage—which was undoubted—contained an element of recklessness which made her and many of his friends apprehensive. At the end of October 1915 she asked a comrade who was acting as intermediary between her and Liebknecht to have a tactful word with him on this subject. As a result of a 'mysterious misunderstanding', some of Liebknecht's comments on the political situation, written from the Russian front, had appeared in her mail. 'I consider it most dangerous for Karl to develop these literary activities at this distance and you would be doing him a good turn if you could find a suitable way of advising him against it.'²

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, pp. 93–94, letter to Hans Diefenbach dated 30 March 1917. Rosa wrote an identical characterization to Luise Kautsky at about the same time (*Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, pp. 199–200). In the latter case the description continues: '... in his heart of hearts he is of a poetical nature as few people are, and can take an almost childish delight in almost every little flower'. This is the most obvious instance of a phenomenon that strikes the careful reader of Rosa Luxemburg's letters: not only the continued use of certain phrases throughout her correspondence but the thrifty hoarding of descriptions and incidents. Spontaneity? Cf. below, pp. 689, note 3.

² Rosa Luxemburg to Fanny Jezierska, probably end of October 1915, in IISH Archives, Amsterdam. Radek also advised Liebknecht from Switzerland in 1915 not to take unnecessary risks. Karl Radek, *Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Leo Jogiches*, Hamburg 1921, p. 33. Karl Liebknecht wrote to Fanny Jezierska on 18 October 1915: 'I don't know what to do, and count on you . . . I know you have plenty to do yourself but I don't know who else to turn to; 5 o'clock in the morning, half an hour's sleep . . . I am dead. I cannot leave my [real] work in spite of all the literary duties, so I never get a rest.'

Friends there were, but private ones, mostly women; and political admirers and disciples, like Hugo Eberlein, the Duncers, the Thalheimers, Pieck (her former student at the party school), and Paul Levi, who had defended her in court and was one day to succeed to her double position as leader of the party and later its most severe critic.¹

It was from a trough of personal loneliness that *Die Parvusiade* was written: *tempi passati*, as she herself had long ago taunted Jaurès in happier, more forward-looking days. Without appreciating the personal as well as the political vacuum of those war years it is not possible to understand Rosa in prison, and especially not the Rosa of the last hectic months after her release in 1918. Soon things were to look up, however, as the *Spartakusbund* became better organized and extended the range and quality of its appeal; and Rosa's friends rallied round closely to lighten the mental and physical burden of her second long imprisonment.

On 29 December 1915 twenty SPD deputies finally voted against new war credits, while another twenty-two abstained. Articulate opposition to the executive was growing. Loyalty to pre-war principles rotted the war-time discipline. Why? The war was no quick walkover; and nothing fails like failure. As long as the German government was imprisoned by the idea of a decisive victory, the war might continue for ever. All this gave stifled doubts a chance to reassert themselves. The SPD leadership's commitment to the war now looked like an option, no longer a necessity. The opposition thought it could feel the disillusion among the rank and file—precisely that same rank and file whose acceptance of patriotic unanimity had so far kept the opposition quiet. The main feature of the centrists, the later USPD, was their essentially democratic base; they were never willing, then or later, to lose contact with mass reality by moving into heroic isolation. The Left's idea of creating mass support with a revolutionary gesture was repugnant to them. They too were a revolutionary party, but only if the masses shouted their desire for revolution.

¹ Eberlein was mentioned by Rosa as 'completely devoted to us' in a letter to Marta Rosenbaum, 5 January 1915, *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 137. Before the war Rosa had recommended Pieck for a job with the following comment, especially interesting in view of his political career and eminent capacity for survival: 'He is energetic, possesses initiative, idealism, and great enthusiasm, and he is a diligent reader' (*Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 166, dated 9 January 1913).

On the left, the 'Gruppe Internationale' began to exercise a pull. As their influence grew, there was a real danger that they would run away with the support on which the Centre relied. As one of their most sensible members, and a former friend of Rosa's, had written in April 1915:

The editors of *Neue Zeit*, especially you [Kautsky], none the less have a duty to answer the attacks of the group I[n]ternationale; silence will be taken as abandonment of the position [*Verstummen*] . . . the fact remains that the I[n]ternationale is now being distributed throughout Germany; thanks to the devoted work of Rosa's friends [*Rosisten*] it was being handed out at all the local meetings [*Zahlabende*] in Greater Berlin last Tuesday. The masses are restive about the war and especially over the rising cost of living, they have no one on whom to vent their rage and since they can't get at the government the party becomes the scapegoat. That is the 'action' which Rosa is screaming for. . . .¹

Some centrists went into opposition willingly, others with a heavy sigh. There was no unanimity about motives. The first abstention in the credit vote, in March 1915, had been justified by one of the leaders, not as opposition to the war effort, but as a means of avoiding a direct vote of confidence in the government.²

Thus the break between Centre and majority led first to the eviction of the recusants from the party caucus on 24 March 1916, and finally in January 1917 to the formation of a new, oppositional Socialist party, the USPD.³ The organizational break was a long and difficult process. Those who voted against the credits from March 1915 onwards believed that they were exercising the undeniable demands of their conscience; they had no wish to break with the SPD. It was the majority who gradually drove them out; from informal consultations as early as the summer of 1915, from official membership of the *Reichstag* delegation in March the following year. Had there been any party congress, a move might well have been made to expel them from the party altogether. The creation of an opposition bloc in the *Reichstag*, and later of a new party, was not what the dissenters wanted but the consequence of majority intolerance—as the Left gleefully pointed out. And inci-

¹ Emmanuel Wurm to Karl Kautsky, 21 April 1915. IISH Archives, D XXIII, 259.

² Hugo Haase to Friedrich Ebert, 5 March 1915, in Ernst Haase, *Hugo Haase, sein Leben und Wirken*, Berlin n.d. [1929?], p. 105.

³ For the Centre's declaration on their vote against the budget, and the withdrawal of the whip, see Prager, *USPD*, pp. 94–96.

dentally it is significant that the emergence of articulate opposition in the SPD was from the top downwards—not the expression of local dissent against the Centre, masses against authority; nor was it even a party phenomenon—everything sprang from the bosom of the *Reichstag* caucus, which officially had no constitutional significance whatever in the SPD.

None of this narrowed the gap between the Left—the ‘thorough’ (*entschieden*) opposition as Meyer called it—and the Centre, the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*, as the loose association of expellees in the *Reichstag* came to be known.¹ On the contrary, it became wider. The Left had the same fear of the Centre as the latter had of the Left—the stealing of each other’s mass support, or, to use the combat phrase, the confusion of the masses. Liebknecht sharply attacked the ‘December men of 1915’ with historical echoes of the Russian Decembrists. Never had historical analogy been harder worked than by the German Left, a sure sign of intellectual doubt and stress.²

Hitherto the Centre’s doings and sayings had merely been quoted in the letters without much comment. But since Liebknecht had been evicted from the caucus on 12 January 1916, the Left had become more confident and better organized. In spite of decimation—Mehring, Marchlewski, Clara Zetkin arrested by the beginning of 1916; Meyer, Eberlein, Westmeyer, and Picck arrested or drafted—they now had their own network of agents, established at a secret conference in March 1915, largely to arrange distribution of *Die Internationale*.³ On 1 January 1916 an important meeting took place at Liebknecht’s law office. Delegates arrived in great secrecy, in twos and threes.⁴ This was the real moment of decision for the Left, and they agreed to maintain a nucleus of opposition to the party executive as well as to the newly-created *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*, but also to work within the party for as long as possible. As a programme this conference adopted the 12 declarations and 6 propositions which Rosa Luxemburg had evolved for Zimmerwald and smuggled out of prison in December 1915. They read as follows:

¹ ‘Ad hoc working group’ would be the most accurate translation. For Meyer, see *Spartakus im Kriege*, Berlin 1928.

² ‘Die Dezembermänner von 1915’, *Spartakusbriefe*, p. 86.

³ Introduction, *Spartakusbriefe*, p. xiii.

⁴ *Dokumente und Materialien*, Vol. I, p. 283. Report from memory by Rudolf Lindau, one of the participants, in *Neues Deutschland*, No. 1, 1 January 1956.

1. The World War has destroyed the result of 40 years of work of European Socialism. . . . It has destroyed the revolutionary working class as a political instrument of power. . . . It has destroyed the proletarian international and has . . . chained the hopes and wishes of the broad masses to the chariot of imperialism.
2. By voting for war credits and by proclaiming the *Burgfrieden* the official leaders of the Socialist parties in Germany, France, and England (with the exception of the Independent Labour Party) have strengthened imperialism and have . . . taken over the responsibility for the war and its consequences.
3. This tactic is treason against the most elementary lessons of international Socialism. . . . As a result, Socialist policy has been condemned to impotence even in those countries where the party leaders have remained faithful to their duty; in Russia, Serbia, Italy and—with one exception—Bulgaria.
4. By giving up the class struggle during the war official Social Democracy has given the ruling class in each country the chance to strengthen its position enormously at the expense of the proletariat in the economic, political, and military spheres.
5. The World War serves neither national defence nor the economic or political interests of the masses anywhere; it is merely an outcrop of imperialist rivalry between capitalist classes of different countries for the attainment of world domination and for a monopoly to exploit countries not yet developed by capital.¹ In the present era of unabashed imperialism national wars are no longer possible. National interests serve only as deception, to make the working classes the tool of their deadly enemy, imperialism.
6. From the policy of imperialist states and from this imperialist war no subject nation can possibly obtain independence and freedom.
7. The present World War, whether it brings victory or defeat for anyone, can only mean the defeat of Socialism and democracy. Whatever its end—excepting revolutionary intervention of the international proletariat—it can only lead to the strengthening of militarism, to the sharpening of international contradictions, and to world economic rivalries. Today's World War thus develops simultaneously with the pre-conditions for new wars.²
8. World peace cannot be assured through apparently utopian but basically reactionary plans, such as international arbitration by capitalist

¹ It is curious to note that with this sentence Rosa Luxemburg in fact got the approval of the entire German Left for the particular thesis of her *Accumulation of Capital*, although at the time no prominent Marxists were willing to subscribe to her analysis of capitalism and its collapse. See below, p. 834, note 1.

² This is as complete a contradiction of Lenin's thesis regarding the revolutionary potential of the First World War as can be found in German left-wing literature of the time.

diplomats, diplomatic arrangements about 'disarmament', 'freedom of the seas' . . . 'European communities' [*Staatenbünde*], 'Central European customs unions', 'national buffer states' and the like. The only means . . . of ensuring world peace is the political capacity for action and the revolutionary will of the international proletariat to throw its weight into the scales.

9. Imperialism as the last phase of the political world power of capitalism is the common enemy of the working classes of all countries, but it shares the same fate as previous phases of capitalism in that its own development increases the strength of its enemy *pro rata*. . . . Against imperialism the worker's class struggle must be intensified in peace as in war. This struggle is . . . both the proletariat's struggle for political power as well as the final confrontation between Socialism and capitalism.

10. In this connection the main task of Socialism today is to bring together the proletariat of all countries into a living revolutionary force. . . .

11. The Second International has been destroyed by the war. Its decrepitude has been proved by its inability to act as an effective barrier against the splintering nationalism during the war, and by its inability to carry out jointly a general tactic and action with the working classes of all countries.

12. In view of the betrayal of aims and interests of the working classes by their official representatives . . . it has become a vital necessity for Socialism to create a new workers' International which will take over the leadership and co-ordination of the revolutionary classes' war against imperialism everywhere.¹

Propositions:

1. The class war within bourgeois states against the ruling classes and the international solidarity of proletarians of all countries are two indivisible and vital rules for the working classes in their struggle for liberation. There is no Socialism outside the international solidarity of the proletariat and there is no Socialism without class war. Neither in time of war nor peace can the Socialist proletariat renounce class war or international solidarity without at the same time committing suicide.

2. The class action of the proletariat of all countries must have as its main object the struggle against imperialism and the prevention of wars. Parliamentary action, trade-union action, indeed the entire activity of working-class movements must be made subject to the sharpest confrontation in every country against its national bourgeoisie.

3. The centre of gravity of class organization is in the International. In peace-time the International decide the tactic of the national sections

¹ Cf. above, p. 629.

in questions of militarism, colonial policy, economic policy, the May Day celebrations—as well as the tactic to be followed in case of war.

4. The duty to carry out the resolutions of the International precedes all other organizational duties. National sections which go against these resolutions automatically place themselves outside the International.

5. In the struggle against imperialism and war, the decisive effort can only be made by the compact masses of the proletariat. The main task of the tactic of the national sections, therefore, must tend to educate the broad masses to take a determined initiative in political action. It must also ensure the cohesion of mass action, must develop political and trade-union organization in such a way that rapid co-operation of all sections will be ensured, and that the will of the International be transformed into the action of the working masses in all countries.

6. The next task of Socialism is the spiritual liberation of the proletariat from the tutelage of the bourgeoisie which makes its influence felt through its nationalist ideology. The national sections must develop their agitation in parliament and in the press towards the denunciation of the out-of-date phraseology of nationalism which is merely a means of bourgeois domination. The only real defence of genuine national freedom today is the revolutionary class struggle against imperialism. The fatherland of all proletarians is the Socialist International, and defence of this must take priority over everything else.¹

All the stress was on internationalism, against national sentiment. Rosa placed her faith in this against the fallible vagaries of national parties; a shift of emphasis rather than a new tactic. It was perhaps the high-water mark of the international ideal among the *Spartakus* group. Probably no one but Rosa Luxemburg would have envisaged an organizational structure in which national parties were made truly subservient to the International. 'National' parties in this context was a pejorative term, and also a piece of loose thinking—the result of being dominated by the recent German experience. The RSDRP for instance, as Rosa well knew, did not consider itself a 'national' party, neither did the Austrian Social-Democratic Party. In any case the intellectual and extreme international emphasis proved transient; from then on the Liebknecht tactic that 'the main enemy is at home' increasingly dominated, with its positive revolutionary tinge.² The difference between

¹ *Dokumente und Materialien*, Vol. I, pp. 279–82. Henceforward each of the *Spartakusbriefe* was headed by extracts from one or several of these propositions.

² 'Der Hauptfeind steht im eigenen Land', illegal handbill of May 1915, printed in Drahm und Leonhard, op. cit., pp. 24–27.

Rosa Luxemburg and Liebknecht was admittedly one of emphasis rather than of policy, but it is noticeable all the same. The fact that her conception was adopted shows again how powerful was her influence on *Spartakus* thinking in the first two years of the war.

But there was complete agreement between her and Liebknecht on sharpening the issues between *Spartakus* and *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*. The conference of 1 January 1916 decided to drive forward relentlessly with the 'clarification process' of attacking the centrist leaders in order to steal their mass support. Rosa wrote her own comment on the 'men of December', more personal and also more profound than Liebknecht's; these men had all at one time been her collaborators and friends. 'I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would that thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.'¹

Rosa was released from prison on 22 January 1916, though the public prosecutor was still mulling over the leading article of *Die Internationale* with a view to an indictment. On the day of her release she had to shake hundreds of well-wishers' hands. 'I have returned to "freedom" with a tremendous appetite for work.'² Karl Liebknecht was on extended leave from his regiment to attend the *Reichstag* session; much as the High Command and police authorities would have liked to lock him up, they could not touch him—yet.³ He was making use of parliamentary question time, the only chance for private members to make a nuisance of themselves; each question was designed to needle the government and to reiterate his thesis of imperialist and aggressive war. The right-wing and liberal deputies even tried physical assault on him;

¹ Revelation, iii. 15-16. From 'Entweder-Oder' (Either-Or), in *Selected Works*, II, p. 533. The piece was circulated as an illegal handbill in typewritten form. It was cited in the testimony to the *Reichstag* commission which sat from 1925-1929 to examine the causes of Germany's defeat. *Untersuchungskommission des Reichstages, Vierte Reihe; Die Ursachen des deutschen Zusammenbruches im Jahre 1918, Der innere Zusammenbruch* (The Internal Collapse), Vol. IV, pp. 102-3.

² Rosa Luxemburg to Regina Ruben, dated 25 February 1916, IML (B). See also *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 196: 'You have no idea of the torture it was having to receive 80 (literally 80) people [in my flat] on the very first day and say a few words to each one of them after a year in the Barnimstrasse.' (Undated—probably early 1917.)

³ *Dokumente und Materialien*, Vol. I, p. 336. (Confidential report from the Berlin police president to the Prussian Minister of the Interior, dated 31 March 1916.) See also p. 355 (Chancellor's telegram to the Emperor's Privy Council, dated 9 April 1916).

they thought that he had gone literally out of his mind.¹ There were insistent demands in the *Reichstag* and press that an end be put to his treacherous performance and to the machinations of his friends. The police reports of the time bristle with material about *Spartakus*, predicting the perpetual imminence of a revolutionary outbreak; though based on real information, it is clear that the conclusions the agents wrote up were those which their superiors wanted to hear. To the authorities *Spartakus* looked much more menacing than it really was, and it was good politics to keep it so.²

It was a period of intense activity for Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. In moments snatched from meetings and editorial work they walked throughout the spring on the outskirts of Berlin, light-hearted with the pleasure of action. Karl was emotionally less stable; it was he who did handsprings and unpredictably burst into song, while Rosa watched tolerantly, though herself unable to join in such transports.³ The friendship between Rosa and Karl's young Russian wife Sonia grew into an intense protective relationship. Later, when Karl was in the penitentiary and Rosa herself immured in a fortress, she bombarded Sonia with letters intended to cauterize the young woman's pain at the separation. As with others, Rosa undertook not only the moral protection but also the education of her friend, though these efforts did not always succeed as she hoped; the effect this correspond-

¹ See report of *Reichstag* debate, during which Karl Liebknecht was constantly interrupted by shouts of 'nonsense!' 'madness!' 'lunatic asylum!' (*Reichstags-verhandlungen*, 13th legislative period, 2nd session, Berlin 1916, Vol. CCCVII, Column 952/953). History does have a habit of repeating itself, at least in its minutiae. Karl Liebknecht's solitary stand, the tone of his speech and the attitude of his opponents, were almost an exact repetition of the occasion when Janko Sakasoff made an anti-war speech on behalf of the Bulgarian Social Democrats in the *Sobranje*, 8 October 1912 (see *Bulletin Périodique*, International Socialist Bureau, Brussels, 1913, 2nd Supplement to Vol. 3, No. 9, p. 7).

² See the extracts of the secret police reports and instructions published in *Dokumente und Materialien*, Vol. I. For 1917 onwards see Leo Stern, *Der Einfluss der grossen sozialistischen Oktoberrevolution auf Deutschland und die deutsche Arbeiterbewegung*, Berlin (East) 1958. A detailed discussion of this subject hardly belongs here. The East German historians have found this material useful for proving the significance of 'mass' opposition to the war as well as to the official party organizations; but the wish is father to the proof. See also below, pp. 823-4.

³ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 94, letter to Hans Diefenbach dated 30 March 1917. See also *Letters from Prison*, Berlin 1923. This is a translation of Rosa Luxemburg's collected letters to Sonia Liebknecht, published as *Briefe aus dem Gefängnis*, Berlin 1920. References to quotations are from the English edition, though frequently I have retranslated the original German.

ence had on Rosa herself was often that of a 'cracked glass'.¹ She saw all her friends, including Hans Diefenbach, now serving as a doctor on the eastern front. These six months were the last time in her life that Rosa was able to lead anything like a normal existence.

But it would not have been normal if it had not also been crammed with political activity. Between the government and *Spartakus* stood two shock-absorbers, which cushioned the necessary and ardently desired class struggle; these were the first obstacles to be removed. First, there was the majority SPD and its executive. The latter had taken the offensive; now that the opposition was prepared to come out into the open there could no longer, in Ebert's and Scheidemann's minds, be any reason for half measures. Besides, the increasing pressure of the government and the military on the majority Socialists—press censorship, restriction of 'discussable' subjects on public platforms, in some cases prohibition of SPD meetings altogether—in turn made the executive press harder on the opposition whom it blamed for its troubles.² Doubtful district organizations were simply taken over by suitable nominees from the centre, and the silencing of oppositional party papers culminated in the executive's physical seizure of *Vorwärts* in October 1916, after various attempts to regulate its policy. This was a theft which the Berlin party organization, which regarded *Vorwärts* traditionally as its own, never forgave.

By March 1916 the irreconcilable hatred of *Spartakus* for the SPD executive was self-evident; it hardly needed repeating. Were these really the people with whom Rosa had once shared a party card, a common society superior to all tactical polemics? There were not only the old enemies—Heine, Südekum, Fischer, and trade unionists like Hué and Legien—but the officials, the

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 188. 'Sonia sent a whole packet of literature for me to read—all hopeless.' (*Briefe an Freunde*, p. 128, letter to Hans Diefenbach dated 13 August 1917.) Sonia Liebknecht is still living in East Berlin, and recently emerged from a long silence to threaten the West German government with legal proceedings for whitewashing one of her husband's murderers. See below, p. 773, note 1. Sonia Liebknecht may have appeared more naïve than she was. She herself was a university graduate; a recent writer has described her as 'attractive, apparently ingenuous, but perfectly capable of delivering important messages for her husband in prison and fully involved in his political activity'. See Okhrana Archives of Russian Secret Police dossiers from 1870 to 1917 in the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, California, quoted in Ralph H. Lutz, 'Rosa Luxemburg's Unpublished Prison Letters 1916-1918', *Journal of Central European Affairs*, October 1963, Vol. XXIII, No. 3, p. 305.

² *Reichstagsverhandlungen*, 1916, Vol. CCCVI, Col. 716; CCCVII, Cols. 943, 1244.

heart of the party organization—Ebert, Scheidemann, Braun, Ernst, Wissell. A few days out of jail, and Rosa took off on a short tour of west Germany, to meet friends and, more important still, supporters. To one of them she put her policy succinctly: 'The masses? I will not leave them to the executive like so much bankrupt stock.'¹

But the real struggle, the close in-fighting, was with the centrists, themselves by now in opposition to the majority in the party. The *Spartakusbriefe* contained one warning after another against mistaking centrist opposition for 'real' opposition, and against confusing tactical manoeuvres with struggle. 'What the 24th of March [the second centrist vote against the budget] offers in the nature of progress is precisely due to the ruthless criticism by the radicals of all half measures'—halfness, wholeness: Liebknecht's favourite words—'it confirms the fruitfulness of this criticism for the *general strengthening of the spirit of opposition*.'² And he concluded: 'Whoever strays about between armies locked in battle will get shot down in the crossfire, if he doesn't seek refuge on one side or the other. But then he arrives, not as a hero, but as a refugee.'³

The solution, however, was still not Lenin's: democracy, not splits; looser and not tighter discipline.

Upwards from below. The broadest masses of comrades in party and trade unions must be reached, in doing battle for the party, *in* the party . . . the handcuffs of the bureaucracy must be cracked open . . . no financial support, no contributions, not a farthing for the executive . . . not splitting or unity, not new party or old party, but *recapture* of the party upwards from below through mass rebellion . . . not words but deeds of rebellion. . . .⁴

Though Rosa Luxemburg attended innumerable committee meetings of the party as well, in which a running battle for control was being fought with the centrists, she did so from loyalty rather than conviction. This was not the struggle she wanted; it was narrow rather than broad—much better to forget about the formal bureaucratic structure and broaden the battle outwards and down

¹ The evidence for this trip and the remark came from Rosi Wolffstein (Frau Frölich), in an interview in Frankfurt.

² *Spartakusbriefe*, p. 130. My italics. Unsigned, but clearly by Liebknecht.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 132–3. This was one of the earliest suggestions of a financial embargo.

to the masses. After a year in prison her patience had anyhow worn thin. 'I cannot attach any importance to this pygmy battle [*Froschmäusekrieg*] within the official bodies . . . our "proletarians" grossly overrate this bureaucratic dogfight', she complained to Clara Zetkin.¹

The activities of the radical opposition were strongest in Berlin. Only here, under the critical eye of the leadership, was it possible to achieve that precise theoretical separation of *Spartakus* from the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* which was supposed to prevent working-class confusion. But any history based on the pronouncements of the leaders is misleading, for at regional and still more at local level *Spartakus* and *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* were largely indistinguishable, and to most local functionaries Rosa Luxemburg's 'either-or' would have been meaningless, as it still was for a time after the war.²

The situation was very confused. It was hard enough to decide between official and opposition members of the SPD outside the *Reichstag*. Even in the Berlin organization there was confusion. On 31 March a general meeting of the Greater Berlin organization reviewed the *Reichstag* events of 24 March, the latest vote against the budget. A resolution was adopted favouring the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*, which appeared in *Vorwärts* next day, fitfully blacked out by the censorship. Rosa Luxemburg, who was present, failed to obtain permission even to bring an amendment to the resolution. Her request to *Vorwärts* to print her criticisms of the resolution was refused—for did it not represent the unanimous view of the opposition? At about the same time the executive made the first attempt to regulate the policy of *Vorwärts*. This time Rosa Luxemburg was able to bring a resolution in the local Press Commission more pointed than the one submitted by the centrist opposition. Her resolution was lost by a small majority—only because it had been submitted by Rosa. Eight days later, however, the executive of the Berlin provincial organization adopted Rosa's same rejected resolution *verbatim*, over the heads of its own Press Commission.³ Each side drew the wrong conclusion

¹ Rosa Luxemburg to Clara Zetkin, 30 April 1916, IML (M), Fund 209, photocopy IML (B), NL2/20, p. 130.

² East German history emphasizes the contrary and claims a clear distinction between Centre and Left at all levels. The point must be made, otherwise *Spartakus* is wrongly seen as a compact, well-defined group behind equally well-defined, articulate leaders—which is nonsense.

³ *Spartakusbriefe*, pp. 149–52. See also *Vorwärts* of relevant dates, 1 April, 7 April, 15 April 1916.

about the disarray in the opposing ranks—the disarray was universal.

On 22 April 1916 Rosa Luxemburg moved to the offensive. She wrote that it was the majority who were tearing the party into shreds, *they* were disobeying the orders of past party congresses. She produced an ingenious if impractical financial proposal:

Subscriptions should not simply be withheld, but paid to the party and destined for their real purpose precisely by keeping them from the destructive, disloyal bureaucrats . . . usurpers . . . the alternatives are: Saving or destroying the party . . . all our strength *for* the party, *for* socialism. But not a man, not a farthing for this system; instead, war to the knife.¹

Deeds, not words, was the mounting refrain. It was decided to make a real, visible, tangible gesture: to call a demonstration for 1 May in the centre of Berlin. Even the mildest May Day celebrations had been put away for the duration; May Day in Germany had anyhow never been what it ought to be and was elsewhere—in the wilds of Poland, for instance: a vast proletarian manifestation. All the more reason to make a memorable show now. There were negotiations with the 'Ledebour group'—it was either the Ledebour group, the Haase group, the Kautsky group, according to choice; these personal attributions were always derogatory and the official title of *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* was rarely used in print. In the end no joint action could be agreed. Madness, said the centrists—there was insufficient evidence of revolutionary feeling among the masses, no evidence at all of a desire for patent suicide; failure could only make the opposition ridiculous.² So Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, with a few supporters, decided to go it alone, after much agitation and advertisement of their intentions.³ This naturally brought the police out in force. 'At eight o'clock sharp . . . in the middle of the Potsdamerplatz,

¹ *Spartakusbriefe*, p. 157. Unsigned, my attribution. Note the echo of Bebel's phrase: 'Not a man, not a farthing for this system'.

² *Spartakusbriefe*, p. 166.

³ She spoke of 'an imposing demonstration', 'a dense crowd', without giving figures (*ibid.*). According to contemporary eye-witnesses, hostile and friendly, the numbers in the original demonstration seem to have been a few hundred, though some days later news of Liebknecht's arrest produced rather larger demonstrations (see *Dokumente und Materialien*, Vol. I, p. 379; also the report mentioned but not printed here in *Archiv der Reichskanzlei*, Nr. 8/7, 'Social Democrats', Vol. XI, Sheet 189, in IML (B). A facsimile of the illegal proclamation calling for the demonstration is printed in *Dokumente und Materialien*, Vol. I, p. 373.

the sonorous voice of Karl Liebknecht rang out: "Down with the government, down with the war".¹ He was instantly arrested, but apparently the other leaders were not molested. The arrest itself was followed by a larger if quieter demonstration for several hours, though it is never easy on such occasions to distinguish participants from spectators; the very presence of large police reinforcements increased the number of curious onlookers.

Liebknecht was first sentenced to two and a half years' hard labour on 28 June; unexpectedly—for all concerned—this caused the first large political strike of the war. In due course the higher military court (*Oberkriegsgericht*) increased the sentence to four years one month.¹ An appeal to the Reich High Court was disallowed and he began his sentence on 6 December 1916 at Luckau in Saxony. The *Reichstag* had hastened, within a few days of Liebknecht's arrest, to lift his immunity, and a majority of Socialists had voted with the 'class enemy' for this measure. Most of them had not the slightest sympathy with or understanding of his action.²

At least Liebknecht's arrest if not his demonstration brought him the personal support and sympathy of Hugo Haase, the leader of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* and former party chairman. A new effort was made to collaborate with *Spartakus*. In July Haase reported to his wife that there was 'full understanding with the

¹ In Germany sentence to hard labour or penitentiary—as opposed to prison—involved the loss of civil rights, in Karl Liebknecht's case for six years. This meant disbarment from legal practice—he was a lawyer—from voting and of course he could not stand as a candidate for Reich or provincial legislatures.

German military sentences during the war fell into three categories: penitentiary or hard labour for treasonable activity, imprisonment for lesser offences, and administrative custody, often in a fortress—the easiest and most convenient way of dealing with Social Democrats without the expense and trouble of a trial. Fortress was more 'political' and less rigorous than prison. By the standard of today's methods of dealing with war-time sedition, both the sentences imposed on *Spartakus* leaders and the treatment in prison were mild. The vociferous protests of the *Spartakus* group against the arrest and imprisonment of their leaders should not mislead us into believing the contrary.

² 'Gentlemen . . . in Liebknecht we are dealing with a man who wanted, through an appeal to the masses, to force the government to make peace, a government moreover which has repeatedly expressed its sincere desire for peace before the whole world. . . . This war is a war for our very homes . . . how grotesque was this enterprise . . . how can anyone imagine that [Liebknecht] could influence the fate of the world, play at high policy [*hohe Politik machen*] by shoving handbills at people, by creating a demonstration in the Potsdamerplatz. . . . Contrast this pathological instability with our [party's official] clear-headed and sensible calm. . . .'

(*Reichstagsverhandlungen*, loc. cit., Cols. 1027/1028, speech by Landsberg. The remarks about 'high policy' are an interesting example of the official SPD's 'deference' attitude to government.

Rosa group'. The arrest of Liebknecht had 'pushed all problems of personality into the background'.¹

This did not mean that he would encourage or countenance what he considered further foolishness.

At the general meeting [of the Berlin constituency organizations] Rosa made a very skilful speech . . . with strong effect, the more so as she did not in the end insist on an embargo of membership dues, but her proposal was dangerous [all the same]; it reeked of separatist organizational measures. The party executive would have risen to this at once, and therefore I fought against it with such success that only a handful [of people] remained with Rosa in the end. How right I was in practice became clear at once. The executive proved unable to attack the adopted resolution . . . I agree with you, the unity of the opposition in the country must be strengthened.²

But Rosa Luxemburg and her friends were not prepared to seize the proffered hand with conditions of 'sensible' behaviour. On the contrary, the original refusal to collaborate on 1 May made the present offers of unity and reconciliation 'the height of creepy shamelessness' as far as Rosa herself was concerned. She administered 'a well deserved kick in the pants', and *Spartakus* continued to draw the sharpest lines of distinction between the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* and itself.

In the two months of liberty that were left to Rosa she continued to battle against the party authorities, particularly in the oppositional districts of Berlin. She appeared at all possible meetings and bombarded them with lively resolutions—everything to turn the centrists' common sense into something more positive. Politically Rosa was almost alone. Only a few Left leaders were at liberty and this meant all the more work for her. Jogiches was there, unobtrusive and efficient; the technical processes of duplicating, distribution, and control of the *Spartakus* literature were almost entirely in his hands. After the arrest of Ernst Meyer in August 1916 he took over the formal leadership of *Spartakus* under

¹ Ernst Haase, *Haase*, pp. 120, 125.

² Ibid. The full report of Rosa's speech and Haase's reply at the meeting on 25 June 1916, in which the Left opposition and the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* met head on, is in *Vorwärts*, 27 June 1916. A statement of correction by Rosa Luxemburg regarding the press reports of this meeting appeared in *Vorwärts*, 2 July 1916. Rosa denied the suggestion (also made by Haase in the letter to his wife) that her resolutions had in fact advocated any practical embargo on the membership dues. 'This legend has caused the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* to sing a hymn to the "sensible behaviour", "political cleverness", and similar virtues of the Berlin opposition under the leadership of Haase-Hoffmann-Ledebour for resisting the danger of the "Liebknecht-Luxemburg" tendency.'



(a) Józef Unszlicht



(b) Jakub Hanecki (Firstenberg)
(probably during the First World
War)

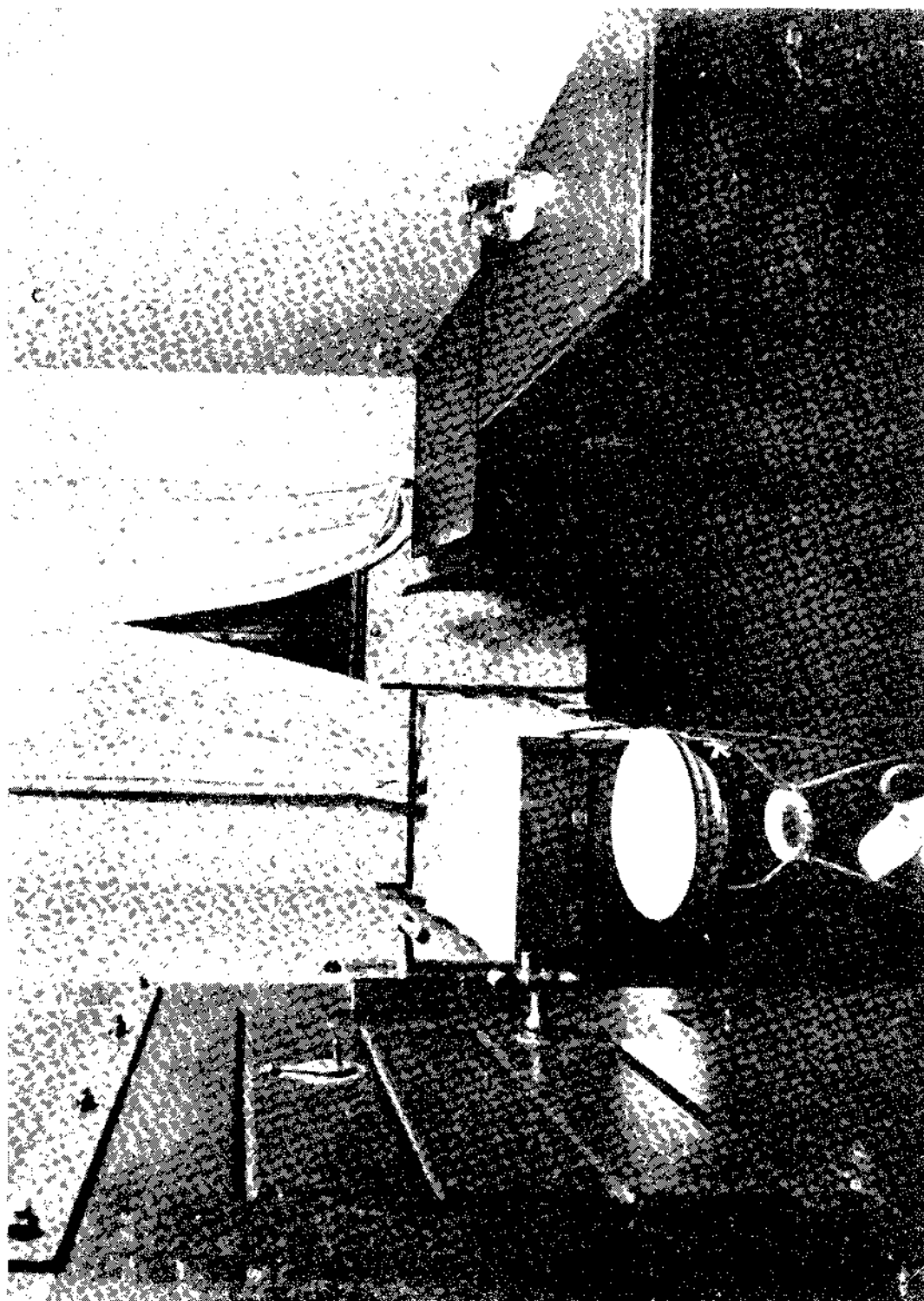


(c) Zdzisław Leder
(Władysław Feinstein)



(d) Adolf Warszawski (Warski)

SDKPiL Leaders



Rosa Luxemburg's cell at Wronko, 1916-1917

the pseudonym of W. Kraft. From August 1916 onwards he was able at last to make printing arrangements for the group; henceforth the letters were no longer hectographed. A few of his circulars exist—laconic, matter-of-fact, unemotional, without any of the charisma of Luxemburg or Liebknecht; flatter even in German than in Polish.¹ But effective. He had never in the past taken any interest in German affairs except in so far as they impinged on the SDKPiL; other than as Rosa's friend and *éminence grise* he was completely unknown in the SPD. None the less it was he who did all the work of clandestine organization, and emerged in 1916 as the effective manager of the Left opposition—a remarkable achievement which has not yet been documented. Without him there would have been no *Spartakusbund*; the scintillating figures associated with the intellectual leadership of the Left were none of them capable of performing the dour conspiratorial work of building a vehicle for their policies.

On 10 July Rosa was suddenly rearrested.² She spent the first weeks at the women's prison in the Barnimstrasse where she had been before, but was then transferred to the interrogation cells at police headquarters in the Alexanderplatz—the famous 'Alex' of Berlin satire and of grimmer memory under the Third Reich. Perhaps this transfer to harsher conditions was due to an incident in which she threw an inkpot at a detective and told him 'you are just a common spy and *Schweinhund*; get out of here [the visitor's room]'.³

¹ See below, p. 653; *Spartakusbriefe*, p. 206. In this circular he proposed a conference to discuss the extent of co-operation with the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* who were finally in the throes of founding a separate party. The circular closes baldly: 'For the expenses of the delegation, each individual group of members will have to be responsible since the situation of our finances is presently unfavourable' (p. 210).

² Some sources say 10 June, but wrongly. (Meyer, Introduction, *Spartakusbriefe*, Vol. I, p. viii.) Meyer's wrong dating is all the more surprising since he was present when she was arrested. 'Dr. Ernst Meyer . . . and Eduard Fuchs accompanied her home that Sunday. Mathilde Jacob awaited them with the bad news that two very suspicious men wished to speak to Rosa about some leaflets. The next morning at the crack of dawn the same men reappeared, identified themselves as secret police, placed Rosa under arrest and took her eventually to the women's prison. . . .' Ralph H. Lutz, *Journal of Central European Affairs*, October 1963, Vol. XXIII, No. 3, p. 309. This story is clearly put together from details in some of Mathilde Jacob's correspondence (see below, pp. 677 and 867).

³ Charge against Rosa Luxemburg heard by the Royal District Court, Berlin, Department 136, on 26 January 1917, reference 136D ⁵⁶⁵/₁₁ 16, photocopy from IISH Archives. Apparently new regulations reducing the permitted time for conversation with visitors had suddenly been imposed. Rosa, in a highly nervous state since her arrest, reacted strongly. The court took her temper into consider-

At the time the police had still not decided whether to put her on trial or merely to keep her in custody; a decision for the latter course was made some time in the early autumn. The six weeks at the Alexanderplatz were the worst prison experience of Rosa's life. "The hell-hole at the Alexanderplatz where my cell was exactly 11 cubic metres, no light mornings and nights, squashed in between cold [water tap] (but no hot) and an iron plank."¹ For a time she was held almost completely incommunicado.²

In October she was at last transferred to the old fortress at Wronke (Wronki) in Posen (Poznań); slothful, comfortable, grass-infested. She had privacy, and the privilege of walking up and down the same battlements as the sentries. Above all, she must have worked out an arrangement with at least one member of the staff; her correspondence, both legal and illicit, reached flood level. She knew that it would be a long while before she would be released; a whole new way of life became necessary. She continued her output of illegal material but, shut off as she was from the struggle outside, there was little development in her thought; for a year her writing was static, even repetitious. Only her temperament and her lively style prevented it from sounding stale.

Within the new circumstances she still found means of giving full rein to her personality. In the many letters written to friends during the next two years her personality reached out of prison like an octopus, wooing, embracing, and scolding her friends, dragging them into the orbit of her intellect and emotions. It did not matter whether she was writing on politics, literature, or life. Prison life, instead of stifling her, in fact enabled her to reach a spiritual and emotional maturity which is remarkable—as are the means which she developed to convey the flow of feelings and ideas. For the next two years the political aspect of her life was bound to cede primacy to the demands of a bursting personality confined in a relatively small space.

ation. She was awarded ten days in prison, a purely formal punishment since she was already in protective custody.

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 45, letter to Mathilde Wurm dated 28 December 1916.

² The *Spartakus* letter of 20 September 1916 contains two—naturally unsigned—contributions by Rosa Luxemburg. The first, 'Der Rhodus' (*Hic Rhodus, hic salta*—the quotation is from Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*), was probably written before her arrest in July (*Spartakusbriefe*, pp. 211–17). The second, 'Liebknecht', deals with the upward revision of the latter's sentence on 23 August and must therefore have been smuggled out of the Barnimstrasse prison through either Mathilde Jacob or Fanny Jezierska (*ibid.*, pp. 217–20).

XV

PRISON IN GERMANY, REVOLUTION IN RUSSIA

ON the surface of war-time Germany the Liebknecht incident caused hardly a ripple. Neither our own preoccupation with this small group of revolutionaries nor the solemn prolixity of police reports can alter the fact that the great majority of Germans hardly knew that *Spartakus* existed. Though the euphoria of early victories had gone, the need to 'see it through' (*durchhalten*)—the phrase which *Spartakus* echoed with such contempt—was still official SPD policy. The war was now bound to be a long and costly one. It was this realization which brought the first stirring, not yet of opposition, but at least of self-consciousness among the SPD leaders. They bethought themselves of the government's frequent protestations of peaceful and purely defensive intentions, and of their own commitment against a war of conquest. As a stiffener, a Reich conference was held—no properly constituted party congress could be envisaged for the duration—from 21 to 23 September 1916. For the last time representatives of all shades of opinion met together within the old and ample bosom of the SPD, the last occasion that executive, centrists, and *Spartakus* confronted each other in one party.

The *Gruppe Internationale* (as *Spartakus* was to be officially known until the end of 1918) sent Käthe Duncker and Paul Frassek as its representatives. In the restrained language required on public occasions in war-time—the hall was spattered with police—these two tried to put the views of *Spartakus* on the question of war. They marked themselves off so firmly from the centrist *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* that their strictures against the latter often drew laughter and approval from the majority.

We cannot make our attitude to the war and the support of war credits dependent on the military position of the moment, as the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* did in its declaration of 21 December [1915]. If we were in the position of France, if considerable parts of Germany were occupied by

enemy troops, God knows whether we would even have [such a thing as] a Social-Democratic *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*. (Great laughter.)¹

Ebert had no sense of humour, and did not laugh. With almost ghoulish deliberation the chairman of the conference attempted to impose the good old rules of formal politeness. The illusion that nothing had fundamentally changed in the SPD had at all costs to be preserved.

'I must ask the speaker to keep her remarks in the form which has customarily been observed in differences of opinion between party members.'

Ledebour (interrupting): 'You must take Heine as your example, then the chairman will not call you to order!'

Chairman: 'I must ask for quiet. What I have just said applies to all party members and has always been a matter of course in our party congresses.'

Frassek submitted what was to be the opposition's last official declaration within the SPD.

The Reich conference has come together under the throttling conditions of the state of siege. . . . The state of siege and the censorship make every free discussion of policy impossible from the start; the state of siege, in giving every advantage to the supporters of the so-called majority within the party, puts those belonging to the genuine opposition at a particularly heavy disadvantage, decimated as we are by prosecutions, arrests and military service. In any case the election of delegates has not been carried out by the members or delegates of individual constituencies, but through the local committees or executives of the party organization. Under these circumstances it is clear that any resolutions adopted by this conference cannot have the least political or moral value.²

A further declaration by *Spartakus* at this conference, couched in stronger language, was not accepted by the conference chairman, and consequently did not even appear in the *Protokoll*.³

Spartakus could not expect that its speeches and resolutions at the conference would sway the majority of delegates. The real purpose was propaganda. Like all Socialist representatives elected into hostile assemblies, the two *Spartakists* were merely 'speaking through the window' to the—it was assumed—attentive masses

¹ *Protokoll der Reichskonferenz der Sozialdemokratie Deutschlands von 21, 22 und 23 September 1916*, Berlin, no date, p. 85.

² *Ibid.*, p. 14. ³ See *Die Internationale*, 1927, Vol. 12, p. 379–80.

outside. For their purposes the SPD leadership was impugned as a mere stooge of the Reich government. In a circular issued by Leo Jogiches after the conference, copies of the *Spartakus* speeches, together with suggestions for further discussion and propaganda, were distributed illegally.¹ The flat, rubbery, almost impersonal style was typical of the man whom circumstances had now put in charge of *Spartakus*.

Finally to current affairs. By separate mail you will receive the '*Spartakus*' letters, from now on printed. [This bald announcement signified the successful conclusion of two years' frantic efforts to find a printer.] We ask you particularly, once you have given them consideration and discussed the matter with other comrades, to let us know how many copies you will be able to distribute so that we can judge the size of future editions. As resolved by a fairly large meeting of comrades, '*Spartakus*' is to be sold for 10 Pfennig per number. It is hardly necessary to add that the largest circulation to safe comrades is desirable. . . . In view of our growing and already considerable expenditure for printing items, handbills, etc., material support on the part of our comrades in the Reich is urgently necessary if we are to continue to meet all requirements. . . .²

The courtesies of the SPD executive at the Reich conference were more apparent than real. On 17 October 1916 a successful coup against *Vorwärts* was finally carried out; at last that same 'Kosher' editorial board of which Rosa Luxemburg had been a member for a few weeks in 1905 was removed. On 5 December the *Bremer Bürgerzeitung* and on 30 March 1917 the Brunswick *Volksfreund* went the same way. Among the major papers, only the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* remained under centrist control while the Left was confined solely to *Der Kampf*, which they had started in Duisburg on 1 July 1916 as their legal paper.

With the executive counter-attacking strongly on all fronts, there was no point in the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* continuing within the SPD, deprived of all influence. An attempt was afoot to elbow its members out of the party altogether. To forestall this, on 7 January 1917 a Reich conference of the Social-Democratic opposition took place in Berlin. This public defiance led to an open

¹ *Die Internationale*, Vol. XII, 1927, pp. 378-9. The circular was signed 'Krumbügel', one of Jogiches' aliases at the time.

² *Ibid.*, p. 379.

breach; the SPD executive formally decided to cut off all party connection with the conference participants and there was nothing for the latter now but to start their own party. 'The founding congress of the Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany (USPD) took place in Gotha in the first week of April amid nostalgic thoughts of the founding congress of the old SPD held nearly fifty years earlier in the same town.

Communist historians have strongly reproached *Spartakus* for failing to make an organizational break with the SPD before the war, but especially after 4 August 1914. Here was another obvious opportunity. With historical sleight-of-hand they point to Lenin's coherent yet democratic organization—leaders and members in harmony—which was soon to make possible the capture of an entire state, unilaterally and without official allies. It is true that *Spartakus* gave little or no importance to purely organizational problems. There were strong historical reasons for this—the proud exclusiveness of a powerful mass party before the war, and the oppositional thesis so long advocated by Rosa Luxemburg of the need to maintain contact with the masses at any cost. Disputes within the party—from 1910, opposition to all party authority—were one thing, but contracting out of the organized working class of Germany was another. In Rosa Luxemburg's eyes contact with the masses was emphatically more important even than any mistaken policy. She had strenuously advised her friend Henriette Roland-Holst against such a move in 1908.

A splintering of Marxists (not to be confused with differences of opinion) is fatal. Now that you want to leave the party, I want to hinder you from this with all my might. . . . Your resignation from the SDAP [the Dutch *Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiderspartij*] simply means your resignation from the Social-Democratic movement. This you must not do, none of us must! We cannot stand outside the organization, outside contact with the masses. *The worst working-class party is better than none.*¹

Now, on 6 January 1917, the day before the planned conference of the party opposition, she wrote:

Understandable and praiseworthy as the impatience and bitter anger of our best elements may be . . . flight is flight. For us it is a betrayal of the masses, who will merely be handed over helpless into the stranglehold of a Scheidemann or a Legien . . . into the hands of the bourgeoisie,

¹ Roland-Holst, p. 221, letter dated 11 August [1908].

to struggle but to be strangled in the end. One can 'leave' sects or conventicles when these no longer suit and one can always found new sects and conventicles. But it is nothing but childish fantasy to talk of liberating the whole mass of proletarians from their bitter and terrible fate by simply 'leaving' and in this way setting them a brave example. 'Throwing away one's party card as a gesture of liberation is nothing but a mad caricature of the illusion that the party card is in itself an instrument of power. Both are nothing but the opposite poles of organizational cretinism, this constitutional disease of the old German Social Democracy. . . .'¹

None the less, this heartfelt appeal for remaining in the party and continuing the struggle against the treacherous authorities from within, did not mean that Rosa Luxemburg modified by one jot her criticism of the insincerity of the men who had called the opposition conference.

The sentimental longing of the 'Bog' [the Marxist centre] to return to the party as it was before the war is one of the most childish Utopias to which this terrible war has given birth. Only one other attitude comes close to it in childishness: the heart-rending political naïveté with which the leaders of the 'Bog'—Haase, Ledebour, Dittmann—suppose that they can reawaken the old honourable Social Democracy, which they themselves helped to bury and on whose grave they danced a fandango for a year and a half. . . .²

The sharpest criticism of the centrist leaders and their policy, but no organized split from the existing party: the policy of *Spartakus* towards the new Independent Socialist party was the same as it had always been in the old SPD. In a circular to sympathizers on 25 December 1916 Jogiches made some proposals for the attitude to be adopted by *Spartakus* delegates at the impending opposition conference to which *Spartakus* had been invited. These stressed the need and means of exposing the SPD's policy to the masses by every available means—elections, meetings, handbills, etc.; the emphasis was on mass propaganda not on problems of separate organization.³ And *Spartakus* went to the

¹ *Der Kampf*, No. 31, 6 January 1917. This article, smuggled out from the fortress at Wronke with the assistance of Mathilde Jacob, appeared under the pseudonym Gracchus.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Spartakusbriefe*, pp. 206–10. The letter is signed W. K[raft], another Jogiches alias. His draft proposals formed the basis of the resolutions brought by *Spartakus* at the opposition conference. (*Protokoll . . . Gründungsparteitag der USPD 6–8 April 1917 in Gotha*, Berlin 1921, pp. 98–99.)

conference to wait and see; insistent on maintaining its own political line but without distinct organizational conditions. It accepted the decision of the conference to separate from the SPD and form a new party. All that was required was the maintenance of its own identity. 'If those representing our direction decide on participation in a joint conference [with the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*] then we will of course do so as a separate, independent, and self-sufficient group.'¹ This from the pen of the most professional organizer on the Left outside the ranks of the Bolsheviks. If the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* had not constituted itself an Independent Socialist party—against Rosa's advice—*Spartakus* would have preferred to remain within the SPD—that 'stinking corpse of 4. August 1914'—rather than set up on its own in what might well prove to be a political vacuum.

The only ones to criticize *Spartakus* at the time were the Bremen radicals. This small group, with whom Radek had been associated until the beginning of the war, was alone in calling for a complete organizational break and thus earned the credit of Lenin and later Communist historians.² The dispute between *Spartakus* and the Bremen radicals continued intermittently throughout that year. At the founding congress of the USPD in April 1917 the *Spartakus* representative characterized the opposition as follows:

We are not satisfied with the policy of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*. Rather we base ourselves on the heads of the *Juniusbrochüre*. . . . In many questions our demands exceed those of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*, but under certain conditions we are prepared to work with them. Nor does our attitude correspond entirely to that of the comrades from Bremen either. . . .³

¹ *Spartakusbriefe*, p. 207.

² *Arbeiterpolitik*, Bremen, 20 January 1917. At the time Lenin completely mistook the intentions of *Spartakus*. See 'Open Letter to Boris Souvarine', *La Vérité*, No. 48, 27 January 1918 (first written in the second half of December 1916), *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXIII, p. 190.

'In Germany the split is taking place before the eyes of all . . . and precisely because Liebknecht and Rühle [who had voted with Liebknecht on one occasion against war credits] were not afraid of a split, because they openly propagated its necessity and did not hesitate to carry it out, therefore their activity in spite of numerical weakness is of such momentous importance for the proletariat.'

³ The Bremen radicals never forgave *Spartakus*, and refused to join in forming the KPD at the end of December 1918. Johann Knief, their most important leader, told Radek that *Spartakus* was merely a stage before the last, their own. See Radek, *Diary*, p. 135 (below, Ch. xvi, p. 731, note 2). His group only joined the KPD early in 1919 and soon left it again, to found its own splinter group, the KAPD.

Our main condition is this . . . the *Gruppe Internationale* insists that it will not give up the propagation of its views because it considers this to be a political necessity. . . . Further we demand that the attitude of individual local organizations must not be prescribed by the central organization. This would only mean another cartel. It has been stated here that the *Gruppe Internationale* will anyhow leave the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* as soon as the war is over, but this we will only do if its policy doesn't follow the principles of the *Gruppe Internationale*.

Spartakus then enumerated the various aspects of policy where its emphasis differed from that of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*, particularly the relative merits of mass action as against parliamentary efforts.¹

The USPD leaders, and Haase in particular, concentrated the attention of the conference on practical matters instead of first principles. They too wanted a new unity—and public debate of presently unrealizable principles was the best means of dividing the new party right from the start. Everything depended on how events would shape; it was precisely the absurd lip-service to empty principles which in their view had bedevilled the pre-war SPD. The USPD was determined not to tie its hands in advance, and above all not to *Spartakus*. In the end the latter joined the USPD without the clear definition which Jogiches had demanded. But *Spartakus* went on urging its own policy within the USPD, and Rosa Luxemburg continued to ridicule its leaders in public as hitherto.

The relationship between them was uneasy, but less so than the tone of the *Spartakus* polemics might suggest. The fierce denunciations at the top did not penetrate far down into the amorphous Socialist membership. Kautsky still saw the main function of the USPD as an honest David struggling against two Goliaths—the predatory SPD executive on one side and *Spartakus* on the other. Yet the centrist view of *Spartakus* had subtly changed. Instead of talking of the 'Rosa group'—a few arrogant, clever, intransigent Marxists whose ambition drove them to prefer a minute but devoted splinter group to a democratic mass party—the USPD leaders were now faced by a powerful myth—the hero-worship of Karl Liebknecht. His demonstrations in April and May 1916 had not only closed the opposition ranks, but had provided the simplest rallying cry—a name. 'The boy Karl has become a real menace [*fürchterlich*]. If we in the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* had not appeared

¹ *Protokoll . . . USPD 1917*, pp. 19, 22.

and proved that we too exist, the irresistibly growing opposition would simply have gone over to *Spartakus* altogether. If a break has been avoided and *Spartakus* held at bay, that is entirely to our credit. The right-wing has not helped us but has only helped *Spartakus*.¹

Kautsky was right, at least in one respect: Liebknecht had become a byword in the farthest corners of Europe, which *Spartakus* did its utmost to keep alive. Some French soldiers talk in the trenches about the futility of their own part in the war.

'And yet,' said one 'look! There is one person who has risen above the whole beastly war; who stands illuminated with all the beauty and importance of great courage . . . Liebknecht. . . .' Once more Bertrand emerged from his frozen silence. 'The future, the future. The work of the future will be to wipe out all this . . . as something abominable and shameful.'²

Lenin, too, increasingly identified opposition to the war and the revolutionary movement in Germany with the name of Karl Liebknecht. It became a convenient shorthand which everyone would understand. 'The future belongs to those who brought forth a Karl Liebknecht, who created the *Spartakus* group, whose point of view is in the *Bremer Arbeiterpolitik*.'³ As the embodiment of *Spartakus*, Liebknecht became one of those political bogiewheels on which Lenin's ideas could move along smoothly and comprehensibly. 'The revolutionary propaganda of the *Spartakus* group becomes more and more intense, the name Liebknecht becomes more popular in Germany every day.'⁴ This identification of *Spartakus* with the person of Liebknecht was to have important consequences. A dead martyr can be manipulated by his heirs, a living one is apt to drag his colleagues with him to the extremes dictated by the contingent pressures of his martyrdom.

The search of *Spartakus* for its distinct identity, of which Karl Liebknecht became the symbol, was most clearly articulated by

¹ Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel*, pp. 634-5: letter from Karl Kautsky dated 28 February 1917.

² Henri Barbusse, *Le Feu* (*Journal d'une escouade*), Paris 1916 (Prix Goncourt), p. 280. Together with Erich Maria Remarque, *Im Westen nichts Neues*, this became one of the most famous anti-war novels of the time.

³ Lenin, 'Farewell letter to the workers of Switzerland', *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXIII, p. 363.

⁴ Lenin's speech on 4 November 1917, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXVI, p. 258.

Rosa Luxemburg. It went well beyond 'mere' politics. Between *Spartakus* and the Independents were two concepts of life which differed in their most fundamental aspects. It is impossible to understand Rosa Luxemburg as a political person without accepting her capacity for judging everything in the form of an extreme dichotomy—words or action, hope or desire, living or dying. Mere political differences were mealy-mouthed understatements; what was happening was a miniature private dialectic of her own, the birth of a new world amid the dust and ashes of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*. Everyone had to choose, neutrality was impossible. Rosa's contributions to the *Spartakus* letters were distinguished by this 'either/or' frenzy, infused with all the temperament of which she was capable—but it was only in her private correspondence that this essentially personal parting of the ways could be presented in all its stark relief. The following letter, to the wife of Emmanuel Wurm, speaks more for Rosa Luxemburg than any official document ever could.

Wronke, 28 December 1916.

My dear Tilde,

I want to answer your Christmas letter immediately while I am still in the grip of the rage which it inspired. Yes, your letter made me absolutely wild [*fuchsteufelswild*] because short as it was every line showed clearly the extent to which you are imprisoned within your surroundings [*im Bann deines Milieus stehst*]; this weepy-weepy tone, this lament for the 'disappointments' which you have suffered—allegedly due to others; instead of for once looking in the mirror to see the perfect image of humanity's whole mystery! 'We' in your language now means the other toads of your particular sewer; once upon a time when you were with me it meant my company and me. All right, then I shall deal with you in your desired plural [*dann wart, ich werde Dich per 'Ihr' behandeln*].

You are 'not radical enough' you suggest sadly. 'Not enough' is hardly the word! You aren't radical at all, just spineless. *It is not a matter of degree but of kind*. 'You' are a totally different zoological species from me and never have I hated your miserable, acidulated, cowardly and half-hearted existence as much as I do now. You wouldn't mind being radical, you say, only the trouble is that one gets put inside and can't be of use any longer. You miserable, pettifogging souls, you would be perfectly prepared to offer a modicum of heroism but only against cash, as long as you can see an immediate return on it; a straight

'yes'—the simple words of that honest and straightforward man: 'Here I stand, I can do no other, God help me'—none of it was spoken for you.¹ Lucky that world history to date has not been made by people like you, otherwise there wouldn't have been any reformation and we would still be stuck with feudalism.

As far as I am concerned I was never soft, but in recent months I have become as hard as polished steel and I will not make the slightest concession in future, either politically or in my personal friendships. I have only to conjure up the portrait gallery of your heroes to feel like caterwauling: that sweet Haase, Dittmann with his cultivated beard and those cultivated speeches in the Reichstag, that limping shepherd Kautsky, whom your husband naturally follows through thick and thin, the magnificent Arthur [Stadthagen]—*ah, je n'en finirai!* I swear to you—I would rather sit here for years—I do not even say here, which is approaching paradise, but rather in the hell-hole in the Alexanderplatz where in a minute cell, without light, I recited my favourite poets—than 'fight' your heroes or for that matter have anything to do with them! I would rather have Graf Westarp [the leader of the Conservative party in the *Reichstag*]—not because he once spoke in the Reichstag of my almond-shaped velvet eyes—but because he is a *man*. I swear to you, let me once get out of prison and I shall hunt and disperse your company of singing toads with trumpets, whips and bloodhounds—I wanted to say like Penthesilea, but then by God you are no Achilles.² Had enough of my New Year's greeting? Then see to it that you remain a *human being*. To be human is the main thing, and that means to be strong and clear and *of good cheer* in spite and because of everything, for tears are the preoccupation of weakness. To be human means throwing one's life 'on to the scales of destiny' if need be, to be joyful for every fine day and every beautiful cloud—oh, I can't write you any recipes how to be human, I only know how to *be* human and you too used to know it when we walked for a few hours in the fields outside Berlin and watched the red sunset over the corn. The world is so beautiful in spite of all the misery and would be even more beautiful if there were no half-wits and cowards in it.

Come, you get a kiss after all, because you are basically a good soul. Happy New Year!³

¹ This is, of course, Martin Luther's famous saying. Rosa closed the article in *Der Kampf*, cited above (p. 657, note 1), with the same sentence. Not only the phrase but the whole concept expressed her own view exactly. The present letter is interesting because it was written at the same time and in the same mood as the article in question, yet the one sums up for political restraint, and the other for personal intransigence.

² Penthesilea was a Queen of the Amazons who fought against the Greeks at Troy and was slain by Achilles.

³ *Briefe an Freunde*, pp. 44–46, to Mathilde Wurm. Rosa Luxemburg's italics.

The recipient must have defended herself as stoutly as she knew how, for on 16 February Rosa wrote again:

Never mind, even though you answered me so bravely and even offered trial by combat, I shall always be well disposed towards you. That you want to take me on makes me smile. My dear girl, I sit firmly in the saddle, no one has yet unseated me. I would like to see the one who does it. But I had to smile for another reason; you do not even want to take me on and are much closer to me politically than you are prepared to admit. I shall remain your compass because your honest nature tells you that *I* am the one with the unmistakable judgement—since I do not suffer from the destroying minor symptoms: fearfulness, being in a rut, the parliamentary cretinism which affects the judgement of others. . . . My dear girl, 'disappointment with the masses' is always the most lamentable excuse for a political leader. A real leader doesn't adjust his tactic in accordance with the attitude of the masses, but in accordance with the development of history. He sticks to his tactic in spite of disappointments and waits for history to complete its work. Let us close the debate on this note. I shall be happy to remain your friend. Whether I can remain your teacher too, depends on *you*.¹

These words are the very core of Rosa Luxemburg's philosophy. Her attachment to the masses was not the formal postulate which in their different ways both Kautsky and Lenin shared. For them, party, leaders, and the masses were theoretical concepts to be manoeuvred into correct juxtaposition. Theoretical analysis would in fact have provided the easy solution; particularly in prison, one would not be called upon to put one's solution into brutal practice under the eyes of a competent and powerful police. Kautsky in his study at the editorial offices of *Neue Zeit*, Lenin in Cracow or in the libraries of Zürich or Bern, could make their arbitrary reckoning on paper or in the company of a few loyal comrades living near by. In her prison Rosa Luxemburg felt more firmly attached to the realities of political life, however disagreeable and hard, than ever before.² Political life, not politics; an enlargement not a contraction—that was the consequence of her dichotomies. Every act

¹ Ibid., pp. 46–47.

² The different effects of prison on revolutionaries would make an interesting study. Parvus felt utterly handicapped in isolation and did nothing but complain. A few cells along, in the Peter-Paul Fortress in 1906, Trotsky immersed himself in fruitful political analysis of a wholly abstract nature; prison provided the peace and quiet he needed for this type of work. Rosa, admittedly 'in' for longer, re-created her normal life; like those of a blind man, her remaining faculties for communication—letters—grew larger than life to compensate for the absence of personal contact.

and interest became life writ large, and took its place in the composite but vital business of living. This was the message of optimism which poured out of prison at her friends. Cut off from the collective life of the community, the individual, instead of shrinking, had to grow large enough to speak not only for itself, but for everything. Things had to substitute for people—plants, flowers, animals, large and small. The old fortress of Wronke became a universe with its own laws and purposes, strong enough to reach out into the consciousness of all Rosa's friends. They must have rubbed their eyes over the morning mail and wondered whether they were not the ones cut off from reality.

Rosa Luxemburg remained at Wronke from October 1916 until July 1917. It was an easy-going routine; conditions were spacious, even moderately comfortable. She had the run of the fortress, could walk along its grass-grown walls and give herself completely to the sight and smell of the surrounding countryside.

Today it rained in torrents, none the less I spent two hours wandering round the little garden—as usual without an umbrella, just my old hat and in Grandmother Kautsky's cape [probably the one she had been given when she went to Warsaw at the end of 1905]. It was lovely to think and dream while walking, even though the rain penetrated hat and hair and ran down my neck in rivulets. Even the birds were awake. One of them, with whom I have become chummy, often walks with me, like this: I always walk on two sides of the garden along the wall, and the bird keeps step with me by hopping from bush to bush. Isn't this nice? We both brave every weather and have already walked our daily round in a snowstorm. Today the bird looked so blown about, wet and miserable, I probably too; and yet we both felt very well. All the same in the afternoon it got so stormy that we just daren't go out at all. The bird sits on the bars of my window and tilts its head right and left in order to look in through the glass. I sit at my desk and enjoy the ticking of the clock which makes a comfortable noise in the room and so I work.¹

With vigour she took up again some of the interests which had fascinated her some years earlier.

How happy I am that three years ago I threw myself into botany with my usual intense absorption, with my whole self; so much so that the whole world, the party, and my work disappeared and one sole longing possessed me—to wander about in the spring fields, to stuff my arms

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, pp. 97–98, to Hans Diefenbach, 16 April 1917.

full of plants and then, after sorting them out at home, enter them in my books. I spent the whole spring as in the throes of a fever. How much I suffered when I sat in front of a new plant and for a long time could not recognize it or classify it correctly. I almost fainted with the effort so that Gertrud [Zlottko] used to threaten to take away my plants altogether. But at least I am now at home in this green world. I captured it—by storm and with devotion; for whatever you give yourself to with such intensity takes strong root in you.¹

She was able to regale some of her friends not only with reports of her own collection but good advice as to what they should go out and find in the fields at any particular time.

You see what enjoyment you got out of your visit to the botanical gardens and how enthusiastic you were about it. Why don't you go more often? I assure you that it means a great deal to me when you promptly record your impressions with such spontaneous warmth and colour. Yes, I know those wonderful crimson flowers of the spruce fir . . . these are the female flowers out of which the great cones grow to hang with their points downwards as their weight increases. Besides them, are the far less conspicuous yellow male flowers. . . .²

Immediately after breakfast I go out into my little garden and occupy myself wonderfully; watering my plants. I have had them get me a pretty little watering can with which I have admittedly to run a dozen times to the well until the soil is damp enough. The water spray twinkles in the morning sun and the drops go on shimmering for a long time on the blue and red hyacinths, which are already half open. Why am I sad in spite of this? I almost believe that I have overestimated the strength of the sun in the sky; it can shine all it wants but sometimes it simply doesn't warm me up when there is no warmth in my heart.³

For Sonia Liebknecht particularly, Rosa tried to reveal the relaxation and absorption of botany and zoology.

I know the different kinds of orchids well. I studied them well for several days in the wonderful hot-house in Frankfurt . . . their fantastic, almost unnatural form, always made them seem over-refined and decadent to me. They made the impression of a dainty countess of the powder-and-patch period. The admiration I now feel for them thus had to overcome an internal resistance. By disposition I am the enemy of everything decadent and perverse. A common dandelion gives me far more pleasure.⁴

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 93, to Hans Diefenbach, 30 March 1917.

² *Letters from Prison*, p. 67.

³ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 107, to Hans Diefenbach, 12 May 1917.

⁴ *Letters from Prison*, p. 38, dated 1 June 1917.

You ask what I am reading—mostly natural sciences: I am studying the distribution of plants and animals . . . I feel so much more at home in a garden like this one here and still more in the meadows when the grass is humming with bees than at one of our party congresses. I can say that to you because you will not promptly suspect me of betraying socialism. You know I hope to die at my post, in a street fight or in jail. But the real deep 'me' belongs more to my butterflies than it does to my comrades. This is not because, like so many spiritually bankrupt politicians, I seek refuge and repose in nature. In nature I see so much cruelty at every turn that I suffer greatly.¹

But the war was never far away. It loomed over wasp and watering-can indiscriminately; as soon as one was lulled by the ferocious microcosms of nature the scene was brutally changed to the clangour of men at war.

Sonichka, dear, I had such a pang recently. In the courtyard where I walk army lorries often arrive, laden with haversacks or old tunics and shirts from the front; sometimes they are stained with blood. They are sent to the women's cells to be mended, and then go back to the army for use. The other day one of these lorries was drawn by a team of buffaloes instead of horses. I had never seen the creatures close at hand before. They are much more powerfully built than our oxen, with flattened heads, and horns strongly curved back so that their skulls are shaped something like a sheep's skull. They are black and have huge, soft eyes. The buffaloes are war booty from Rumania. The soldier-drivers said that it was very difficult to catch these animals who had always run wild, and still more difficult to break them in to harness. They had been unmercifully flogged—on the principle of '*vae victis*'. There are about a hundred head in Breslau alone. They have been accustomed to the luxuriant Rumanian pastures and have here to put up with lean and scanty fodder. Unsparingly exploited, yoked to heavy loads, they are soon worked to death. The other day a lorry came laden with sacks, so overladen indeed that the buffaloes were unable to drag it across the threshold of the gate. The soldier-driver, a brute of a fellow, belaboured the poor beasts so savagely with the butt end of his whip that the wardress at the gate, indignant at the sight, asked him if he had no compassion for animals. 'No more than anyone has compassion for us men', he answered with an evil smile, and redoubled his blows. At length the buffaloes succeeded in drawing the load over the obstacle, but one of them was bleeding. You know their hide is proverbial for its thickness and toughness, but it had been torn. While the lorry was being unloaded the beasts, utterly exhausted, stood perfectly still. The

¹ Ibid., pp. 24-25.



(a) Wilhelm Pieck



(b) Hans Diefenbach as a
medical officer, about 1916

Military Service in the First World War



(a) Julian Marchlewski (Karski)



(b) Feliks Dzierżyński, between 1909 and 1912

SDKPiL Leaders

one that was bleeding had an expression on its black face and in its soft black eyes like that of a weeping child—one that has been severely thrashed and does not know why, nor how to escape from the torment of ill-treatment. I stood in front of the team; the beast looked at me; the tears welled from my own eyes. The suffering of a dearly loved brother could hardly have moved me more profoundly than I was moved by my impotence in face of this mute agony. Far distant, lost for ever, were the green lush meadows of Rumania. How different there the light of the sun, the breath of the wind; how different there the song of the birds and the melodious call of the herdsman. Instead the hideous street, the foetid stable, the rank hay mingled with mouldy straw, the strange and terrible men—blow upon blow, and blood running from gaping wounds. Poor wretch, I am as powerless, as dumb, as yourself; I am at one with you in my pain, my weakness, and my longing.

Meanwhile, the women prisoners were jostling one another as they busily unloaded the dray and carried the heavy sacks into the building. The driver, hands in pockets, was striding up and down the courtyard, smiling to himself as he whistled a popular air. I had a vision of all the splendour of war! . . .¹

With flowers and plants Rosa still had the professional touch acquired from the studies in Zürich long ago. The equally intense comments on art—literature, music, painting—were those of a gifted amateur. But once again the reverberations of a solitary routine brought to the surface a more intense and systematic involvement with art. Rosa no longer saw or read, she re-absorbed and criticized and analysed, and fed off art like a plant off compost—herself and her friends, who were regaled by her feast. This, too, was part of the foundation of her new self-sufficiency.

As ever, Rosa had distinct preferences. Fulsomeness, excessive decoration, mere skill—indeed any excess—was repugnant to her. She was always attracted by simplicity precisely because social questions were essentially simple:

I have just finished Ricarda Huch's *Wallenstein* . . . in the end the portrayal comes to nought. No complete picture emerges from so much detail and decoration . . . I cannot help it, German thoroughness makes it impossible to create a delicate, living portrait of an age or a person.

¹ *Letters from Prison*, pp. 56–58. Whatever Sonia Liebknecht may have replied, she could not help feeling that Rosa's vicarious sufferings were much less than the more direct ones of her husband, and she unburdened herself feelingly to Mathilde Jacob about the difference in the circumstances of Rosa Luxemburg and her husband, Karl. See Ralph H. Lutz, 'Rosa Luxemburg's . . . letters', *Journal of Central European Affairs*, October 1963, Vol. XXIII, No. 3, p. 310.

. . . She lacks, although she is a woman, the mental *finesse* which should have told her that the pursuit of every detail must ultimately tire and repel any sensitive person. . . .¹

Or on Hebbel:

He has high intelligence and a good style. His characters however do not possess sufficient life and blood, they are merely expressions of super clever, over-refined problems. If you were thinking of sending him to me, could I perhaps swop him for Grillparzer? . . . Pure Shakespeare with his sparseness, the certainty of his deadly aim and his popular humour, add to which a delicate poetical touch which Shakespeare doesn't have. Isn't it a joke that Grillparzer was a stiff-necked civil servant and a thoroughly boring person—see his autobiography which is in almost as bad taste as that of Bebel.²

For artists as well as politicians a close contact with real life was essential.

Your idea that I should write a book about Tolstoy doesn't appeal to me at all. For whom? Why? Everyone can read Tolstoy's books and if they don't get a strong breath of life from them, then they won't get it from any commentary. Can anyone 'explain' what Mozart's music is? Can anyone 'explain' of what the magic of life consists, if the smallest and most matter-of-fact things don't tell him—or better, if he doesn't have this magic in him? . . . Far too many books have already been written; people forget to look into the beautiful world with so much literature all around them.

It was natural that Rosa should prefer to translate a less well-known Russian author than write a commentary on one of the giants. Her interest in the Russian language—'the language of the future'—continued unashamed and undiminished. The choice fell on Vladimir Korolenko's autobiography *History of my Contemporary* (*Istoriya moego sovremennika*). Her correspondence with publishers and with Luise Kautsky clearly shows the desire to help fill a gap in the study of modern Russian writing. But the value of this work was social as well as literary. Her preface to the translation emphasized the link. It placed Korolenko in the majestic tradition of Russian literature—and although Rosa Luxemburg never set up as a literary critic by allocating marks of merit and demerit, she emphatically claimed a high place for him among

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, pp. 102–3.

² *Ibid.*, p. 82.

living writers. In addition she analysed Korolenko's writings in the context of social history. Here her judgements were uninhibited. Writers like Tolstoy and Korolenko himself, who were aware of what *was* and in what way it was changing, earned her approval over those who ran away from social realities into introspective and spiritual absorptions.¹ Within the chosen group of socially conscious writers, Rosa particularly contrasted Gorky and Korolenko. The latter was still interested in the countryside, in peasants, while Gorky,

the devoted follower of German scientific socialism, was already pre-occupied with the town labourer, and his shadow, the Lumpenproletariat . . . Korolenko, like Turgenev—whom he so highly esteemed—had a thoroughly lyrical and receptive nature, he was a man of mood; Gorky, on the other hand, followed the tradition of Dostoevsky—a man with a thoroughly dramatic conception, bulging with energy, bursting for action— . . . if drama is the poetry of action, then [Korolenko's writings were] only half poetry but wholly truth, like everything that is part of life.²

Korolenko combined an unassuming literary style—reportage but deeply felt—with an irrevocable attachment to society around him. These virtues are mirrored in her introduction. There were no blaring assertions, none of the catchwords of Marxism, only joy at the continuous social protest yet individually expressed. Rosa gave a brief biography of Korolenko and the reader feels with her the unbearable necessity of protest and action rather than any rationalized thesis of opposition. Korolenko—and she herself—were no longer dealing with Russians, Poles, or Jews, but with people.

It is one of the necessities of modern society that human society, whenever it gets a bit uncomfortable for one reason or another, should immediately find a scapegoat in members of another nation, or race, or religion, or colour; having stilled its bad temper on them it returns refreshed to its own routine. And it is natural that the only suitable

¹ Comparison with Lukács's scale of approval, based on the extent to which writers like Stendhal and Flaubert reflect the ethical and social realities of their historical 'period', is interesting. Lukács, not concerned with political context but with the thorough application of Marxist determinism to literature, is aiming at an entirely different standard of merit from Rosa Luxemburg's normative search for social protest separate from but in addition to 'purely' literary qualities. (Cf. above, p. 29, note 1.)

² *Die Geschichte meines Zeitgenossen*, Berlin 1919-20, p. 50 (Introduction).

scapegoats are always economically, historically, and socially backward nationalities.¹

Enlarged by Rosa's growing emphasis on wholeness, protest no longer consisted in *doing* but demanded *being*; individual gestures of protest lost their significance and perhaps did more harm than good. 'Was not the obstinate *eppur si muove*—Galileo's pointless and empty gesture—without any practical result other than the revenge of the Holy Office . . . if indeed it ever took place at all.'² But what then of Liebknecht? He too was undergoing his enlargement in prison, though through a process of violent oscillation rather than Rosa's direct and well-proportioned growth. How could anyone imagine that either of these two could ever again fit into the personal and political limits of a pre-war SPD?

Before her close friends Rosa Luxemburg went through a rather elaborate rigmarole of reluctance with regard to her own contribution. 'Kestenberg [the publisher] insists upon his pound of flesh—a preface from me, and I am making a desperate effort to gather the material for it.'³ And no doubt the unwillingness to set up as a literary critic was perfectly genuine. But Rosa Luxemburg's interest in Korolenko accords very well with the whole process of deliberate self-examination to which she subjected herself in prison, turning inward upon herself all her formidable tools of analysis which could not now be deployed upon a society from which she was cut off. Korolenko, too, both as a writer and as a person, at times suffered from the enforced deflection of his outgoing sympathies and understanding back upon himself. 'Korolenko is almost unique in Russian literature—in that arid waste where, as Virginia Woolf says, the writer has to fall back upon "the illumination of the soul and upon the brotherhood of man".'

¹ Ibid., p. 44 (Introduction).

² Ibid., p. 31. This contemptuous dismissal of Galileo, for hundreds of years a symbol of the intellectual revolt against darkness and obscurantism—scientific truth against religious dogma—had no echo at the time, but was both prophetic and fascinating. Modern research (in the West, not in the East) has exposed Galileo as the intransigent dogmatist against a flexible, political, above all responsible church forced to take action, not against the inroads of modern science but the irresponsible disturber of the peace. (See George de Santillana, 'Phases of the Conflict between Totalitarianism and Science' in Carl J. Friedrich (ed.), *Totalitarianism*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1954, pp. 244–62, and his book *The Crime of Galileo*.) It is surprising that the analogy between Galileo and, say, Pasternak from the Soviet point of view as a conflict between spontaneity and discipline has never struck any Soviet theorists. And what price Rosa Luxemburg's spontaneity in view of her dismissal of Galileo's 'pointless and empty gesture'?

³ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 239, 19 December 1917.

For he was what we might call today an integrated personality who saw life steadily if not always whole.¹ Like Rosa Luxemburg, moreover, he was essentially a persuader rather than a describer; he, too, combined an acute social sympathy with a somewhat legalistic manner of argument.² It is no wonder that Rosa Luxemburg found in Korolenko someone who seemed to personify her suppurating dissatisfaction with the aridness of life as viewed from inside a prison.

The translation of Korolenko and her economic writings in prison were a self-imposed discipline. She still pressed hard against the limits of her existence. Occasional visits and letters were the only form of communication with the living world outside. But she was determined to live—perhaps more fully than she had ever lived before; and her friends were turned into delegates, pressed and moulded to live her life for her. Whether encouraging others to be brave and strong; whether insisting on a new closeness with Luise Kautsky or Marta Rosenbaum through an arrangement of symbols on paper which she had probably never sought in the intimacy of speech; whether binding a disciple like Hans Diefenbach close to her by perpetually displaying her scintillating personality for his benefit—it was her life and not theirs that was at stake. The choice of vehicles was so limited—literature, politics, the instant, timeless speck of life minutely observed and captured; broad-based judgements alternating with the ruthlessly critical penetrations of a needle—they follow on each other's heels in a bewildering and complex procession. The present and the past became welded into one flexible whole—where most other prisoners would choose to moan about the contrast. Some minute and fleeting vision in the prison yard was captured, made to conjure up a shared experience of the past. Yet such was Rosa's skill that she breathed life into her correspondents—so that they took on new and

¹ R. F. Christian, 'V. G. Korolenko (1853-1921). A centennial appreciation', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 32 (1953-1954), p. 452. 'The acute moral sensitiveness which, in Rosa Luxemburg's case, found a somewhat Messianic outlet in preaching to her friends about the beautiful, suffering world of animals and flowers, was characterized by Chekhov with regard to Korolenko by the assertion that he would have written better if he had only gone off occasionally and been unfaithful to his wife. (See I. A. Bunin, *Memories and Portraits* (translation V. Traill and R. Chancellor), London 1951, p. 48.

² It is interesting that his last published writings relate to a correspondence with Lunacharskii in which he condemned the post-revolutionary atrocities of the Bolsheviks, who he had hitherto supported. The standard modern Russian biography of Korolenko is G. A. Byalyi, *V. G. Korolenko*, Moscow/Leningrad 1949.

sharper dimensions. Luise Kautsky, much the same age as Rosa, needed only a hint, a snap of the finger, to drop everything and join Rosa in spirit at Wronko. In return Rosa could be cold, even brutal; the reader knows or feels that Luise left more of herself in pawn to her friend than she received in return, for friendship is never equal, or for that matter just. In a passage which Luise Kautsky omitted from her edition of Rosa's letters, the latter ironically chided Luise for her sentimental refusal to look the situation in the face and honestly accept her emotional attachment to another man.¹

This passage is revealing because it indicates a facet of Rosa's character which none of her biographers has mentioned—and of which perhaps only Luise Kautsky was aware. Rosa Luxemburg was not interested in any high-principled campaign for women's rights—unlike her friend Clara Zetkin.² Like anti-Semitism, the inferior status of women was a social feature which would be eliminated only by the advent of Socialism; in the meantime there was no point in making any special issue of it. But disinterest in public did not mean private indifference. Since the break-up of her own 'marriage' to Leo Jogiches in 1907, Rosa had undertaken a campaign for the possession of the souls of her women friends, especially against those husbands who were also her political opponents. This subtle enticement had been carried out with Rosa's usual blend of intellect and emotion; a war on two fronts. From prison the campaign moved into high gear, as the letter to Mathilde Wurm shows (above, pp. 661-2). Rosa now gladly committed further reserves of emotion to the battle.³

The same increase of pace is clear from the letters to Hans Diefenbach. This became a very special friendship, and in her letters to the young army doctor during the war Rosa unleashed a many-splendoured offensive, with an emotional skill which she never surpassed. Even today one can still feel her tentacles reaching out from prison like those of a passionate and demanding

¹ This passage occurs in letter No. 93 dated 19 December 1917. All the originals of Rosa's letters to the Kautskys are at IISFI. Since it was Luise Kautsky's special wish that this particular aspect of her life should not be made public, I have confined myself to this comment.

² One of Clara Zetkin's favourite themes was a quotation from Engels (*Ursprung der Familie . . .*): 'He is the bourgeois in the family, the woman represents the proletariat.' See for instance Clara Zetkin, *Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften*, Berlin 1957, Vol. I, p. 95.

³ For the beginning of the campaign, see above, p. 412.

octopus. Nowhere is the mixture of emotion, ethics, politics, and aesthetics more skilfully and tidily woven; past, present, and future more dialectically fused, than in these outpourings coming apparently straight from the heart. From the descriptions of contemporaries and from the few letters of his that remain, we know Diefenbach to have been a reserved, somewhat stiff young man who had difficulty in keeping his end up among all his highly verbal and incisive friends.¹ The slightly cannibalistic streak in Rosa's friendships caused her to hammer unmercifully at Diefenbach's dilettantism: 'Hänschen regrettably has more talent than knowledge . . .', she told him, ' . . . and if your temperament is a little too much like over-refined white flour [*semmelblond*] and your perpetually cool hands irritate me at times, I still say: "Blessed are those without temperament as long as this lack of temperament means that they will never trade on the happiness or peace of other people." ' And to his sister she wrote after his death:

His weaknesses—naturally he also had these—were those of a child not equipped for life's realities, for the struggle and for the inevitable brutalities; he was always slightly afraid of life. I always feared that he might remain an everlasting dilettante, buffeted by all the storms of life; I tried as far as I could to apply gentle pressure on him so that he might eventually take root in life after all.²

She made a point of bettering each one of his literary comments; what he liked she promptly criticized; what he discovered she had known long before and so—it was implied—should he have; what he did not know she insisted on his learning. Continual competition prevailed for possession of his person, not with a third party but with his own restrained temperament—the power of which, in order to satisfy her enormous talent for battle, she had infinitely to exaggerate. Even in her friendships Rosa could not live without conflict.

What effect did these marvellous letters have on their recipients? In Diefenbach's case we do not know. She always addressed him as 'Sie'—the polite form—but this was the only restraint. For the rest, the letters have an intensely provocative, erotic quality, almost daring this restrained young man to be shocked and to protest. Yet she could not have gone on in this vein if there had not been

¹ See the brief sketch by Benedikt Kautsky, the son of Karl and Luise, in *Briefe an Freunde*, pp. 16–17.

² *Briefe an Freunde*, pp. 77, 78, 134.

some response. 'Good God, if I sense in the slightest that somebody doesn't like me, my very thoughts flee from his presence like those of a scared bird; for me even to look him in the face again seems too much.'¹ Diefenbach's devotion to his volatile and fascinating friend was of long standing, though perhaps tinged with hopelessness, after all the years of Rosa wilfully blowing hot and cold. Then, in 1914, the friendship was suddenly and mysteriously promoted. With Konstantin Zetkin gone and the circle of friends narrowed by political defection, who but the faithful, unromantic, but transparently decent and fastidious Hans Diefenbach, so often the object of amused pity and derision, should now advance to the grail of her close affection, surrounded by a glow of virtue? The need for a single, supreme confidant was greater than ever in the impersonal routine of Wronke fortress. Rosa's friends were all delighted; the marriage of scarlet and alabaster, so suitable for both, became their fond hope for the conclusion of the war.² But there was also nothing naïve about Diefenbach's affection for Rosa Luxemburg. He may not have realized the circumstances of his own promotion, but he did know Rosa's weaknesses as well as her great strengths. With slightly mocking affection he provided for Rosa in his will—a sum of money to be held in strict trust, lest among other things she should spend it 'politically'. 'The money must be managed by some responsible person—e.g. my sister—and the beneficiary shall get the interest annually until the date of her death. I make this disposition because my excellent friend may not prove as great a genius in her personal economy as in her understanding of the economics of a whole society.'³ Despite her great grief, Rosa was annoyed rather than flattered when this came out after his death in action in 1917.⁴

Many of Rosa's letters from prison were published as an act of piety. 'They were meant to show that the red revolutionary, the enthusiastic propagandist of violence and destruction, was in fact a highly sensitive, easily hurt, kindly woman who suffered with every frozen wasp and had a deep love of life and of living creatures. What Luise Kautsky and her son Benedikt have done is to say to us:

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 77.

² Reported by Blumenberg. But Luise Kautsky's statement that the marriage was an 'understood thing' is, I am sure, an exaggeration—at least as far as Rosa was concerned. Cf. above, p. 371, note 1.

³ *Gedenkbuch*, p. 53.

⁴ Letter to Luise Kautsky, dated 29 May 1918, in *International Review of Social History*, 1963, Vol. VIII, Part 1, pp. 106-7.

choose—between the public and the private Rosa; at least observe the contrast between the two. Rosa herself would probably have laughed at this attempt and poured scorn on such sentimentality. For what is implied is that we must take these letters as evidence of another Rosa, a spontaneous and much more human Rosa, to set against the intensely political being of her public writings. The error is to see her political writings as artefacts, the letters as natural, bursting through in a torrent of temperament. In fact, there was nothing spontaneous about these letters at all. They were written quickly, but writing them was as disciplined and deliberate an activity as any of her political work. Phrases, thoughts, run through them like sudden inspirations—but they are raw material, bait, not ends in themselves. Whatever spontaneity there may be in Luxemburgism, it is not here. Every syllable serves a purpose. The real, the only, spontaneity of which Rosa was ever capable was—silence. When she was really moved she could not communicate at all. But silence cannot be quoted or recorded and so we must rely on her own occasional references to it. Thus after the death of her father Rosa wrote to Minna Kautsky: 'This blow shook me so deeply that I could not communicate for many months either by letter or word of mouth.'¹ And after one of the worst blows of her life, the death of her devoted Hans Diefenbach: 'I have just received word that Hans has fallen. For the moment I am unable to write more. Brevity and frankness are the most merciful things, just as with a difficult operation. I am unable to find words.'² This was still the same woman who years before had shyly written of her own compulsive need for self-communion, and wondered if there was something peculiar about her on account of it—as though it were some terrible evidence of failure.³

Last but not least, there was the imperceptible re-creation of *Spartakus*—quite apart from its political purposes—as an ideal peer group, very much like that comfortable if highly sprung sociological mattress—the original SDKPiL. While Kautsky's accusations of political ambition were absurd, they did make unintended sense in social and intellectual terms. Rosa's organizational commitment to the big party as late as January 1917 was actually a substantial personal sacrifice.

¹ 30 December 1900. IISH Archives, now printed *ibid.*, p. 97.

² *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 204, 10 and 15 November 1917.

³ Seidel letters, p. 70.

Always and eternally the same elevated personalities around me—Adolf Hoffmann with his characteristic ‘popular’ humour, and those unmentionables (forgive me!) like two collapsing Doric columns; that perpetual brown velvet hat of Papa Pfannkuch. . . . The thought of being surrounded to the end of my life by such phenomena makes me shudder. ‘The world is upside down. “Thrones overturned and empires split”—and at the end of it all I never get out from under that perpetual same dozen people—*plus ça change, plus ça reste tout à fait la même chose*.¹

She swore that after the war, whatever happened, she would not go back to the boredom and bureaucratic mincing-machine of the pre-war party—‘no more meetings, no more conventicles. Where great things are in the making, where the wind roars about the ears, that’s where I’ll be in the thick of it, but not the daily treadmill.’² In the meantime Rosa would deal only with real political ‘friends’—friends almost in the English sense of being like-minded; a selection made by circumstances and by herself: no more need for reservations, for tact, for all those political concessions which had disfigured the sociology of the old SPD. ‘The new peer group mustered for Franz Mehring’s 70th birthday. ‘We honoured the old man with speeches, all serious and suitable to the occasion. Quite different from that jamboree with Bebel, do you remember?’³ A peer group imposes personal responsibilities. Even from prison Rosa encouraged the old man with all the means at her disposal, for every member of that small band was immensely valuable.

How wrong you are to think that your bad mood has anything to do with age. What better evidence of youthfulness than your indestructible pleasure in your work, in fighting and laughing, the way you still set about it every day [*Sie noch jeden Tag in die Pfanne hauen*]. You cannot imagine to what extent the example of your wonderful capacity for work, the thought of your mental flexibility and even the hope of earning your approval, egg me on. How I look forward to sitting again in your comfortable study at the small table to talk with you and laugh with you.⁴

Both Mehring and Clara Zetkin spent some time in custody during the war and both were in very poor health. Rosa organized

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 76.

² Rosa Luxemburg to Clara Zetkin, 1 July 1917, photocopy IML (B), NL5iii-A/14.

³ Rosa Luxemburg to Clara Zetkin, 9 March 1916; File 209, No. 494, IML (M).

⁴ *Ibid.*, File 201, No. 858, IML (M).

a complete almoner's service for Clara Zetkin's benefit, nagging her friends to call on her or at least to keep writing; Rosa was not above berating Hans Diefenbach for visiting Stuttgart without making a point of calling on Clara Zetkin.¹ The almoner-in-chief was none other than Mathilde Jacob, Rosa's secretary. Her war-time letters to Clara Zetkin are preserved, and while they contain little of political interest—Mathilde Jacob was not a very political person but *was* devoted to Rosa—they do reflect the stream of instructions, queries, and suggestions which emanated from Wronke and Breslau for the better preservation of Clara Zetkin. The latter was a hypersensitive, often obstinate woman who had to be coaxed—and this, under precise instruction from Rosa, larded with concrete tokens of regard like books and flowers, was Mathilde's job.²

In fact Mathilde Jacob played an important role as Rosa Luxemburg's funnel for communicating with the outside world and also as a means for carrying political messages in and out of jail. The best proof of Rosa Luxemburg's charisma is the loyal and devoted service of this fundamentally unpolitical person who was willing to add political functions to her private tasks for a cause in which she was not primarily interested. Indeed, her interest lapsed quickly with Rosa Luxemburg's death.³ Rosa Luxemburg's friends, however, were well aware that the woman engaged as her secretary had voluntarily 'promoted herself to being Rosa's kindly spirit'.⁴ Apart from Mathilde Jacob's communication with Clara Zetkin, she conveyed Rosa's wishes and messages to all and sundry, Mehring, Paul Levi, Haase, and others.⁵ Most important

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 102.

'I really take exception to the fact that you have not visited Clara. You should have *made* time. Do you understand what I am after in this case? The more I reproach myself that I do not stand by her sufficiently, the more was it important and a relief to me that you were doing better than I, and as it were made up for my shortcomings with your own good nature and sympathy for her. And now you have failed me completely . . . I must ask you at once to write to her honestly and openly and make everything good with a really kind letter.'

² The letters are in IMI, (M).

³ This clearly emerges from her public declaration after Rosa Luxemburg's death; see above, p. 27.

⁴ Luise Kautsky to Mathilde Jacob, 1 November 1915, in the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

⁵ Many of Mathilde Jacob's letters are preserved in the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, as are some 125 letters from Rosa Luxemburg to Mathilde Jacob from 10 July 1916 to 8 November 1918. I have not seen this collection but it is discussed, unfortunately in a very haphazard and unsystematic way, by Ralph H. Lutz in *Journal of Central European Affairs*, Vol. XXIII, No. 3,

of all, Rosa Luxemburg was able to unload on her faithful friend and servant some of the inevitable spleen that collected through the years of imprisonment—without fear that it would be resented.¹

In a Socialist society, for which the peer group was to be a skeleton, the strong must carry the old and infirm. In 1918 Mehring suffered a blackout while walking in the street and Rosa wrote to him:

I cannot tell you how much your last letter and the news of your accident have affected me. Normally I support my own almost four-year-old slavery with the patience of a lamb; but now under the influence of your painful news I was seized by such a fever of impatience and a burning desire to get out to Berlin and see with my own eyes how you are, to shake you by the hand and spend an hour or so chatting with you . . . I am certain that next year at last we shall all be able to gather round you for your birthday. . . .²

It is noticeable that Rosa's concern was largely with the older generation, with the small group of intellectuals who had broken loose with such agony after 4 August 1914. There are only a few references to younger sympathizers, the new shock troops of radicalism, later to dominate the KPD until many of them, too, were flung off the dizzy turntable of Bolshevization. To this extent Rosa was anchored in the Second International; in her personal relations she looked backwards to the past rather than to the future. Only when a different social organization was found to be required in order to make effective an old philosophy did the new men begin to come into their own.

Not that the work of care and protection all went one way. A determined effort was made to cushion Rosa Luxemburg from the exigencies of prison—and the only reason this remained unsung was that its inspirer and director was Leo Jogiches, furtive as ever. Rosa had always suffered from a delicate stomach, and now more than ever; the collection of rice to supply her with the right diet was no easy task in blockaded, war-time Germany. Rosi Wolffstein,

October 1963, pp. 303–12. Although this article contains many errors of fact, one must presume that its quotations and direct references from Mathilde Jacob's letters are reliable.

¹ See letters dated 11 and 18 August 1917, following Rosa's discovery that her cat Mimi had been dead for some time and that her friends had wanted to 'spare' her the news. (IML(B), NL2000-A/16, pp. 29–30, 35.)

² *Die Internationale*, 1923, Vol. VI, No. 3, p. 70.

Rosa's ex-student, had helped significantly in this effort, and was summoned to a secret meeting with the redoubtable Dr. Kryśtałowicz (Leo Jogiches) at a station café to receive his formal thanks on Rosa's behalf.¹ Indeed, Jogiches now devoted himself to Rosa in the most touching way, thus opening up the third and last period of peace in their long and often stormy relationship.

The February revolution in Russia was the first crack in the dishearteningly monolithic pursuit of imperialist war. But no one dreamt that the events in Petrograd would eventually end Russia's participation in the alliance against Germany. On the contrary, a more popular government was expected to release national energy into more effective prosecution of the war. No one quite knew what to make of the events—whether they were a good or bad omen for Germany, or for the Socialists for that matter. Rosa Luxemburg's first reaction was personal. 'So many old friends, locked up for years in Moscow, Petersburg, Orel or Riga, now walking about free! How much easier that makes my own incarceration. It is a strange change of roles, isn't it? But I am satisfied and don't begrudge them their freedom, even though it means *my* chances have got so much the worse.'² In July 1917, and again the next year, the question arose as to whether Rosa might claim Russian citizenship and benefit from deportation, like Marchlewski. Another alternative was a special exchange of distinguished revolutionaries; such a move was at one time envisaged for Karl Liebknecht. Rosa was undecided; 'perhaps, maybe—a difficult question'. In the end she declined. What mattered was the inevitable German revolution, and she wanted to be on hand for it—even if it meant longer imprisonment meanwhile.³

For her information about events in Russia she necessarily depended on the newspapers, and the newspapers were cautious. Right from the start the German government had worked out precise directions to the press about its reporting of the events in Russia. No discussion of the new constitutional forms which had emerged from the Russian revolution was permitted, since 'they only indicate how one should proceed here in case of an upheaval'. Even after the October revolution, which was clearly to Germany's

¹ This story was told to the author by Frau Frölich herself.

² *Briefe an Freunde*, pp. 87–88, 27 May 1917.

³ Rosa Luxemburg to Mathilde Jacob, 29 July 1917, photocopy IML (B), NLz III-A/16, p. 20.

advantage, the German authorities would only permit such comments on the Soviet state as served as a frightening example; 'all that explains or praises the proceedings of the revolutionaries in Russia must be suppressed'.¹

Rosa's first official reaction in the *Spartakus* letter of April 1917 was also cautious.² The analysis was historical, backward-looking—a sure sign of uncertainty. All that could be done was to hark back to the events of 1905–1906: once more the liberals were shown as being on the verge of reaction instead of in the vanguard of revolution; the proletariat was warned that further advances would depend on itself and no one else. Almost syllabically the next objectives are spelled out (no reason why that distinguished 'international' tactician Rosa Luxemburg from inside a German prison should not give dialectical advice to far-away Petrograd): democratic republic, eight-hour day, confiscation of large landed properties; above all, an end to the imperialist war. It was a curiously formal and archaic programme, as though the clock had really been turned back to 1906. Peace was just the first of several demands that must be put forward, less in the hope of achieving them than as a means of galvanizing working-class action. This was the old idea of a programme, not as a political expression of wants but as a process of political stimulation. It is important to understand this if the reaction of *Spartakus* to the unexpected conclusion of peace by the Bolsheviks less than a year later is to make sense. The demand for peace was a weapon, not something which one could actually hope to achieve.

The second part of the article was a reckoning with the claim of the German government and its SPD supporters that the war against Russia was a war of liberation from Tsarist absolutism. This was safer, more familiar ground.

Events in Russia have also faced the German proletariat with a vital question of honour. . . . Once the Russian proletariat has burst the solidarity of the home front through open revolution, the German proletariat unashamedly stabs it in the back by continuing to support the war. From now on the German troops in the East do not fight against Tsarism any longer, but against the revolution; as soon as the

¹ *Revolutionäre Ereignisse und Probleme in Deutschland während der Periode der grossen sozialistischen Oktoberrevolution 1917/1918*, Berlin (East) 1957, p. 282, quoting a minute from the Ministry of the Interior.

² 'Die Revolution in Russland', *Spartakusbrieft*, pp. 302–5. The attribution to Rosa Luxemburg is mine.

Russian proletariat comes out openly for peace the German proletariat by remaining silent will become the accomplice to an open betrayal of its Russian brethren—if it remains silent. Russia has liberated herself, but who will liberate Germany from military dictatorship, from *Junker* reaction, from the imperialist slaughter?¹

In the next *Spartakus* letter of May 1917 there were two lengthy articles by Rosa Luxemburg.² There had been time to read and think. Preoccupation with the past was pushed aside in favour of a more rigorous examination of the present.

In the stuffy atmosphere of Europe, in which everything has been effectively stifled for three years, a window has at last been torn open, and a fresh and lively current of air is blowing in. . . . But even with the greatest heroism the proletariat of a single country cannot break the stranglehold [of the world war] by itself. Thus the Russian revolution inevitably grows into an international problem. The Russian workers' striving for peace comes into the strongest conflict not only with their own middle class but with that of England, France, and Italy. . . . The Socialist proletariat of England, France, and Italy has the unavoidable duty of unfolding the flag of rebellion against the war—in the form of effective mass actions against the ruling classes at home. . . . As for the German bourgeoisie . . . it only wants to use the Russian proletariat to get itself out of a war on two fronts, seeing how unfavourable the strategic situation is abroad and how poor the supply position at home. This is the same machination by German imperialism to make use of the Russian revolution for its own self-interested purposes as that attempted by the allied powers, only in the opposite way. The western powers want to harness the bourgeois liberal tendency of the revolution in order to . . . defeat their German competitors. The German imperialists want to use the proletarian tendencies of the revolution to avoid a military defeat—and why not, gentlemen? German Social Democracy has served so faithfully and long in dressing up mass slaughter as 'liberation' from Russian 'Tsarism'; now the Russian Social Democrats are called upon to assist by helping the 'liberator' out of his unhappy involvement in an unsuccessful war.³

Scheidemann's role as a go-between for Russia and Germany had been engineered by Parvus's string-pulling behind the scenes, with the blessing of the German Foreign Office. Some of this was known to *Spartakus* though they did not yet realize the full purpose of the originators of the plan. Rosa sensed that Ebert's and

¹ Ibid., p. 305.

² 'Der alte Maulwurf' (The Old Mole), *Spartakusbriefe*, pp. 322-9; 'Zwei Osterbotschaften' (Two Easter Messages), *ibid.*, pp. 347-51.

³ Ibid., pp. 323-5.

Scheidemann's initiative in Copenhagen was part of an official flirtation with Russian revolutionaries *against* the Russian liberals who had declared their support for the war. She was certain that such a mission 'could only get a kick in the pants from Russian Socialists of all shades', but she was wrong. Parvus short-circuited the SPD at this stage and got the German authorities to deal with Lenin direct, instead of with the Workers' and Soldiers' Soviet in Petrograd.¹

Having all too correctly analysed the interests of the belligerent governments and their supporters, Rosa turned once more to the interests of the Russian and German working classes. In her view it was now possible at last to talk of a real war of liberation, the kind of defensive struggle she had indicated in the *Juniusbrochüre*.

The question of peace for the Russian proletariat is not as simple as would suit Hindenburg [and] Bethmann [the German Chancellor] at this particular moment. The outbreak of the revolution and the powerful position of the proletariat as a result have changed the [character of] imperialist war in Russia to something akin to that claimed in the propaganda of the ruling classes in all countries: a war of defence. The liberals, with their dreams of a Russian Constantinople, have had their plans stuffed down their throats; the solution of a patriotic war of defence has suddenly become reality. The Russian proletariat, however, can only end the war and make peace in good conscience when their work—the achievements of the revolution and its unhampered progress—is assured. The Russian workers are today the only ones who *really* defend freedom, progress and democracy.²

Already the analysis diverged sharply from that of Lenin. Looking outwards from Russia, it was the same old imperialist war, now carried on by Kerensky and Chkheidze instead of Nicholas and his ministers—to be combated by exactly the same means; any means, including German help. Looking out from Germany, however, the Russian revolution had achieved something worth defending against the strong and unrepentant German reaction, which might want peace with Russia for tactical reasons, but in the long run would want even more to destroy the revolution. This in essence was to be the *Spartakus* position for the next eighteen months. They recognized the need for peace as the only way to open up further revolutionary horizons, but not a peace which left imperial Germany

¹ Philipp Scheidemann, *Memoiren eines Sozialdemokraten*, Vol. I, pp. 420–7.

² *Spartakusbriefe*, pp. 326–7.

triumphant. The x in the equation was the German revolution.

What prescription for the German workers under these circumstances?

Who guarantees that tomorrow, after the conclusion of peace and as soon as German militarism has got its paw out of the trap, it will not attack the Russian proletariat in order to prevent dangerous undermining from that quarter? . . . the throttled 'assurances' of the former heroes of the SPD are not enough. . . . The danger of German militarism for imperialist England or France is truly rubbish, myth, the publicity of competitors. The danger of German militarism for republican revolutionary Russia, however, is real enough. . . . There is only one guarantee against future danger to the Russian revolution: the awakening of the German proletariat, the seizing of power by *German* 'soldiers and workers' at home, the revolutionary action of the *German* people in the cause of peace. To make peace with Bethmann and Hindenburg is a damnably difficult risk for the Russian revolutionary soldiers. The question of peace is indeed a part of the unhindered and utterly radical development of the Russian revolution, but this in turn is tied to parallel revolutionary action in the cause of peace on the part of the French, English, Italian and particularly the German proletariat.¹

The turgid phrases so untypical of Rosa were no accident; there was nothing but vague hopes and generalizations to offer; not a hiccough of revolution in Germany. It was the beginning of that intellectual paralysis that was to befall *Spartakus* increasingly as the war went on, and the Russians acted in a German vacuum.

Even before the pact between Lenin and Trotsky, in which the one accepted Bolshevik organization and the other armed insurrection as the motor of the 'permanent' revolution, Rosa Luxemburg in her German jail had announced the complete dependence of the Russian revolution on revolutions elsewhere. To succeed, the revolution in Russia had to spark off revolutionary outbreaks—above all in Germany. This was the key. Scheidemann's negotiations for a possible peace between the Russian revolution and German imperialism were only mentioned in order to show them as grotesque absurdities. Rosa knew nothing of the assiduous negotiations between Parvus, Karl Moor, and the German Foreign Office, of the impending journey of Lenin and his entourage through Germany in a sealed train provided by the German government. She believed such eventualities to be not only un-

¹ Ibid., pp. 327-8.

desirable but impossible. Her task and that of her friends now lay in bringing about a revolutionary outbreak in Germany. Every effort of *Spartakus* from now on was directed to achieving this aim. If only the masses could be awakened, and made to see their own interest! To that end she now directed her efforts, with an increasingly bitter and sarcastic tone as her words scattered like useless autumn leaves among passers-by preoccupied with other worries than saving the Russian revolution. In Rosa's mind the pattern of the Russian revolution was set in February, not in October. The unpredictable product of history (unpredictable in time), and therefore the more important, was the February revolution; the events of October were merely the logical consequence and as such had already been placed within their historical context in April and May 1917. This was to be the real issue between her and the Bolsheviks, more than any dispute over the tactical details of the next twelve months. For Rosa the achievements of February would last while those of October were a transient success, valuable only as an experience. (As we shall see, she in no way belittled the Bolshevik achievement. But while October was the achievement of the courageous, determined Bolsheviks, February was the achievement of history—base and superstructure!) Unless of course the German working class came to the rescue. And to some extent later Communist attacks on her judgement suffered from the awkwardness of the following choice: either they had to accept the October revolution as a natural consequence of the earlier February revolution, in which case like Rosa they had to admit the historical primacy of the earlier events; or the October revolution was indeed an act of will, an arbitrary *détournement* of history, and only then could Rosa Luxemburg justifiably be accused of misunderstanding when she failed to recognize its special significance. After her death it was said that she had simply changed her mind and recognized her errors. We shall have the opportunity of examining the case for this later. What matters here is that in outline Rosa's ideas had already taken shape *before* October 1917.

Spartakus openly greeted the events of February and propagated them as widely as possible in Germany. The *Spartakus* letter in which Rosa published her two articles contains a collection of documents and proclamations issued by the all-Russian Soviet. Certainly *Spartakus* articles written by other comrades followed

Rosa Luxemburg's analysis very closely. In August 1917 the unknown author of an article entitled 'Burning questions of the time' foresaw in Russia the emergence of a dictatorship of the proletariat, but added: 'Here begins the fatal destiny of the Russian revolution. The dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia is destined to suffer a desperate defeat compared to which the fate of the Paris Commune was child's play—unless the international proletarian revolution gives it support in good time.'¹ But just as the Russian revolution required the help of the German working classes in order to survive, so—true to the 'internationalism' of the *Spartakus* group—did the German Left appeal to the successful Russian revolutionaries for support against their own Mensheviks, the majority SPD.

'The agreement of our Russian comrades to admit Messrs. Südekum, Scheidemann, Legien, etc. to the Stockholm conference would be a heavy blow to the international Socialist idea in Germany and to our common cause . . . it might be taken as a recognition and legitimization of these gentlemen by international Socialism and would greatly confuse once more the already well advanced process of clarification among the German workers.'²

Here, too, were the first traces of that profound pessimism for the short term which characterized Rosa's thinking about the Russian, and later the German, revolutions. It was not an easy point to make in public, especially while the war was on. As early as April 1917 Rosa wrote to Marta Rosenbaum:

Of course the marvels in Russia are like a new lease of life for me. They are a saving grace [*heilbotschaft*] for all of us. I only fear that you all do not appreciate them enough, do not recognise sufficiently that it is our own cause which is winning there. It *must* and *will* have a salutary effect on the whole world, it must radiate outwards into the whole of Europe; I am absolutely certain that it will bring a new epoch and that the war cannot last long.³

¹ *Spartakusbriege*, p. 356. According to the style of this article, it could well be by Leo Jogiches.

² Letter of Franz Mehring on behalf of the *Gruppe Internationale* to the Petrograd Workers' and Soldiers' Soviet, *Dokumente und Materialien*, Vol. II, pp. 592–3. The letter first appeared as part of the 'Internationale Korrespondenz' in the Swiss paper *Berner Tagwacht*, in June 1917. The Stockholm conference in question never actually took place since the Bolsheviks refused to attend and the English and French delegations could not appear because their respective governments refused to issue passports. From 5 to 12 September, however, a conference of left-wing Socialist groups did take place in Stockholm, known as the Third Zimmerwald Conference.

³ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 157.

But this enthusiasm was for a distant future. An epoch was a long-term concept; as soon as her friends began to cast favourable horoscopes for the immediate political scene Rosa blew cold at once: 'We must not count on permanent success [in Russia], though in any case even the attempt to seize power is already a slap in the face for our Social Democrats and the whole miserable International.'¹ And to Luise Kautsky she predicted even more baldly that 'of course, the Bolsheviks will never be able to maintain themselves'.² Once more she reflected and also created *Spartakus* opinion—though both Franz Mehring and Clara Zetkin were to prove more optimistic after the events of October.³

Neither the circumstances of the October revolution nor the implications of Lenin's policy of peace and land distribution to the peasants were clear to anyone in Germany—except perhaps to the German government. The Left, particularly the leaders in prison, were unable to distinguish the inevitable from the peculiar, the historical from the 'man-made', in the events in Russia. That was why they could not see the factors making for Bolshevik survival. Their disapproval of these factors once they knew them, and their ability to pass judgement on them—which the Bolsheviks later questioned precisely as being ill-informed—was, as we shall see, quite a different matter; for by that time survival was no longer a revolutionary factor but one compounded of non-Socialist concessions which carried within them the dialectic of their own peculiar problems—it was that or repression, on an ever-growing scale.

In July 1917 the wheels of the German security administration ground out Rosa's transfer from the fortress in Wronke to the town prison of Breslau. This was much closer confinement, in terms of physical space as well as visits and facilities. There is no evidence that the transfer was a punishment for any breach of discipline or that the smuggling of illegal material through Mathilde Jacob and Marta Rosenbaum was suspected.

Here I am leading the existence of a proper convict, i.e. day and night they lock me into my cell and all I can see outside is the men's prison

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, pp. 160–1. The East German historian, Leo Stern, summarizing the reaction of the German Left to the outbreak of the revolution in Russia, gives the cheerful quotation, but not the pessimistic one (*Der Einfluss der grossen Oktoberrevolution*, p. 79).

² *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 207. ³ See below, pp. 689, 693.

. . . I limit my presence [in the yard where I can see all the other prisoners running about] to the minimum prescribed by the doctor for health reasons and during my walks I look around as little as possible. The difference from Wronke is in every respect a sharp one, though this is not a complaint but merely an explanation if for the time being I do not write letters woven out of the scent of roses, the azure colour of the sky and the wisps of cloud to which you have hitherto been accustomed. . . .¹

In addition, Rosa's health had worsened again. 'My stomach has been rebelling strongly for several weeks and I actually had to spend part of the time in bed; even now I exist mainly on warm bandages and very thin soup. The cause is uncertain, probably nervous reaction to the sudden worsening of my general circumstances.'²

At the beginning of 1917 an effort had been made to obtain Rosa's release on the grounds of ill-health, but this failed owing to lack of liaison between her own doctor and the local medical practitioner acting on behalf of the authorities.³ In addition, her new lawyer, Dr. Pinner, bombarded the Commander-in-Chief, under whose orders Rosa Luxemburg was detained, with complaints and appeals. The second senate of the military court (*Reichsmilitärgericht*) heard the appeal and refused the military prosecutor's motion that proofs of treasonable activities confidentially obtained should be submitted against her. The prosecutor also argued that her divorce from Gustav Lübeck automatically cancelled her German citizenship. On 22 February 1918 the High Court (*Reichsgericht*) heard a final appeal against detention but dismissed it.⁴ For once Rosa Luxemburg had been wholeheartedly behind the attempt to force the German authorities to release her. Her severe depression at the beginning of 1917 and again in Breslau were in part the consequence of these protracted but unsuccessful efforts.

From the end of 1917 onwards Rosa Luxemburg's influence on the tactics and policy of *Spartakus* undoubtedly suffered a decline. Various factors contributed to this, partly on Rosa's side, partly arising out of the situation. With her transfer to Breslau she was more cut off, her state of mind more self-absorbed than ever. The

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, pp. 126-7.

² *Ibid.*, p. 127.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 150-1.

⁴ See *Reichsmilitärgericht*, No. 476, A(Sch), quoted by Lutz, *Journal of Central European Affairs*, Vol. XXIII (1963), p. 312.

Spartakus letters had largely been her inspiration and effort; without her frequent contributions they lost much of their lustre. Moreover, her immediate circle of political friends, for whom she had acted as the fountain-head of strategy as well as tactics, began to lose its grip on events. Leo Jogiches was arrested on 24 March 1918; the authorities knew that with his arrest they had captured the main organizer of *Spartakus* activities as well as the willing vehicle of Rosa Luxemburg's ideas.¹ This left Franz Mehring, now seventy years old, Ernst Meyer and Paul Levi in charge, of whom only the first was a member of the peer group. More important still, the development of the opposition in Germany was temporarily moving against *Spartakist* influence. There were two waves of strikes, one in April 1917, another far bigger in January 1918—the first to have distinctly political overtones. But although these events had full *Spartakus* support with handbills and appeals, they were not under its direction nor had *Spartakus* exercised any significant influence on them. Not even recent East German history claims more than propagandistic participation for *Spartakus* in either of these events.² Out of these strikes, and leading them, there emerged an elusive organization of workers based on the larger factories of Berlin, and with it the first traces of workers' councils. In spite of arrests and the military draft of thousands of restive workers, the organization remained more or less intact throughout the war and found its political expression in the Revolutionary Shop Stewards (*Revolutionäre Obleute*) who were to play such a significant role in the period from November 1918 to March 1919.

Spartakus was following rather than making events in Germany from the end of 1917 onwards.³ The intellectuals, who provided *Spartakus* with its sophisticated programme and the necessary Marxist analysis of the situation, now had no significant function to fulfil, especially not from prison. Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were too honest to claim for themselves a leading role

¹ *Archivalische Forschungen*, 4/III, p. 1282. See also *Dokumente und Materialien*, Vol. II, p. 131.

² For summary and sources of this evidence, see E. Kolb, *Die Arbeiterräte in der deutschen Innenpolitik, 1918–19*, Düsseldorf 1962, p. 49.

³ For Jogiches' report on the January strikes and the *Spartakus* role in them, see *Dokumente und Materialien*, Vol. II, pp. 131–6. This document was found during the house search undertaken at the time of his arrest and was given limited and confidential distribution in the administration by the German authorities as a cautionary tale.

which at the time they did not play; Liebknecht, whose correspondence was very restricted by prison regulations, merely noted down a continual commentary on events, while Rosa's letters gave no more than fleeting, desperate references. There was remoteness, self-absorption; her remaining efforts were concentrated on the one event on which she could speak with unchallenged authority—the Russian revolution.

Among the first public commentators on the Bolshevik victory at the beginning of November 1917 Rosa Luxemburg was noticeably absent. This may have been due to physical difficulties. The most enthusiastic support came from Radek's old friends in Bremen, and from Clara Zetkin.¹ Both these articles, while stressing the dangers and difficulties, pledged immediate and complete support for the Bolsheviks. But in private Rosa Luxemburg asked Luise Kautsky on 24 November:

Are you happy about the Russians? Of course, they will not be able to maintain themselves in this witches' Sabbath, not because statistics show economic development in Russia to be too backward as your clever husband has figured out, but because Social Democracy in the highly developed West consists of miserable and wretched cowards who will look quietly on and let the Russians bleed to death. But such an end is better than 'living on for the fatherland'; it is an act of historical significance whose traces will not have disappeared even after many ages have passed. I expect great things to come in the next few years, but how I wish that I did not have to admire world history only through the bars of my cage.²

To Mathilde Wurm she had written a week earlier: 'My heart is heavy for the Russians, I don't expect the continued victory of the Leninists, but still—such an end is better than "living on for the fatherland"'.³

¹ *Arbeiterpolitik*, No. 46, 14 November 1917. See also Clara Zetkin in the women's supplement of *LV*, 30 November 1917.

² *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 207. This letter was written almost immediately after the death of Hans Diefenbach, during a period when Rosa was emotionally handicapped in her ability to write.

³ *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 55, 15 November 1917. Once more the partially identical phraseology of these two letters is an interesting example of Rosa's careful 'rationing' of words and feelings, and incidental evidence that her letters were deliberate, not spontaneous, creations. The contemptuous reference to 'living on for the fatherland' [instead of dying] is based on Heinrich Heine's sarcastic portrait of the heroically posturing but perpetually surviving Polish revolutionary émigrés of his day (see above, p. 103, note 3).

By the middle of November the impending peace negotiations with the Bolsheviks had been written up in the German press and Rosa's private comments became much more incisive.

Yes, the Bolsheviks; of course they don't please me either with their fanatical determination to make peace at any price [*Friedensfanatismus*] but after all *they* are not to blame. They are in a cleft stick and have only the choice between two sets of troubles, and are choosing the lesser. *Others* are responsible for the fact that the devil is the beneficiary of the Russian revolution. . . . Consequently, let us first sweep before our own doors. On the whole the events there are glorious and will have immeasurable results. If I could but talk with you and Igel [Karl Kautsky's brother, Hans] about all these things and especially if I could only get out of here! But complaining isn't my strong suit; for the present I am trying to follow events and am in good hope of participating one of these days. . . .¹

Doubts about the wisdom of a Russian revolutionary peace with German imperialism were expressed in the first public *Spartakus* comment on the events of October. A curious reversal in the roles of USPD and *Spartakus* had taken place. The former now hailed the prospect of negotiations and attempted to use the events in Russia for bringing pressure on the German government in the direction of Kautsky's old scheme for a 'just' peace without annexations.² They had thus inherited *Spartakus*'s slogan of peace at any price, first and foremost, if there was to be anything left of the proletariat. *Spartakus*, on the other hand, now saw in the conclusion of peace with Russia nothing but benefit for German imperialism and its wish to destroy the Russian revolution. The article 'Historical Responsibility' in the *Spartakus* letter of January 1918 was sour and unhappy in tone; the anonymous author could see no good from any of the probable alternatives in the near future. Now that an armistice had been concluded, a separate peace treaty between Germany and Russia was only a matter of time.

Not even the irony of seeing the hated and despised Bolshevik revolutionaries elevated to the status of equal negotiating partners by the German government could alleviate the harm.

Only the rock-like certainty of its reliance on the hopeless backwardness of the German people could have brought German reaction to make the

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, pp. 214-15, 19 December 1917.

² *IV*, 12 November 1917.

experiment of shaking the hand of the Petersburg murderers and pyromaniacs, who have just thrown on to the rubbish heap throne, altar, interest payments on foreign bonds, titles and various other sacrosanct items, who have strung up unrepentant generals from the windows of railway carriages and put the useless scions of the royal house in prison. . . . According to the press, Trotsky has made several speeches about the international situation in which he presents the effect of the Russian revolution on other countries in a very rosy light. . . . If these press reports are correct then we must regrettably pour water into Trotsky's champagne. It is psychologically understandable that the Bolsheviks should see a prestige success in that most important question of peace and should present themselves as successful to the Russian people. But a second look shows the Bolsheviks in another light. The immediate effect of the armistice in the East will merely be that German troops will be moved from there to the West. . . . Already the last bloody German advances in Flanders and in the South, the new 'marvellous' successes in Italy, are the direct results of Bolshevik victory in Petersburg . . . the mask of virtue and restraint which was forced on German imperialism by its precarious military situation up till now will be thrown into the lap of the Scheidemanns. With the help of God—who is undoubtedly on the side of the big battalions—a 'German peace' will be dictated. . . . This is how the situation really is and the Bolsheviks are only deceiving themselves and others if they hear the melody of peace on earth. . . . The last laugh about the Russian revolution has hitherto been exclusively enjoyed by Hindenburg and the German nationalists.¹

January 1918—the lowest ebb of confidence and hope. The unknown Jeremiah could not even offer any good advice, for every avenue of progress was blocked. In fact the article has all the makings of an epitaph.

The German workers continue to watch the spectacle good-naturedly, continue to be mere spectators, and so Soviet rule in Russia cannot find a fate different from the Paris Commune. This connection [between Germany and Russia] is already visible in the deterioration of Bolshevik policy. Only the desperate search for some sign of proletarian action in Germany can for instance explain—even if it does not excuse—the fact that the Bolsheviks even for one moment allowed themselves to carry on negotiations with the German official Socialists. Their negotiations with Hindenburg and Hertling [the new German Chancellor] may in their eyes be nothing but sad necessity which merely illuminates the evil German circumstances, but at least they do not cast

¹ *Spartakusbrieife*, pp. 406-9.

any reflection on those in power in St. Petersburg. The fact that they find it necessary to spread revolution into the German masses through such dirty channels as Parvus-Scheidemann proves that they too suffer from a lack of principle [*zerfahrene Zweideutigkeit*], which is completely at variance with their usual severe morality and intolerance of compromise.¹

It was the severest public criticism of the Bolsheviks ever to be uttered by the German Left—typical of the profound pessimism and the deep self-hatred of this black period.

For the first time since 1914 the issue of self-determination, Rosa Luxemburg's old bone of contention, was raised again.

More important and even graver is another mistaken attitude of the Bolsheviks, 'the right of national self-determination' which the Soviet government brandishes around. In reality there is only *one* form of national self-determination which is not a mockery of this 'right': that is the revolution of the proletariat, the mass of people in each nation. Other than this, the right of self-determination within the framework of the bourgeois state is nothing but a hollow phrase which in practice delivers the people into the hands of their ruling classes.²

The bitter polemics of 1913–1914 still rankled.

After the conclusion of the peace of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918, public comment by *Spartakus* surprisingly became more favourable again. Lenin had gone to great trouble to explain and excuse the separate peace; he felt, quite correctly, that it would certainly be misunderstood and resented in Germany. It was, he declared, to the accompaniment of stormy applause, 'the only way out for the survival of the efforts of the proletariat and the poor peasants . . . however hard the conditions it has imposed'. In return he excused the inaction of the German working class: was

¹ *Spartakusbriefe*, pp. 415–16. I do not feel able to identify the author of this depressing article with any confidence. The flat and uncompromising despair does not conjure up Rosa Luxemburg at all. On the other hand the long discussion of Polish and Lithuanian self-determination makes the authorship of Leo Jogiches at least possible.

The reference to Parvus and Scheidemann concerns the Social Democrat leaders' visit to Stockholm in December 1917 at Parvus's request, to negotiate a possible peace with the Russians. This visit took place with the knowledge and approval of the German authorities, who wanted to put out an unofficial feeler to the Soviet government to find out its terms. Parvus had been in financial and political contact with the Bolshevik Bureau in Stockholm since the summer. The attempt failed; the Russians in the end would not deal with the SPD, while the SPD executive were not prepared to carry out the Russian wishes for real peace agitation at home. See Philipp Scheidemann, *Memoiren eines Sozialdemokraten*, Vol. II, pp. 123 ff.

² *Ibid.*, p. 416.

it perhaps a veiled form of moral bargain? 'It is unjust to accuse the German workers of not making a revolution . . . things don't go like that. Revolutions cannot be made to order . . . they ripen as part of the historical development. . . .'¹ The soothing use of Rosa's old phrase of 1904 against Lenin's disciplined revolutionary will was possibly unconscious irony. None the less, 'the [German] working masses will understand, will say: "the Bolsheviks have acted correctly"'.²

Apart from the emotional enthusiasm of Clara Zetkin and the concurrence of the small Bremen group, historical justification of the Bolsheviks was chiefly provided by Franz Mehring. Already at the end of 1917 he had adopted in public the long view which Rosa Luxemburg was content to express in her private letters.

Revolutions have a long wind—if they are real; the English revolution of the seventeenth century, the French revolution of the eighteenth, took forty years to impose themselves [on history] and yet how the tasks of these revolutions shrink—one might almost say into *minutiae*—compared to the enormous problems with which the Russian revolution has to struggle.³

At the beginning of 1918 and throughout the year Franz Mehring continued his propagation of 'the long wind of history'. It was not only the need to justify the Russian events in public at any price, which *Spartakus* and—though reluctantly—Rosa Luxemburg accepted. Even Karl Liebknecht, almost completely isolated in Luckau jail—'unable once again to get a proper grip on Russian problems', he complained bitterly—had marked an early outburst against the Bolshevik peace policy in his private notes: 'Not to be printed! With all reserve, owing danger of misdirection. Only intended as basis for discussion. We must avoid any basic tendency to anti-Leninism. Greatest care and tact in all German criticism of Russian proletariat!'⁴ Mehring was more positive. He had never been interested in tactics. In contrast to all his hatreds and self-hatreds, he had a real love for the impersonal processes of history. Where Rosa had primarily abhorred the physical

¹ Speech at the conference of factory committees of Moscow region, 23 July 1918, *Pravda*, No. 153, 24 July; Lenin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXVII, pp. 506–7.

² Speech at session of All-Russian Central Executive, 23 February 1918, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXVII, p. 26.

³ *LV*, 31 December 1917.

⁴ Karl Liebknecht, *Politische Aufzeichnungen*, pp. 32, 102.

annihilation and suffering of the working classes during the war, where Lenin had seen the value of death and destruction for revolutionary purposes, Franz Mehring merely saw abstract history in the making. His increasing support for the Bolsheviks—though he too had criticized the separate peace—and his faith in their survival had a highly personal colouring and certainly does not provide any evidence for the later Bolshevik thesis that their action actually served the best interests of the German proletariat.

Mehring apart, *Spartakus*'s increasing commitment to the Bolsheviks was inevitable if the German working classes were not to be boxed in by the sort of negatives implied in the *Spartakus* letter of January 1918. Following the treaty of Brest-Litovsk German troops occupied the Ukraine in spring and summer 1918, together with large parts of the Baltic States and Finland. Violent opposition to what were practically annexations of large parts of Russia was intended to help the Bolsheviks in spite of themselves; to all intents and purposes Germany was once more at war with Russia and the problems of conscience posed by a separate peace were things of the past. Moreover the USPD, which had welcomed the February and October events in Russia, was now becoming sharply critical of the Bolsheviks. On 15 November 1917 Kautsky had analysed Russian conditions and found them wanting; according to the best Marxist standards, conditions in Russia were not ripe for Socialist rule. This thesis produced an immediate reaction from Franz Mehring in *Der Sozialdemokrat* on 5 January 1918; it also induced Rosa Luxemburg to mock Kautsky in public as well as in private. If it was a matter of fighting the USPD leadership or arguing with Kautsky, Rosa at once took up arms on behalf of the Bolsheviks.¹

The long wind of revolution in Russia crippled the chance of any German version in the foreseeable future. Rosa was not willing to say this in public, but Franz Mehring was. In an open letter to the Bolsheviks he wrote: 'If only I could send you better news from the internal life of the German working-class world. But official Socialism grows like an oil stain, even though it may be close to moral and political bankruptcy and daily continues to come closer to it.'² By declaring bankrupt all German revolutionary potential,

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 207. For Lenin's opinion of this support, see below, pp. 707-8.

² *Dokumente und Materialien*, Vol. II, p. 158.

Mehring necessarily admitted the failure of the whole *Spartakus* policy; with him it was intellectually in for a penny, in for a pound. 'We have made one big mistake, namely that from an organizational point of view we joined the independents in the hope of driving them forward. This hope we have had to give up. . . .'¹

As late as 5 September 1918 Ernst Meyer wrote to Lenin in much the same vein. 'You will have waited and still be waiting impatiently, as we are, for signs of a revolutionary movement in Germany. Happily all my friends are considerably more optimistic. We cannot unfortunately report large actions at present, or even in the near future, but we have plans for the winter and the conditions in Germany support our work.'²

In the *Spartakus* letter of September 1918 Rosa thus broke a considerable period of silence.³ The essay was the result of a long discussion between her and the leaders of *Spartakus* still at liberty. The latter had by now pronounced an embargo on any criticism of the Bolsheviks; only Rosa's special status made them include this article in the current issue. None the less, the editors added a note of caution:

'This article expresses doubts which are widespread in our circles—doubts which arise from the *objective* circumstances of the Bolsheviks not from their *subjective* actions. We are printing it largely on account of its conclusions: that without a German revolution there can be no salvation for the Russian revolution, no hope for Socialism after this world war. There remains only one solution—mass rising of the German proletariat.'⁴

Starting from the beginning, Rosa examined the prospects and results of the Russian revolution after eight months of Bolshevik rule. Far from any ignorance or misunderstanding, she showed very real knowledge of events, as well as of the intentions of the Bolsheviks.

The policy which has guided the Bolsheviks is evident: peace at any price, to obtain a respite, meantime to build up and strengthen pro-

¹ Ibid., p. 161.

² Ibid., p. 195. Cf. his own rather different version in *Rote Fahne*, 15 January 1922: 'In vain did I make every effort to impress on Comrade Luxemburg that we were able to look forward to great revolutionary events in Germany in the very near future.' The article was written as part of the KPD's defence against Paul Levi's publication and Meyer, a most punctilious person, may be forgiven his retrospective optimism (below, pp. 792 ff.).

³ *Spartakusbriege*, p. 453.

⁴ Ibid. The article itself must have been written some time at the very end of July or more probably in early August.

letarian dictatorship in Russia, to realize as many Socialist reforms as possible and thus to await the outbreak of the international proletarian revolution, to hasten this event with the Russian example.

So far not very different from the current or subsequent Bolshevik self-image. But, Rosa went on, the Russian revolution was in an unhappy dilemma.

Two notions stood Godmother at its birth, the unshakeable belief in the European revolution and the determination to defend its existence within Russia. But the evil Godmother was left out of account—German militarism, to which Russia has delivered itself for good or ill by making its separate peace. This peace was in reality nothing else but a capitulation of the Russian revolutionary proletariat before German imperialism. Naturally Lenin and his friends deceived neither themselves nor others. They openly admitted their capitulation. Where they did deceive themselves was with the hope of buying a real respite, the hope of escaping once and for all from the hell-fires of the world war. They did not take account of the fact that Russia's capitulation at Brest-Litovsk would stiffen the hopes of the German militarists, which in turn could not but weaken the chances of a revolutionary rising in Germany; far from bringing about the end of the war with Germany, they merely hastened the beginning of a new phase of it.¹

Rosa Luxemburg's severe indictment was on four main counts, the same that she later elaborated in her pamphlet 'The Russian Revolution'.

[One,] the victory of counter-revolution in all the revolutionary outposts of Russia—for Finland, the Baltic, Ukraine, Caucasus, all these are Russia, namely the territory of the Russian revolution, whatever the hollow middle-class phrases about 'national self-determination' may claim. Two, separation of the remaining revolutionary areas of Russia from its granaries, coal mines, iron-ore mines and oil supplies, in fact from all the most important sources of life. Three, encouragement and strengthening of all counter-revolutionary elements inside Russia. Four, making Germany the arbiter of the political and economic destinies of Russia and of relations with its own provinces—Finland, Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, Caucasus, even neighbouring states like Rumania.²

All four problems were indeed to prove great enough almost to overturn the Russian revolution—and to lead with a vengeance to a reversal of the policy of national self-determination, to the

¹ Ibid., p. 454.

² Ibid., pp. 454-5.

repression of Stalin and Dzierżyński while the 'encouragement of the counter-revolution' brought about the Cheka and the Terror. For Rosa it was no longer a question of the damage the Bolsheviks were doing themselves and others during their short period of survival, but of choice—the choice of surviving (this was by implication recognized to be possible) with grave blemishes or of not surviving (this time) with an unstained record for the future. Rosa did not specifically recommend the latter course, but she did elaborate the two alternatives.

Russia was the last small corner where revolutionary ideals still had some value, where the eyes of all honest Socialist elements in Germany, as in all of Europe, were turned in order to find relief from the disgust with the behaviour of western working-class movements. We hope that Lenin and his friends will answer such suggestions with a categorical 'so far, but no further'. . . . Any and every political defeat, even the ruin of the Bolsheviks in honest struggle against superior forces and in the teeth of the historical situation, might be preferable to such moral collapse.¹

Rosa Luxemburg had no easy advice to offer. 'It is the fatal logic of the objective situation that *every* Socialist party which comes to power in Russia today *must* follow false tactics, as long as this advance guard of the international proletarian army is left in the lurch by the main body.'² As ever, the only solution was a mass rising in Germany. But unfortunately this was not practical politics, merely a mixture of moralizing and self-flagellation.

Rosa Luxemburg had announced her intention of publishing her criticisms of the Russian revolution in the form of a pamphlet and was trying to get Franz Mehring to do the same. All efforts to dissuade her seemed doomed to failure.³ She wrote a further article containing a still sharper attack on the supplementary protocols to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk—and this time Levi, Meyer, and Leviné decided not to print it.⁴ After the second article was delivered in Berlin through the usual good offices of Mathilde Jacob, Paul Levi travelled to Breslau to have it out once and for all with

¹ Ibid., pp. 457–9.

² Ibid., p. 460.

³ Clara Zetkin, *Um Rosa Luxemburgs Stellung zur russischen Revolution*, Hamburg 1922, reprinted in Clara Zetkin, *Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften*, Vol. II, p. 385.

⁴ See Ernst Meyer, 'Rosa Luxemburgs Kritik der Bolschewiki', *Rote Fahne*, 15 January 1922.

the impenitent critic. The only record of this meeting is his own, and then only a brief reference.¹

They had an obstinate and lengthy argument, but in the end he succeeded—perhaps the only occasion in the last decade that Rosa had been talked out of an intention to publish. Even then, it was only the argument that her remarks would be misused by enemies which convinced her. But after Levi's departure she nevertheless sat down at once and wrote out a draft which she sent him in September 1918 through an intermediary: 'I am writing this pamphlet only for you and if I can convince *you* then the effort isn't wasted', she assured him.²

Rosa Luxemburg could afford to be more forthright and detailed in what was practically a private discussion, just as Karl Liebknecht in prison had poured himself without reserve into his private notebooks. She now went back to first principles. Her pamphlet was not only a comment on the Russian revolution but a critique of the very notion of Socialist revolution. The pamphlet was rigorously divided into heads and sections like a legal brief. Bouquets first.

The party of Lenin was the only one which grasped the mandate and duty of a truly revolutionary party; with the slogan—'all power in the hands of the proletariat and peasantry'—they insured the continued move forward of the revolution. Thereby the Bolsheviks solved the famous problem of 'winning a majority of the people' which has always weighed on the German Social Democracy like a nightmare. . . . Only a party which knows how to lead, that is to advance things, wins support in stormy times. The determination with which, at the decisive moment, Lenin and his comrades offered the only solution . . . transformed them almost overnight from a persecuted, slandered, outlawed minority whose leader had to hide like Marat in cellars, into the absolute masters of the situation.³

This passage has always presented a problem. The Bolsheviks see it as a rather involved way of presenting a blank cheque of approval, slightly marred by the ill-informed criticism immediately following; but for Social Democrats it is the example-extraordinary of a deep-down democrat who insists on seeing democracy even in the arbitrary tyranny of Bolshevism—though not without doing

¹ Paul Levi's introduction to Rosa Luxemburg, *Die Russische Revolution*, Berlin 1922. For its history see below, p. 792.

² Ibid., p. 1. Quotations are taken from the English edition by Bertram D. Wolfe, *The Russian Revolution*, Ann Arbor (Michigan) 1961.

³ *The Russian Revolution*, pp. 38–39.

violence to every demand of logic and evidence. And in formal democratic terms the idea of a Bolshevik majority is nonsense. But that was not what Rosa Luxemburg meant. There was no question of elections or mandates. 'Winning a majority' was the same doctrine of revolutionary action as a solvent for static opposition—movement against rigidity—as she had preached in the SPD from 1910 to 1914. By acting instead of reacting, by moving and not talking, the Bolsheviks had utilized their revolutionary period to the full and swept the masses along. For the moment. But there followed a bill of particulars which cut sharply into the general plethora of praise.

1. *Land Policy*. The fact that the Soviet government had not carried out full-scale nationalization of large and middle-sized estates could not be made the subject of reproach.

It would be a sorry jest indeed to demand or expect of Lenin and his comrades that in the brief period of their rule they should already have solved or even tackled one of the most difficult tasks, indeed we can safely say *the* most difficult task in a Socialist transformation of society . . . but a Socialist government must at least do one thing when it comes to power, it must take measures which lead in the direction of a later Socialist reform of agriculture; it must at least avoid everything which may bar the way to those measures in future. Now the slogan launched by the Bolsheviks—immediate seizure and distribution of the land to the peasants—necessarily tended in the opposite direction. Not only is it not a Socialist measure; it even cuts off the way to such measures; it piles up insurmountable obstacles to the Socialist transformation of agrarian relations. . . . [In short,] the Leninist agrarian reform has created a new and powerful layer of enemies of Socialism in the countryside, enemies whose resistance will be much more dangerous and stubborn than that of the large aristocratic landowners.¹

2. *The Nationality Question*. This chapter was a classic restatement of Rosa's lifelong view of the essential economic and political unity of the Russian empire, and the error of hawking the concept of national self-determination to all and every constituent member of the Russian empire, large or small.

It is exactly as if the people living on the north coast of Germany should want to found a new nation and government. And this ridiculous pose of a few university professors and students was inflated into a political force by Lenin and his comrades . . . to what was at first a

¹ Ibid., pp. 43, 46.

mere farce they lent such importance that the farce became a matter of the most deadly earnest—not a serious national movement for which . . . there are no roots at all, but a single and rallying flag for counter-revolution. At Brest[-Litovsk], out of this addled egg crept the German bayonets.¹

This much could have been written against the PPS. But then the argument became more fundamental.

The 'right of national self-determination' constitutes the battle-cry of the coming reckoning of international Socialism with the bourgeoisie. It is obvious that the . . . entire nationalist movement which at present constitutes the greatest danger for international Socialism has experienced an extraordinary strengthening from the . . . Russian revolution and the Brest[-Litovsk] negotiations . . . from all this the terror and the strangling of democracy followed directly.²

Neither the particular nor the general statement was new. But what was brilliant was the sudden intuition at the end, which linked this problem specifically to that of terror. Because of the weak edges of the revolution, because of the mistaken tactic which permitted the creation of strongly inimical movements and régimes in the Ukraine, the Baltic states, and elsewhere, the government at home was obliged to resort to the fiercest measures in order to maintain itself on that territory to which, by its arbitrary acceptance of national self-determination, it had been confined. In this she was right. The centrifugal pressures of nationality were in the end to bring out the repressive policy of Stalin, Ordzhonikidze, and Dzierżyński, three non-Russians, whose practical views on national self-determination differed totally from those of Lenin and against whose rigid terror his last impotent efforts were directed.³

3. *Constituent Assembly and Suffrage.* The next two items in *The Russian Revolution* dealt with Bolshevik policy with regard to the Constituent Assembly and suffrage. Rosa Luxemburg criticized the Bolsheviks' action in dispersing the Constituent Assembly, which they themselves had called, and in restricting the suffrage. The details were not important, and these—but only these—she later retracted.⁴

But again she was concerned only with tactics as examples of

¹ Ibid., pp. 54–55.

² Ibid., pp. 55–56.

³ For this and further discussion of the differences in the national question between Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin, see below, pp. 853–9.

⁴ See below, pp. 716–19.

principle. She took issue with Trotsky's theory—he too was quick to elaborate theories—that institutions tend to lead a life of their own and, if they did not reflect the particular reality assigned to them, must be destroyed: a fear of reification which strongly survived in Soviet constitutional practice. To this she opposed her own long-held view about mass influence *on* institutions. 'The living fluid of popular mood, continually forced round representative bodies, penetrates them, guides them . . . even in bourgeois parliaments.'¹

Similarly, on suffrage:

. . . freedom of the press, the rights of association and assembly all have been outlawed for all opponents of the Soviet régime . . . on the other hand it is a well-known and indisputable fact that without a free and untrammelled press, without the unlimited right of association and assembly, the role of the broad mass of the people is entirely unthinkable.²

On the face of it, this could only mean that the existing institutions should have been preserved, full freedom of the press and of assembly guaranteed, and so on. No doubt Bolshevik rule was to be an example for the future, for the eventual and final Socialist revolution (in Germany?), and not simply a means of clinging to power at the price of deformation and compromise. Therefore, purity of Socialist principles needed emphasizing continually, at the expense of tactical success. But more important still, Rosa Luxemburg was not putting forward concrete alternatives to Bolshevik mistakes. She was not writing for the Bolsheviks at all, but for the future, for German revolutionaries. In the last analysis the present was unimportant; present, past, and future had equal weight. Rosa Luxemburg learnt things—unlike the Bourbons—but she too never forgot anything. The opponent here was the Lenin of 1903, not the Trotsky of 1918. She was wrong in supposing that a kind of mass pressure on a Constituent Assembly in Russia, moving it forward and keeping it Socialist, was available; quite the contrary. She did not realize the extent to which the Bolsheviks were a minority in the country; she caught only a glimpse of the fact that Bolshevik rule was possible only by toleration of the peasants, who were more interested in peace and land than in Socialism. But this was secondary to the more general proposition that arbitrary curtailment of inconvenient institutions and

¹ *The Russian Revolution*, p. 60.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 66–67.

popular processes after a revolution was bound to be self-generating and repetitive, bad habits which would lead the government farther and farther away from contact with the masses.

4. *Dictatorship*. The same feeling of malaise was expressed in the last sections dealing with the problem of dictatorship.

Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party—however numerous they may be—is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently. Not because of any fanatical conception of ‘justice’ but because all that is instructive, wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on this essential characteristic; and its effectiveness vanishes when ‘freedom’ becomes a special privilege.¹

Of course this was not a plea for bourgeois democracy but for the democracy which Socialists had always believed to be possible only after the success of a revolution. No doubt it assumed mass enthusiasm for the Bolsheviks which did not exist, but more important was the feeling that the Bolsheviks were imposing democracy from above rather than building on it from below.

Lenin is completely mistaken in the means he employs. Decree, dictatorial force of the factory overseer, draconic penalties, rule by terror, all these things are but palliatives. The only way to rebirth is the school of public life itself, the most unlimited, the broadest democracy and public opinion. It is rule by terror which demoralizes.²

Rosa Luxemburg, who did not mind in the last resort whether the Bolsheviks maintained themselves or not—and this perhaps was the major difference between her and them—was far more afraid of a deformed revolution than an unsuccessful one. She took Lenin’s organizational abilities and objects seriously enough and extended them through time to their inevitable consequences.

With the repression of political life in the land as a whole, life in the Soviets must also become more crippled . . . life dies out in every public institution, becomes a mere semblance of life, in which only the bureaucracy remains as the active element. Public life gradually falls asleep. The few dozen party leaders of inexhaustible energy and boundless experience direct and rule. Among them only a dozen outstanding heads do the leading and an élite of the working class is invited from

¹ Ibid., p. 69.

² Ibid., p. 71.

time to time to meetings where they are to applaud the speeches of the leaders, and to approve proposed resolutions unanimously—at bottom then a clique affair. A dictatorship to be sure; not the dictatorship of the proletariat, however, but only a dictatorship of a handful of politicians in the bourgeois sense . . . yes, we can go even further: such conditions must inevitably cause a brutalization of public life. . . .¹

Khrushchev could have used these words in his speech denouncing Stalin's régime at the Twentieth Congress if he had thought of them! They contain all that he said—if one substitutes 'one man' for 'a few leaders', admittedly an important difference—only much more concisely than his own long speech.

Finally, Rosa Luxemburg turned once again to the remedy for these tendencies. 'Lenin and Trotsky and their friends were the *first* who went ahead as an example to the proletariat of the world. . . . But in Russia the problem could only be posed. It could not be solved there. In *this* sense, the future everywhere belongs to Bolshevism.'²

How far then was Rosa Luxemburg right? The fact that she accepted the notion of Soviets (workers' and soldiers' councils) in Germany and fought bitterly against the calling of the German Constituent Assembly, her willingness to draw a line under the old Russian polemics during the German revolution and not to haggle with Radek over this part of the past when he arrived on 19 December 1918, her admission to Warszawski that she had changed her mind about a lot of things (unspecified)—all these later caused Communist historians to talk of a general withdrawal of her criticisms.³ But this seems to me to be a one-sided judgement. No doubt she changed her mind about details, though even here she herself pointed out in her speech to the KPD's founding congress in December 1918 that her opposition to the Constituent Assembly was based on the fact that Germany still had an anti-Communist government, and that a comparison with the Russia of November 1917 was therefore incorrect. More significant than changing her mind was her unwillingness, in the middle of the German revolution, to grub around in the Russian past. But most important of all, the pamphlet on the Russian revolution was not primarily a discussion of detailed policies. It was an examination of the basic propositions of revolution and in fact the only glimpse from Rosa's pen of how she envisaged the future. Her general conclusions had little

¹ Ibid., pp. 76–77 ² See below, p. 782. ³ See below, pp. 717–19, 793–4.

or nothing to do with the details she was criticizing; rather she was applying well-established, systematic conclusions to a new set of facts. 'The Russian Revolution' happened to be the title of the particular frame passing through Rosa Luxemburg's mental epidiastroscope at the time. In this sense her argument was highly deductive; she was arguing from an attitude—her particular attitude—to the facts and not, as appears at first sight, using the facts available about Russia to construct a theory of revolution.

Unlike Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg did not accept a difference between party life and eventual public life, between party and post-revolutionary society; for her the Socialist revolution was nothing more than the expansion of Socialism from the party to the whole society. The idea of *Socialists* in control of *capitalist* society was hardly thinkable, the idea of accepting and temporarily even strengthening such a *status quo* and calling it stability could only be lunacy. If this last is a necessary condition of Bolshevism then Rosa was truly anchored in the Second International. Lenin on the other hand did make the sharp distinction. He evolved a theory of party discipline and organization which he put into effect with every means at his disposal. His approach to public life after the revolution was, however, highly empirical; provided the party was properly organized, it could afford every change of tactic, survive every manœuvre, could fortify or discard at will, if necessary, every single institution in society. Only the constitution of the party mattered. The Bolshevik view of society did not change much before and after the revolution, except in terms of their power within it; there was still 'we' and 'it'. Party discipline could not relax, but rather became tighter. Only in this way could rapid tactical changes in government policy be undertaken without lack of cohesion. It was Stalin who later completed the picture, first by making society conform to the graveyard discipline of the party, from the centre towards the periphery; then, finding alteration of policy a course too brusque for party cohesion, he reversed the thrust of power, and made the party as empty as society, from the periphery towards the centre. In 'balancing' society and party, Stalin was closer to Rosa Luxemburg than to Lenin, though their methods were somewhat different.

Rosa Luxemburg's pamphlet on the Russian revolution has become famous as an almost clairvoyant indictment of the Bolsheviks. In part this is justified. But its purpose will be better served if we

see it as an analysis of ideal revolution based, like so much of Rosa Luxemburg's work, on a form of critical dialogue, in this case with the Bolshevik October revolution. Those who are made joyful by criticism of the fundamentals of the Bolshevik revolution would do better to turn elsewhere.

XVI

1918—THE GERMAN REVOLUTION BEGINS

POLITICALLY, *Spartakus* was at a very low ebb in the summer of 1918. Most of the leaders were immured in indefinite confinement while the war dragged on, incapable of decision. Judging from the bulk of the press and from official German reactions, the outlook for the revolution in Russia was gloomy—the Bolsheviks unlikely to maintain their position in spite of the very policies which had helped to prolong the radical agony in Germany. 'Oh God, my nerves, my nerves. I cannot sleep at all', Rosa wrote to Luise Kautsky in July 1918. 'Clara too has been silent for too long, has not even thanked me for my birthday letter, a thing quite unheard of in her case. I cannot contain the fear within me. . . . For myself I am full of courage. To bear the sorrow of *others*, for that I lack courage and strength. All these are merely thoughts, ghosts. . . .'¹

Then, unexpectedly and spectacularly, the Western Front collapsed in September. The worst fears of the German High Command soon communicated themselves to the capital; as so often, people were overtaken by events, those committed to the *status quo* as well as those who aspired to overthrow it. In September 1918 a new wave of strikes broke out. On 28 September the German General Staff informed the imperial government that armistice negotiations were essential if a catastrophe was to be avoided. On 1 October Lenin notified his colleagues that the situation in Germany was sufficiently ripe for action by the Russian government.² The executives of the SPD and the USPD had to consider their position now that the German government belatedly tried to associate wider political groups in the liquidation of the unsuccessful war policy. On 23 September 1918 the SPD executive and the

¹ *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, pp. 220–2, dated 25 July 1918.

² Lenin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXXV, pp. 301–2.

Reichstag group of SPD deputies jointly stated their minimum demands for participation in any government.¹

Quicker off the mark, the USPD leaders and the Revolutionary Shop Stewards had begun to meet regularly and discuss how the impending situation could be turned to good account. They too issued an appeal to the population, which contained their immediate demands from the government—more extreme in tone and content than that of the SPD.²

Spartakus issued two final letters, in September and October 1918. In neither of these was there any optimistic prognosis for the coming months, any signs that the long-predicted collapse of the imperial government was imminent. The September letter contained Rosa Luxemburg's gloomy analysis of events in Russia which we have already discussed. Though *Spartakus* had already indicated some of the methods and techniques of the future revolution in outline, taken over from the Russian experience, there was little evidence that the group foresaw any imminent application of these ideas. Though the conception of *calling* for workers' and soldiers' councils as a *means* of furthering the revolution goes back in Germany to the beginning of 1918, their function as a form of state *power* on a more permanent basis was first promulgated in a handbill in the summer of 1918.³ But these were anyhow no more than theoretical formulations. The later investigations of the German *Reichstag* into the causes of the German collapse as well as modern historical research both show how little *Spartakus* was able to contribute in the summer and early autumn of 1918 to the development of events in Germany.⁴ Interesting evidence from a source most unlikely to denigrate *Spartakus* comes from Lenin, who had an extremely sharp eye not only for revolutionary potential but equally for weakness and ineffectiveness. On 20 September 1918 he wrote to Vorovskii, one of his representatives in Stockholm:

¹ *Vorwärts*, 24 September 1918.

² *Dokumente und Materialien*, Vol. II, pp. 207–10.

³ Walter Tormin, *Zwischen Rätediktatur und Sozialer Demokratie. Die Geschichte der Rätebewegung in der deutschen Revolution 1918/19*, Düsseldorf 1954, pp. 35 ff. and 48 ff. For a Communist work on this subject, see K. Marnmach, *Der Einfluss der russischen Februarrevolution und der grossen sozialistischen Oktoberrevolution auf die deutsche Arbeiterklasse*, Berlin (East) 1955.

⁴ These researches must be set against German nationalist claims for the effectiveness of internal left-wing sabotage in order to save the 'honour' of the German army. The police reports on *Spartakus* activity, on which these claims were based, are misleading; clearly police informers, in Germany as elsewhere,

... Is it to be tolerated that even people like Mehring and Zetkin are more concerned to take issue with Kautsky from a *moral* (if one may use this term) point of view, rather than a *theoretical* one? Kautsky, they say, really ought to have better things to do than to write [polemics] against the Bolsheviks.

Is this any kind of argument? Can one weaken one's own position to such an extent? This means nothing else but to arm Kautsky gratuitously.¹

Lenin went on to order an immediate theoretical campaign in the sharpest terms against Kautsky in which he himself proposed to participate strongly; he ordered Vorovskii to procure for him immediately as many of Kautsky's current writings about the Bolsheviks as possible, to enable him to reply.² This criticism of too much *Spartakus* 'morality' instead of aggressive theoretical combat was based on articles in *Leipziger Volkszeitung* and other legally-appearing papers, and clearly showed that Lenin had somehow sniffed out the exhaustion of *Spartakus* and its unpreparedness for coming events.

By early October the German government was visibly beginning to disintegrate. *Spartakus* and the Left radicals from Bremen had finally decided to collaborate closely. Both recognized at last the impending revolutionary possibilities. The first thing was to break the existing government and in particular the state of martial law. An appeal by the *Spartakus* group in October 1918 therefore called on the people to rise, to create 'conditions of freedom for the class struggle of the workers, for a real democracy, for a real and lasting

provided precisely the kind of evidence their employers hoped to get from them.

In this connection it is an interesting irony of history that pre-war Communist historians, with every natural incentive to write up the significance of their own *Spartakus* ancestry, sometimes resolutely refused to do so. Thus P. Langner, *Der Massenstreik im Kampf des Proletariats*, Leipzig 1931, p. 49: 'The collapse of Wilhelminian Germany [in] . . . 1918 did not take place as a result of the struggles of the working classes against imperialist war and the bourgeoisie. It came from inside, as a result of the physical incapacity to continue the war.' Nothing shows up the nationalist *Dolchstoß* (stab in the back) myth more clearly than this. However, post-war East German history on the whole tends to exaggerate the importance of *Spartakus*. All the recent evidence, including the substantial East German literature, is summarized in an appendix to E. Kolb, *Die Arbeiterräte in der deutschen Innenpolitik 1918/1919*, Düsseldorf 1962, pp. 410-14.

¹ First published in *Pravda*, No. 17, 21 January 1925, quoted from *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXXV, p. 299.

² The promised reply to Kautsky was written on 9 October 1918; see *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXVIII, pp. 85-93. A shortened version with unfavourable editorial comment appeared in *Vorwärts*, 25 October 1918.

peace and for Socialism'.¹ Shortly afterwards a more positive appeal was launched calling upon the workers as well as the soldiers to organize. But the form of organization was not yet specified: 'the spontaneous mutinies among the soldiers must be supported by all means and be led towards an armed uprising, the armed uprising for the struggle to gain the entire power [of the state] for the workers and soldiers . . .'.²

On 7 October *Spartakus* held a national conference, the first for nearly two years. Nothing is known of the discussions at the conference; but a report, together with the resolutions and an appeal to the workers, was circulated illegally, and part of it appeared in the last *Spartakus* letter in October.³ The joint conference itself produced a lengthier analysis of the world situation and more strenuous and precise demands, but again they were confined to an attempt to obtain particular concessions from existing authority rather than the destruction of that authority itself. Clearly it was not a programme within the normal political context of that word—to be achieved by all available means. Rather it was to serve as a rallying cry for bringing the masses into action, if possible behind *Spartakus*; once revolution was on the move further goals could always be set. The whole process was intended as a continual raising of revolutionary sights so that the ponderous and reluctant dragon of the German working classes could finally be induced to snort and move. But there was still nothing about the organizational forms of the coming struggle, much less about the way to implement any future working-class victory.

On 12 October the Prussian government and some of the other provincial governments declared an amnesty for political prisoners. Three days later the *Bundesrat*—the upper house of the Reich legislature—officially announced the participation of both *Bundesrat* and *Reichstag* in the coming bid for peace. The German government was still hopeful of saving its authority by broadening its base, even though the allies had already declared that the Emperor at least must be sacrificed before any armistice negotiations would be entertained. Karl Liebknecht was among the first to be released under the amnesty. He returned to Berlin on 23 October and was escorted by a crowd of workers from the station

¹ *D. & M.*, Vol. II, p. 225. Compare the name of the Cominform journal after the Second World War: 'For a lasting peace, for a people's democracy!'

² *Ibid.*, p. 227.

³ For the full text, see *D. & M.*, Vol. II, pp. 228–34.

straight to the Soviet Embassy. Nothing is known in detail of the discussions he had there; a short and somewhat ominous sentence of Karl Radek's merely confirms complete agreement: 'The night after [Karl Liebknecht's] release Bukharin told us that Karl was in complete agreement with us . . . if he had at that time been able to come to us, no king would have been welcomed as Liebknecht would have been welcomed by the Russian workers.'¹

From the moment of his release Liebknecht automatically took over the leadership of the *Spartakus* group. His reputation and moral authority had never been higher. On 23 October the executive of the USPD offered to co-opt him, but Liebknecht stipulated that he would only accept if the USPD altered its programme and tactics and fell into line with *Spartakus*. Though not refused outright, this stipulation cooled USPD enthusiasm, as it was meant to do.

While these discussions were going on, the revolution itself broke out at the naval base in Kiel, the same place where in August 1917 the only significant mutiny of the war had taken place. The inability of the government to do more than send a negotiating commission brought the ferment out into the open everywhere. From the beginning of November onwards Soldiers' Councils appeared at the front and Workers' Councils sprang up in most of the major cities of Germany. As yet these were demonstrations of revolt rather than instruments of revolution, and in most places they had no clear programme except to attempt to impose their authority—or at least their right to exist—on local authorities and army commanders. The Sailors' Council at Kiel sent a radio message to Moscow from which the Russian leaders deduced that revolution in Germany was now under way.

For a short time the situation in the provinces was more revolutionary than in Berlin. Representatives of the USPD, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, and *Spartakus* represented by Liebknecht and Pieck—fatal partnership—began to plan an organized rising and fixed the day for 4 November. However, in full meeting the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, though they accepted the principle, refused to accept the early date agreed by

¹ Karl Liebknecht, *Klassenkampf*, p. 108 (Appendix: 'In memory of Karl Liebknecht', first published in February 1919 in *Izvestiya*). The same comment is made by Radek in his biographical sketch in memory of the three German leaders, *Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, Leo Jogiches*, Hamburg 1921. See also below, p. 715.

their negotiators. A few days later, on 6 November, in view of the evident success of the mutiny in Kiel and the ferment in the provinces, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards finally settled the 11th as 'the day'. Liebknecht's immediate proposal to bring this date forward to the 8th was lost by a considerable majority in the meeting. Was it the hope that events would overtake them after all?

Meantime the SPD too had been drawn into the impending negotiations for a change of government. However, the executive was treating with two sides, with those who planned an uprising, and also with the government itself about a peaceful hand-over of power. Notes passed backwards and forwards; the negotiations with the government appeared to reach deadlock when the SPD insisted that the Emperor must abdicate. In order to reinforce its position during these negotiations, the government brought in troops on 7 November to occupy the main factories, and forbade a proposed mass demonstration to celebrate the anniversary of the Russian revolution. Finally, on the same day, the SPD leaders sent an ultimatum to the Chancellor; if he refused it they were determined to join the rising.

In the end all these elaborate plans came to nothing. On 9 November, two days before the deadline, a general strike took place in Berlin and large groups of armed workers and soldiers thronged the streets. It was the effective end of the Empire. The Chancellor, Prince Max of Baden, formally handed over his power to SPD chairman Ebert. But even then the SPD's advent to power was not the result of its own efforts. Liebknecht had gauged the potential of the demonstrations correctly; in a speech from the balcony of the Imperial Palace shortly after midday, he proclaimed the Socialist Republic. When the news of these events reached the *Reichstag*, where the SPD caucus was in permanent session, Scheidemann was persuaded to declare the Democratic Republic then and there to prevent a complete *Spartakus* take-over.

Now I saw clearly what was afoot. I knew [Liebknecht's] slogan—supreme authority for the workers' and soldiers' councils—and Germany would therefore be a Russian province, a branch of the Soviet. No, no, a thousand times no! . . . A few working men and soldiers accompanied me into the hall. 'Scheidemann has proclaimed the Republic.' Ebert's face turned livid with wrath when he heard what I had done. . . . 'You have not the right to proclaim the Republic, what

becomes of Germany . . . whether she becomes a republic or something else—a constituent assembly must decide.”¹

Immediate negotiations took place between the two Socialist parties with a view to forming a joint government based on equal representation. The concession of parity by the SPD was generous; but in return almost all those radical conditions posed by the executive of the Independents to which the SPD took exception were withdrawn, ‘to cement the revolutionary Socialist achievements’. Now that the day had come, pressure for unity among the leaders was strong. The new Reich executive, known as the Council of People’s Commissars (*Rat der Volksbeauftragten*), consisted of three SPD and three USPD delegates.² The *Spartakus* group—which of course was an organized pressure group within the USPD—had called for the ‘Russian example’ on 7 November, the anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution—at least for the Russian spirit if not yet for the Russian facts. This meant no compromises. But all mention of Russia frightened the leaders of the two Socialist parties to death. On 9 November *Spartakus* issued a special supplement to the new *Rote Fahne* in which it called for a more advanced and detailed programme of revolutionary steps:

1. Immediate peace.
2. End of martial law.
3. Opening of prisons.
4. Disarming of all the police, of all officers and soldiers who did not accept the basis of this programme.
5. ‘Take-over of all military and civil authority by representatives of the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils.
6. Handing over of all military establishments and armament factories.
7. Handing over of all transport facilities, factories and banks to the representatives of the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils.
8. Cessation of military tribunals.
9. Dissolution of the Reich and all provincial parliaments.
10. Dismissal of the Chancellor, all ministers and state secretaries, as well as all officials who would not serve the Socialist people. Replacing of these by representatives of the workers.

¹ Philipp Scheidemann, *The Making of a New Germany*, New York 1929, Vol. II, pp. 261–2.

² Part of the correspondence is reprinted in *D. & M.*, Vol. II, p. 331 (SPD) and p. 346 (USPD).

11. Removal of all royal dynasties as well as corporative class institutions.

12. The election of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils everywhere in Germany, in whose exclusive hands legislation, executive decisions, administration of all social institutions, funds and public property should be placed. The entire working population in cities and on the land should participate in the election of these councils without distinction between the sexes.

13. Immediate contact to be made with Socialist parties abroad.

14. Immediate reopening of the Russian Legation in Berlin.

Already *Spartakus* demands were far exceeding the realities that were in process of achievement. The intention was quite clear. With the first release of revolutionary activity, the goals had at once to be set higher, and so on in continuous progression.

This then was the situation when Rosa Luxemburg was released from the city jail in Breslau. Apparently the amnesty of 12 October had been deemed to apply only to those serving a specified sentence; the large number interned under administrative order were either forgotten or had been deliberately ignored at some stage in the administrative chain. Only when the revolutionary wave reached Breslau on 9 November were the gates of the prison opened. The last few weeks had tried her nerves and patience to the utmost. She had refused all visits, since

my mood is such that the presence of my friends under supervision has become impossible. I have suffered everything patiently, and under other circumstances would have remained patient for a long time. But the general situation . . . has wrecked my psychological detachment. These conversations under supervision, the impossibility of talking about things that really interest me, have become such a burden that I prefer to renounce every visit until we can meet as free people. It cannot take long. . . .¹

Her first task on release was naturally to address the expectant crowds in the central square of Breslau, from the balcony of the old *Rathaus* where the judgements of the city elders had long ago been given to the citizens. She was no stranger to the city, or to them. Now she was able to judge the new temper from which she had been cut off for so long.² And late that afternoon she hastened

¹ *Letters from Prison*, p. 78, dated 18 October 1918, to Sonia Liebknecht.

² Frölich, p. 288; *LV*, 10 November 1918. Frölich wrongly gives the date of her release as the 8th instead of the 9th. Publication of the Breslau *Volksmacht* had been suspended by the government for a few days.

to Berlin where 'she was greeted with joy by all her old friends, but with concealed sadness, for they suddenly realized what the years in prison had done to her. She had aged terribly and her black hair had gone quite white. She was a sick woman.'¹

The outbreak of revolution in Berlin, whose extension was only prevented by the speed with which the joys of government were accepted by SPD and USPD alike, had established a pattern which was already set when Rosa Luxemburg arrived on the scene. There was no question of altering the arrangements that were being made on the 9th between the leaders of the official Social Democrats and the Independents. Indeed, *Spartakus* accepted this solution as fulfilling the immediate needs of the present. In the words of Rosa Luxemburg: 'The image of the German government corresponds to the inner ripeness of German conditions. Scheidemann-Ebert are the proper [*berufene*] government of the German revolution in its present stage.'² The task of *Spartakus*—which ceased to be the *Gruppe Internationale* and finally adopted '*Spartakus*' as an official title on 11 November 1918—now was to prepare and hasten the conditions in which the next stage of the revolution could take place. There had been no question on 9 November of hustling aside the SPD, much less the USPD, and taking over power itself. Even Liebknecht's proclamation of the 'Socialist Republic' from the Palace had been a declaration of intent rather than a practical proposal for action; a means of pushing the Independents. *Spartakus* was barely equipped to provide an organized and coherent ginger group within the USPD; its immediate preoccupation was the growth of its influence and support, and the formation of a tactic to act upon the masses. 'To take over the government was out of the question; they had far less chance of success than the Bolsheviki in October 1917.

Thus the situation set objective limits to the possibilities of the group. However, there were also severe subjective limitations to its policy. Liebknecht, whose personality and attitudes dominated

¹ Frölich, loc. cit. Although there are minor factual inaccuracies in Frölich's account of these last months, he spent most of them in Berlin within Rosa's orbit, and his observations are first-hand evidence. Frölich was involved in at least two of the major street actions in December and January, and gave evidence at the trial of Ledebour in 1919. On the other hand he will make no admission of anything but monolithic wisdom for the *Spartakus* leadership, of which he was a member; his political judgements are therefore of less value.

² *Die Rote Fahne*, 18 November 1918.

the activities of *Spartakus* for the next two months, was quite adamant in his refusal to make any compromise with either SPD or the Independents. He refused participation both in the government of 9 November which had been suggested by the negotiators on both sides and, as we have seen, would not even serve on the executive of the USPD. This policy of abstention from any commitment to parties which did not accept the total *Spartakus* programme was no doubt shared by all his colleagues. But the programme itself had also been set: no Constituent Assembly, all power to the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. This was the policy borrowed from the Russian experience. It was concerning the whole-hearted acceptance of this tactic that Radek reported that 'Liebknecht and we are in complete agreement'.

There is no reason to suppose that Rosa Luxemburg disagreed either in her evaluation of the situation or about the tactics to be adopted. Just as she had taken over the leading role in interpreting the Polish Revolution in 1905-1906, she now took on the same task in Germany. Her special skill consisted as always in analysing events in revolutionary Marxist terms and in emphasizing the role of *Spartakus* within the necessities of the situation. This meant constant review of that situation. She was a superb propagandist. All her writings were directed towards persuading a proletariat assumed to be more aware than ever of its needs and possibilities; waiting only to be guided in the required direction. Her emphasis was above all on clarity. As it had been necessary for so long to dig a demarcation ditch between the PPS and the Polish Social Democracy and to refute the false appeal of the seducer, so it was now essential to demarcate even more clearly a correct working-class policy when the false siren-calls were legion. The militant crowds were being harangued from all sides, SPD, USPD, *Spartakus*, Revolutionary Shop Stewards; last, but not least, by middle-class interest groups. Soon, moreover, there developed a further complication in the shape of a younger group of ultra-radicals, who wanted complete dissociation from the *mêlée*, a disdainful withdrawal till history placed its chance before them on a silver platter. In practice this merely amounted to forgoing all the possible opportunities of revolution, like the brief refusal of the Bolsheviks to participate in the 1906 Duma elections. As confusion increased, so necessarily did the temper of the voice of clarity. Rosa's inflammatory tone was in the first instance due

to a desire not so much to create positive revolutionary action as to provide a firm and unmistakable channel for the streams of advice and proposals unleashed by all the various socialist parties. Clarity came to mean volume and pitch as much as correct analysis.

Any search in Rosa's writings for specific approval or disapproval of the Russian example during these months is based on a misunderstanding of her attitude and her situation. The sharp criticism of Lenin and the Bolsheviks contained in her writings in prison has been contrasted by Communist historians with her tacit acceptance of the Russian programme after November 1918—the result of a conversion. Rosa Luxemburg's few specific statements have been carefully culled as valuable evidence of a definite change of mind. Thus a few years later Warszawski reported the receipt of a letter at the end of November, brought to Warsaw by a German soldier. This was Rosa's answer to Warszawski's questions about the attitude to be adopted towards the Russian revolution. 'If our party [SDKPiL] is full of enthusiasm for Bolshevism and at the same time opposed the Bolshevik peace of Brest-Litovsk, and also opposes their propagation of national self-determination as a solution, then it is no more than enthusiasm coupled with the spirit of criticism—what more can people want from us?' With most of the old SDKPiL leaders now in Russia and working closely with the Bolsheviks (Dzierżyński, Hanecki, Unszticht, Leder, Radck, as well as Marchlewski—the split had long been healed), there was naturally great pressure on the local Polish party headed by Warszawski with its still official links with Rosa Luxemburg and Jogiches in Germany. 'What shall I do?' Warszawski had asked, and Rosa continued:

I shared all your reservations and doubts, but have dropped them in the most important questions, and in others I never went as far as you. Terrorism is evidence of grave internal weakness, but it is directed against internal enemies, who . . . get support and encouragement from foreign capitalists outside Russia. Once the European revolution comes, the Russian counter-revolutionaries lose not only this support, but—what is more important—they must lose all courage. Bolshevik terror is above all the expression of the weakness of the European proletariat. Naturally the agrarian circumstances there have created the sorest, most dangerous problem of the Russian revolution. But here too the saying is valid—even the greatest revolution can only achieve that which

has become ripe [through the development of] social circumstances. This sore too can only be healed through the European revolution. And this is coming!¹

It will be noted that Rosa made the same reservations, with the same emphasis on matters of primary and secondary importance, as in her writings for Paul Levi—without the polemical tone. Where was the conversion?

Similarly Clara Zetkin reported that Rosa's two urgent requests to her in the summer of 1918 to get Mehring to arrange a scientific and critical analysis of the Russian revolution, on the basis of her own work, were not pursued, and that she made no further reference to these requests or to any need for them.²

Both conclude that Rosa Luxemburg was wrong about certain aspects of the Russian revolution in the first place, and that in any case she changed her mind after her release from prison. The criticism of Bolshevik suppression of other parties Clara Zetkin ascribed to Rosa's 'somewhat schematic, abstract notion of democracy'. She claims that Rosa misunderstood the discriminatory electoral laws in Russia, the dismissal of the Constituent Assembly and the refusal to elect another; that she failed to grasp the essence of 'proletarian dictatorship', the need and nature of terror, and the Bolshevik relationship between party and masses.³ Warszawski's conclusions were identical. None the less, he qualified the 'errors' of his old and brilliant comrade.

We have seen that the opinions which Rosa Luxemburg stated in her pamphlet were no longer her opinions from November 1918 and until her death. All the same, in spite of all the errors and incompleteness of her work, it is revolutionary work. Rosa Luxemburg's criticism differs from opportunistic criticism because it can never harm the cause or the party of revolution, it can only enliven it and help it—because it is revolutionary criticism.⁴

Thus both Adolf Warszawski and Clara Zetkin deduced—admittedly on instructions from the executive of the KPD and the Comintern in its dispute with Paul Levi—a fundamental revision of Rosa's attitude to the Russian revolution. Whatever she did not

¹ Adolf Warski, *Rosa Luxemburgs Stellung zu den taktischen Problemen der Revolution*, Hamburg 1922, pp. 6–7.

² Clara Zetkin, *Um Rosa Luxemburgs Stellung zur russischen Revolution*, Hamburg 1922, reprinted in Clara Zetkin, *Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften*, Berlin 1957, Vol. II, p. 385.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 392, 396–8, 393, 400, 404, 408.

⁴ Warski, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

revise were alleged to be errors. However, like so many discussions which involve the projection of someone's views from one period to a totally different one, especially after their death, the problem is largely irrelevant. Rosa was never quick to change her mind. She was obstinate and had considerable confidence in her own powers of analysis, and in this case there was anyway no real need to recant. New circumstances could always invalidate the practical relevance of ideas, though not necessarily their validity in the past. There is no reason to suppose that she now approved of those aspects of the Russian revolution which three months earlier she had criticized; in fact she took pains to reiterate some of her criticisms.¹ In any case, she had always postulated most strenuously that most of the bad features of the Russian revolution would dissolve in the melting-pot of a European revolution; the advent of that revolution automatically altered the context of most of her remarks. With this, the problems that had bothered her in the summer of 1918 simply became irrelevant.

Possibly the only factual error to which she ever admitted was her support for a Constituent Assembly in Russia at the beginning of 1918. For the rest, she had always insisted that the problem of terror and the suppression of democracy were phenomena of isolation, and a world-wide, or at least European, revolution would do away with them. But they were no less reprehensible for being temporary.

In any case, all the evidence shows that she was willing and anxious to collaborate with the Russians, to learn from their experience, and to agitate as strongly as possible for a link between revolutionary Russia and revolutionary Germany. Right from the start *Spartakus* demanded that the Soviet Legation, which had been closed on 5 November after allegations that it was abusing its diplomatic immunity by smuggling propaganda material, should be re-opened as soon as possible. But this did not imply any admission of Russian precedence, or the subordination of German tactics to the dictates of Moscow. As we shall see, she resisted this possibility to the end of her days. In November 1918 this problem simply did not exist. Lenin and the Bolsheviks were still willing to admit, if not the primacy of the German revolution over the Russian—though there is some evidence of this—at least the critical importance to the Soviet Union of Communist success in

¹ See above, pp. 700, 703.

Germany. The Bolsheviks were prepared to make real sacrifices for this. In short, the whole dispute between *Spartakus* and the Bolsheviks was for the moment drowned in the call for action in Germany, and Rosa was the last to prefer abstract criticisms of other people's activities to the exploitation of her own immediate possibilities. This was Kautsky's speciality. By 9 November 1918 the rights and wrongs of the Russian revolution had for the moment become irrelevant.

As in the spring of 1916, the leadership of *Spartakus* was once again in the hands of Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, and Leo Jogiches (released from his Berlin prison on 9 November). With them in the executive were Meyer and Levi, who had between them run *Spartakus* after the arrest of its other leaders, Lange, H. Duncker and his sister Käthe Duncker, A. Thalheimer, Pieck, Eberlein, and Paul Frölich, back in the fold after his Zimmerwald-Left period during the war. Clara Zetkin was in Stuttgart and Mehring was too old and ill for active participation. On 10 November *Spartakus* issued its new programme based on the events of the previous day. More strongly than ever it emphasized the need to get rid of all parliaments and to substitute Workers' and Soldiers' Councils everywhere in Germany, with all administrative and legislative power. The need was for centralization, the slogan 'the unified Socialist Republic of Germany'. Unlike the Russians, with their fetish about nationality rights, federalism had no place in a *Spartakist* Germany; semi-autonomous provinces were merely a guarantee of reaction. No one apparently considered that the decentralization accompanying hundreds of councils, each supreme, would be far more chaotic than provincial governments.

At the same time the appeal underlined the poverty of what had been achieved to date.

Nothing is gained by the fact that a few additional government Socialists have achieved power. . . . See to it that power, which you have captured, does not slip out of your hands and that you use it for your own goal. . . . No 'Scheidemann' must sit in the government, no Socialist must enter government as long as a governmental Socialist is still in it. No co-operation with those who betrayed you for four years.¹

Already the fatal weakness of *Spartakus* had made its appearance, the incitement to remove the present government without the stipulation of a clear alternative. While this was based on a definite

¹ *D. & M.*, Vol. I, pp. 341-2.

tactic—and not merely unclear thinking—it was a tactic that led, as we shall see, to confusion and not to clarity.

On 10 November a joint meeting of all the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Councils took place at the Circus Busch—the traditional place of assembly for large popular gatherings. This meeting elected an executive which, pending the calling of a national congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, was to act as its trustee and representative. Its functions were not clearly defined, but given the spontaneous nature of the Councils it was a miracle that anything as concrete as an executive emerged at all. The meeting confirmed the six People's Commissars as the provisional national executive but its own functions and role vis-à-vis this latter body were left unclear. The Commissars considered themselves legitimately if provisionally invested with supreme authority, responsible only to the Constituent Assembly to be elected in January, or as soon as practicable. *Spartakus*, on the other hand, which considered the executive of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils as the supreme authority, responsible only to the coming national congress of councils, immediately agitated against any resignation of power into the hands of the Commissars. Thus the differing conceptions of revolutionary power immediately led to a tactical divergence between the two extreme Socialist camps. Both fastened their slogans on to institutions, *Spartakus* on the Councils, the SPD on the coming Constituent Assembly. The Independents swung in between, accepting the Constituent Assembly as inevitable—they always had a clear sense of the limits of revolutionary possibilities; pending the election, however, which they wished to put off as long as they could, the revolutionary power of the Councils was to be built up as much as possible. They accepted the duality, which the groups on either side would not; *Spartakus* opposed any parliament, while the SPD expected the Councils to wither away once a legitimate government came into being.

These articulate opinions existed, we must repeat, only at the top. They were by no means reflected in the membership of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils in Berlin, still less in the rest of Germany. In Berlin and in most of the Reich, SPD members, or soldiers and civilians unattached to any party but conservative on the whole, formed the majority on the Councils. The USPD provided a consistent and sometimes substantial minority, though in a few places it dominated the Councils; and its left wing,

Spartakus, for a period controlled a few Councils, in Brunswick and Stuttgart. The *Spartakus* call for all power to be given to the Councils was therefore not primarily intended to promote institutions which they did not in fact control, or in which they did not have even a substantial minority. No doubt they hoped that more power for the Councils would make the membership more radical, that the slogan itself would sharpen the situation generally without too much immediate institutional emphasis just as it had done in Russia. But for the moment, while agitating strongly on their behalf, *Spartakus* was not even able to get its main leaders co-opted on to the provisional executive of the Councils in Berlin. The demand of *Rote Fahne* on 10 November 1918, that Rosa Luxemburg be asked to join this executive, was ignored. Later attempts of *Spartakus* leaders to join or influence the meetings of the executive, or of the national congress of Councils in December, all failed, on the fine legal point that Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were neither workers nor soldiers! German precision and orderliness lent its particular flavour even to the revolution. Had Rosa Luxemburg forgotten all her expletives about the psychology of German Social Democracy?

Another immediate preoccupation of *Spartakus* and of the USPD was to get their papers published. *Spartakus* in Berlin adopted, at Jogiches' suggestion, the technique of the SDKPiL in Warsaw during the 1905 revolution. A small group, with Liebknecht at its head, occupied the offices of the *Berliner Lokalanzeiger* on 9 November, while raids were also made on other papers in Berlin. The occupiers insisted on the production of the newspaper under the title *Die Rote Fahne* (The Red Flag) and the second evening issue of Friday 9 November carried this title for the first time. But the loyalty of the printers to their management, and their threat to down tools, jeopardized the chances of any further such issues. Rosa Luxemburg had just arrived from Breslau by train and had gone straight to the newspaper offices; her first physical contribution to the German revolution was an eloquent appeal to the printers' proletarian conscience—never in the past famous for its militancy.¹ Even this was no use; next morning the printers, under instructions from the old management, firmly refused to print any

¹ Hermann Duncker, 'Wie die erste Nummer der *Roten Fahne* erschien' in *Einführungen in den Marxismus*, Berlin (East) 1958, Vol. I, p. 395. Also *Rote Fahne*, 9 November 1928.

more. Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, now in charge of all *Spartakus* publications, were turned out on 11 November.¹ Reference to the local Workers' and Soldiers' Council produced a directive that the occupation was illegal. On 12 November, however, the executive of the Berlin Councils authorized the use of printing and distribution facilities for the production of *Rote Fahne*, the authorization being signed by Richard Müller, one of the leaders of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, and by Captain Beerfelde, an officer with left-wing sympathies. Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, accompanied by an escort of workers, personally carried the authorization back to the firm's offices. But the management was now adamant in its refusal—the fear of *Spartakus* was not so great when commercial interests were at stake—and turned to Ebert personally: 'Our firm has been suffering twinges of conscience in case this authorization is really to be followed. . . . We are determined to trust the government programme for peace and quiet and the assurances for the safety of private property. This authorization, however, would place the vast resources of the firm at the disposal of quite the contrary tendency.' The People's Commissars thereupon consulted with the Council of Workers and Soldiers; a brief, laconic comment across the firm's protest states: 'The order against the publishers will not be carried out, further orders of this sort will not be given.'² Rosa Luxemburg thereupon tried to make a more commercial arrangement with the firm for bringing out *Rote Fahne* but, assured of government support, the management refused this as well.³

After this *Rote Fahne* did not appear again until 17 November. An unfavourable contract had finally to be made with a new publisher, which was expensive for *Spartakus*. This, and the small ration of paper allocated to the radicals, greatly hampered the range of their distribution. The USPD also had difficulties, and their main organ, *Freiheit*, first appeared only on 16 November.⁴

Thus *Spartakus* could not hope to influence the main organs of government directly. All it could hope to do was to direct and influence the genuine revolutionary potential of the masses with

¹ Wilhelm Pieck, *Die Gründung der KPD*, Berlin 1928, reprinted in *Reden und Aufsätze*, Berlin (East) 1951, Vol. I, pp. 97–98.

² *D. & M.*, Vol. II, pp. 289–392.

³ *Der Ledebour-Prozess*, Berlin 1919, p. 513, Meyer's testimony.

⁴ *Ledebour-Prozess*, p. 514. A number of sources wrongly give 18 November as the first date of *Rote Fahne*'s reappearance. See bibliography, p. 908, No. 624.

the limited means at its disposal, and on this objective all its efforts were henceforward concentrated. It was freely admitted that the *Spartakus* organization was embryonic. But, contrary to the assumption of some later anti-Communist historians, *Spartakus* was well aware of these limitations, even if it conveniently did not admit them in public; the agitational policy was adopted partly because it suited the political philosophy of Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, but particularly because they and their colleagues knew well that their situation permitted no other form of action. On 9, 10, and 11 November the leadership of *Spartakus* was in almost continuous session to formulate policy and to review negotiations with both Revolutionary Shop Stewards and USPD. The agitational demands of *Spartakus* on both these groups were still being consistently refused, just as the Revolutionary Shop Stewards had overruled Liebknecht with regard to the date of the proposed uprising. If anything the USPD, who had allowed Liebknecht to formulate their demands in the correspondence with the SPD after 9 November and had wanted him on their executive, were more susceptible to *Spartakus* influence than the Revolutionary Shop Stewards.¹ From the USPD side, at any rate, there was still a fund of old comradely loyalty. If only *Spartakus* were prepared to negotiate seriously instead of resorting constantly to demagoguery! *Spartakus*, however, negotiated by means of abuse; its terms were nothing less than the complete adherence of Goliath to David.

The Revolutionary Shop Stewards, on the other hand, were possibly the only group of the three who had anything like an effective organization—though even this varied greatly from factory to factory. They were determined to preserve it. They stressed the necessity for keeping the revolutionary demands in line with the organizational possibilities—as opposed to the USPD's more political preoccupations; Liebknecht's conception of continuous mass action was mere 'revolutionary gymnastics'. *Spartakus* in turn accused them of suffering from a 'mechanical conception which places far too much emphasis on technical

¹ Richard Müller, *Vom Kaiserreich zur Republik*, Berlin 1924-5, Vol. II, p. 29; Pieck, *Reden*, Vol. I, p. 99.

One *Spartakist*, Schreiner, who had joined the left-wing Socialist cabinet in Württemberg (Stuttgart), was forced to resign on 15 November because *Spartakus* would not sit in any commission or government with the SPD (Wilhelm Keil, *Erlebnisse*, Vol. II, p. 107).

preparations'. Monotonously *Spartakus* dinned its only lesson, mass action, into unreceptive ears—at least as far as its potential allies were concerned.¹

The *Spartakus* leaders knew they had no effective mass organization. The main historical burden of the German Communists to this day has been their failure to build up an organization during and particularly at the end of the First World War. But it certainly was not due to any oversight. The *Spartakus* leaders deliberately decided to forgo any sustained attempt to create an organization in November 1918. They held that the revolutionary possibilities made this an unnecessary dispersal of effort; by concentrating on organizational work and neglecting the inspiration and leadership of an existing if uncertain mass movement, they might miss the bus of revolution altogether. The fact that the rising of 9 November had taken place spontaneously, that the organized parties had followed and not led, seemed to justify this decision. At the meeting of 11 November Rosa Luxemburg particularly stressed the need for *Spartakus* to remain within the organizational network of the USPD as long as possible, so that the masses might be captured for the *Spartakus* programme or possibly the Independent leaders be removed by democratic processes. After all, here was an organization ready-made—the USPD. To achieve all this, a full USPD party congress was considered necessary, and this Rosa immediately demanded. Jogiches, who knew the organizational possibilities better than anyone, supported her whole-heartedly, and the meeting once more adopted a programme whose main emphasis was on propaganda. Rosa laid down as immediate tasks the reissue of their daily paper, the production of a more theoretical weekly, special papers for youth and for women, a soldiers' paper, syndication of leading articles to be offered to other newspapers—shades of *Sozialdemokratische Korrespondenz*; finally, the creation of a special department for propaganda in the army.² Never had a revolution had such a paper base.

¹ For the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, see Richard Müller, *Vom Kaiserreich zur Republik*, Vol. I, pp. 129 ff., and Emil Barth, *Aus der Werkstatt der deutschen Revolution*, Berlin, no date, pp. 30 ff.; for *Spartakus*, *Illustrierte Geschichte der deutschen Revolution*, Berlin 1929.

Liebknicht, who had the habit of sketching his views for his own benefit in revolutionary shorthand, characterized his own policy as: 'slogan [*Parole*]—mass action—further raising [of all demands]' (*Illustrierte Geschichte*, pp. 203 ff.).

² Pieck, *Reden*, Vol. I, p. 100. H. Duncker, *Erinnerungen von Veteranen der deutschen Gewerkschaftsbewegung an die Novemberrevolution*, Berlin (East) 1958, p. 21.

Organizationally, therefore, *Spartakus* was slow to develop; in most of the important provincial cities it evolved an organized centre only in the course of December and in many cases not until February or March 1919. The remarkable exception was Stuttgart where there had been an important *Spartakus* centre since the summer of 1918, which had, among other things, acted as a collection point for deserters from the German army.¹

By the same token *Spartakus* had no means of bringing direct and personal pressure to bear in the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. Attempts to arrange caucus meetings of *Spartakus* sympathizers within the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Councils did not produce satisfactory results, and an independent Communist caucus within the Berlin Council was formed only on 20 February 1919.² Attempts to have well-known *Spartakus* leaders co-opted to the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils in Berlin failed with monotonous regularity.

By mid-November 1918 *Spartakus* had exhausted its capacity for direct influence on the USPD leadership and was openly quarrelling on tactics with the Revolutionary Shop Stewards. It now adopted a wholly oppositional attitude and had to rely exclusively on mass action to bring its programme to fruition. Rosa Luxemburg did not participate in the early decisions which had produced this configuration but there is no reason whatever to suppose that she disagreed with it. Certainly any reservations she may have had in September and October with regard to the revolutionary potential in Germany, and any consequent lowering of revolutionary sights, had now given way, if not to optimism, at least to the demands of a fully revolutionary solution—and its corollary, the application of the dictatorship of the proletariat against the class enemy as well as his working-class allies. Whether she understood by this what Lenin understood, and what Radek later gruesomely elaborated with his graphic illustrations about knives and gallows, may be doubted. None the less, technique apart, firmness and the full Marxist treatment as then understood in Germany were accepted by all the *Spartakus* leaders.³ The only question was how to bring about the heightened situation, so essential for *Spartakus* plans? All Rosa Luxemburg's thinking for

¹ Keil, *Erlebnisse*, Vol. II, p. 12.

² *Rote Fahne*, 21 February 1919.

³ See the report of the discussion on this point on 11 November in *Rote Fahne*, 15 January 1922.

the past ten years had led her to emphasize the revolutionary possibilities of the masses, as against the possibility of influencing reluctant leaders. Since *Spartakus* possessed no effective organization, this policy was not only theoretically desirable but practically inevitable. So for the next four weeks Rosa Luxemburg's talents and energy were devoted to justifying the *Spartakus* position, to analysing events as a guide to the revolutionary masses, and finally to keeping in being the revolutionary potential of 9 November, on the grounds that what had been achieved that day was only a beginning and a poor one at that. When reading her articles in *Rote Fahne* it is essential to bear in mind the circumstances we have described, all resulting from the positive tactical decisions forced on *Spartakus* on the one hand, and from its isolation, partly deliberate, partly circumstantial, from both majority Socialists and Independents on the other. 'The revolution has begun; not joy over what has been achieved, not triumph over the beaten enemy are the orders of the day, but the strongest self-criticism and iron conservation of energy to continue the work that has only been initiated. Our achievements are slight, and the enemy is *not* beaten', she wrote, as early as 18 November in the first issue of *Rote Fahne* after the printing hiatus had been overcome.¹

As usual, Rosa's first reaction to a situation was the broadest possible analysis of general conditions. But soon enough she dived into more tactical considerations. Now that there was a movement wholly in sympathy with her ideas, the old pre-war habit of creating policy out of criticism no longer applied; something more positive was needed. But old habits died hard—even now, the existence of the Independents was to serve Rosa Luxemburg as a beak-sharpener. As we shall see, this pre-war style of policy-formation did not suit everyone, and there were many youngsters in the group who preferred to ignore rather than waste time attacking the USPD.²

The proposal of the provisional executive of People's Commissars to call a Constituent Assembly as soon as possible was the first point of attack.

Constituent Assembly as the bourgeois solution, Councils of Workers and Soldiers as the Socialist one. Among the open or disguised agents of the ruling classes the slogan [of a Constituent Assembly] is natural.

¹ *Rote Fahne*, 18 November 1918.

² See below, pp. 757 ff.

With the guardians of capitalist money hoards we never argue *in* the legislature or *about* the legislature. But now even the Independents take their place among the guardians of capital on this vital question.¹

As yet Rosa still made some concession to the good intentions of the Independent leaders; it was their mistaken and feeble application of Marxism which led them to misunderstand the real nature of a Constituent Assembly.

They have forgotten that the bourgeoisie is not a political party but a ruling class . . . but once profits are really in question, private property really in danger, then all easy-going talk of democracy immediately comes to an end. . . . As soon as the famous Constituent Assembly really decides to put Socialism fully and completely into practice . . . the battle begins. . . . All this is inevitable. This battle must be fought out, the enemy destroyed—with or without a Constituent Assembly. 'Civil war', which they are so anxious to cut out of the revolution, cannot be cut out. For civil war is simply another name for class war, and the thought that Socialism could be achieved without class war, that it follows from a mere majority resolution in parliament, is a ridiculous petit-bourgeois conception.²

Thus the very *conception* of a Constituent Assembly was a negation of the class war and therefore unacceptable to Socialists.

A week later the last illusions about any muddle-headedness on the part of the Independent leaders had disappeared.

We never did think much of Messrs. Haase, Dittmann and Kautsky; often during the war we found that they suffered from verbal diarrhoea but from time to time—particularly when action was required—from the other kind as well. . . . They merely long for conditions of peace and quiet; some of them to be able to digest party congress resolutions peacefully like spring vegetables, the others to avoid getting out of breath in a situation which is greater than the horizons of their conception. . . . We do not need to accuse the Independents, like *Vorwärts*, of a policy of dubious compromises. What they have recently been carrying out is no policy of any kind.³

The clearest statement of the alternative was made a month later—it was Liebknecht's ascending revolutionary progression in literary terms—when the Reich Conference of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils in turn adopted the proposal of the People's

¹ 'Die Nationalversammlung', *Rote Fahne*, 20 November 1918.

² *Ibid.*

³ 'Der Weg zum Nichts', *Rote Fahne*, 28 November 1918.

Commissars for elections to a Constituent Assembly. History was pressed into service, the history of the English revolution:

Not in the debates [of the Long Parliament] in Westminster Abbey, though it may have contained the intellectual centre of the revolution, but on the battlefields of Marston Moor and Naseby, not in glowing speeches, but through the peasant cavalry which formed Cromwell's Ironsides, was the fate of the English revolution decided.

And of the French:

And what was the result of the National Assembly? The Vendée, the emigration, the treason of the generals and the clergy, a revolt by 50 departments, the coalition of feudal Europe, until at last the only means to save the revolution: dictatorship and, as its final form, the terror.

Parliaments were thus useless as means of ensuring revolution, even bourgeois revolution; they were merely the end product of revolutions achieved by other means, in physical and social battle.

Parliaments were only arenas of class warfare for the proletariat as long as bourgeois society ruled in peace and quiet, they were the tribune from which the masses were called [by Socialist deputies] to the banner of Socialism and trained for the coming battle. Today we are in the middle of the proletarian revolution and we need to axe the very tree of capitalist exploitation . . . Lassalle's famous words are more true today than ever. 'The real revolutionary *states what is*' and today *this is*: here capital—there labour; here Constituent [Assembly]—there democracy, in the form of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils.¹

And so it went on, with ever increasing violence. The creation of a deep cleft between Constituent Assembly and Councils had all the impact of a geological upheaval.²

Although the distinction between these two forms of institution served as a useful means of dividing *Spartakus* from the rest, this was not the only means of achieving clarity. Rosa loved history—the present was real only as the reflecting surface of the past; she constantly related the events of the present to what had happened since 4 August 1914.

The ghost of 4 August 1914 reigned in the meeting place of the Council Congress. The old pre-revolutionary Germany of the Hohenzollerns, of Hindenburg and Ludendorff, of martial law and the mass executions

¹ 'Nationalversammlung oder Räteregierung?', *Rote Fahne*, 17 December 1918.

² E.g. 'Ebert's Mamelucken', *Rote Fahne*, 20 December 1918; 'Die Wahlen zur Nationalversammlung', *Rote Fahne*, 23 December 1918.

in Finland, in the Baltic and in the Ukraine, all were unashamedly present in the hall of the Prussian parliament [where the Council meeting took place]—in spite of [the events of] 9 November. . . . But the revolutionary tension, the revolutionary consciousness of the masses must become more acute every day. Every event, particularly the Congress with all its mistakes and reactionary resolutions, has in fact contributed considerably to the clarity and education of the masses, by heightening the contradiction in the attitudes and feeling of the masses. . . . Only lack of clarity, heavy-heartedness; only veils and mist can harm the cause of revolution. Every clarity, every unveiling [of disagreeable facts] is so much oil on the flames.¹

But just as the masses had to be clear about their situation, so it was from time to time regrettably necessary to defend *Spartakus* in the eyes of the masses. This was where Rosa Luxemburg made her own particular contribution to the writings of the time. Here especially she left statements which rose above the immediate necessities of revolutionary action and have remained as a valid commentary on what is best in proletarian revolution for all time. More perhaps than any other member of *Spartakus*, she was at all times concerned with the ethics of revolution, both as an essential part of revolution itself and as a tactical reminder to all its detractors of the moral purposes of revolution. She poured scorn on the rumour-mongers:

Liebknicht has killed 200 officers, has been killed himself, has looted the shops, has distributed money among the soldiers to incite them to destroy the revolution. . . . Whenever a window pane crashes on to the pavement, or a tyre bursts in the street, the Philistines at once look over their shoulders; their hair standing on end and pimply with goose-flesh, they whisper: 'Aha, here comes *Spartakus*'.

A number of people have been writing to Liebknicht with touching personal requests to save wife, nephew or aunt from the coming mass slaughter, which *Spartakus* has planned. We have come to this in the first year and month of the glorious German revolution! . . . Behind these rumours, ridiculous fantasies, and shameless lies there is a serious purpose. The whole thing is planned . . . to create an atmosphere of pogrom and to shoot *Spartakus* politically in the back. They [the official Social Democrats, Scheidemann, Ebert, Otto Braun, Legien, etc.] consciously and deliberately misrepresent our Socialist aims as banditry. They yell against putsches, murder and similar rubbish, but they mean Socialism . . . but the game will not succeed . . . though

¹ 'Ein Pyrrhussieg', *Rote Fahne*, 21 December 1918.

yet vacillating sections of workers and soldiers may be inveigled into opposing us. Even if a momentary return of the counter-revolutionary wave should throw us back into those prisons which we have only just left—the iron course of revolution cannot be held up. Our voice will sound loud and clear, the masses will understand us, and then they will turn all the more fiercely against the propagandists of hate and pogroms.¹

Against the constant accusation of being a party of terror Rosa had this to say.

[Those] who sent 1½ million German men and youths to the slaughter without blinking an eyelid, [those] who supported with all the means at their disposal for four years the greatest blood-letting which humanity has ever experienced—they now scream hoarsely about ‘terror’, about the alleged ‘monstrosities’ threatened by the dictatorship of the proletariat. But these gentlemen should look at their own history.

The revolution that had brought them into power long ago had used its fair share of force.

Terror and fear were the weapons of bourgeois revolution with which to destroy illusions and hopeless resistance to the mainstream of history. The Socialist proletariat, however, thanks to the theory of scientific Socialism, enters into its revolution without illusions, with a clear comprehension of the ultimate consequences of its historical mission, of the unbridgeable contradictions of society, of the bitter enmity to bourgeois society as a whole. It enters the revolution not in order to follow utopian illusions *against* the course of history, but to complete the iron necessities of development, to make Socialism *real*. . . . It therefore does not require to destroy its own illusions with bloody acts of violence in order to create a contradiction between itself and bourgeois society. What it needs is the entire political power of private capital, of wage-slavery, of middle-class domination, in order to build up a new Socialist society. But there are others who need terror, anarchy, and the rule of violence today: the middle classes who are shaking in their shoes for their property, their privileges, and their profits. It is they who fabricate the myths about anarchy and putsches, and pile all these on to the shoulders of the proletariat, in order to unleash their real putsches, their own real anarchy, in order to stifle the proletarian revolution, to drown Socialist dictatorship in chaos, and to create on the ruins of the revolution a class dictatorship of capital for ever and ever.²

¹ ‘Das alte Spiel’, *Rote Fahne*, 18 November 1918.

² ‘Ein gewagtes Spiel’, *Rote Fahne*, 24 November 1918.

Rosa Luxemburg's conception of terror, which she developed in the coming weeks, was later to be attacked both by the Communists—for not being radical or clear enough—and by 'neutral' historians, who claimed that this was mere phraseology to disguise planned and necessary terror in all its consequences. Certainly Rosa Luxemburg's formulations differ substantially from those of the Russians, particularly Radek, who for some years to come was to be the spokesman of the official Russian view in German Communist affairs. 'When the Independents, like Hilferding and Ledebour, said that they accept dictatorship but without terror, without force, they show that they do not accept dictatorship of the working classes at all. . . . Dictatorship without the willingness to apply terror is a knife without a blade.'¹ Other members of *Spartakus* did not find it necessary to write on this question at the time; those who survived only denounced Rosa Luxemburg's conception much later, on Stalin's orders. When Radek arrived in Berlin illegally on 20 December, this was one of the first subjects he discussed with Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg—had the comments in the *Spartakus* letters struck home to them more than the Bolsheviks were openly prepared to admit?

Our argument was mostly concerned with terror. Rosa was hurt that Dzierżyński had accepted the post of heading the Cheka [the Russian security police]. 'After all terror had never beaten us; why should we have to depend on it?' 'But with the help of terror,' I answered her, 'by persecuting us, they throw us back a full five years. We plan for world revolution, we need a few years' grace. How can you deny the need for terror under those circumstances? Anyhow terror is valueless when applied against a young class, representing the future of social change and therefore full of enthusiasm and self-sacrifice. The case is quite different with classes whom history has sentenced to death, and who in addition bear the responsibility for the crime of the world war.' Liebknecht supported me warmly. Rosa said, 'Perhaps you are right, but how can Josef [Dzierżyński] be so cruel?' Tyshka [Jogiches] laughed and said: 'If the need arises, you can do it too.'²

¹ Struthahn (Karl Radek), *Die Entwicklung der deutschen Revolution und die Aufgaben der Kommunistischen Partei*, Stuttgart 1919, p. 5.

² Karl Radek, 'November—A small page out of my memoirs', originally in *Krasnaya Nov'*, 1926, No. 10, pp. 139–75, reprinted in Otto-Ernst Schüddekopf, 'Karl Radek in Berlin, Ein Kapitel deutsch-russischer Beziehungen im Jahre 1919', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 1962, Vol. II, p. 133. This will in future be cited as Radek, *Diary*.

Once again there is no need to isolate Rosa's conceptions from their context. She had strong personal reservations about terror, but had necessarily accepted Russian events as being the result of particular circumstances. 'The revolution in Germany was improving those circumstances and making the use of terror unnecessary in both countries. She naturally believed in the slow, if irresistible, advance of revolution from that moment onwards. Taking this long but optimistic view, she did not envisage any need to return to the harsh exigencies of isolation. Out of earshot of the daily propaganda bulletin, the founding members of the German Communist Party heard her declare that, in the long view, 'the working-class revolution needs no terrors for its ends, it hates and despises cold-blooded murder'.¹

At the same time she was fully conscious that terror would be applied as a weapon of defence by the opponents of the revolution; that many Socialists, including possibly herself, would yet fall victim to it. She was not squeamish; mass action in all its forms must result in frequent destruction of life as well as property. The more armed resistance to revolution, the greater the clash and the damage. Revolution was not a drawing-room game, or an abstraction; it was simply inevitable. This view differed, however, from the organized and deliberate terror on the part of the revolutionaries which she had condemned in Russia. While it is therefore correct that Rosa Luxemburg never occupied herself with the technique of terror, her attitude cannot be described as 'clever sophistry', or as an attempt 'to avoid a clear confrontation with this issue through self-deception, and with the help of subtle dialectic'.²

Finally Rosa supported every available means of keeping the masses awake and on their toes. *Spartakus* organized repeated demonstrations, not only in reply to what it considered major provocations by the government but as a constant check on its own ability to call up mass support. Thus on 21 November there were big meetings in Berlin at which, among others, Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg addressed the crowd. On 1 December there were a further six big public meetings.³ From then on *Spartakus* was continuously mobilizing support in the streets. Rosa Luxemburg analysed these mass movements as 'Acheron on the move':

¹ *Bericht über den Gründungstag der KPD*, p. 53.

² Kollb, *Arbeiterräte*, p. 140.

³ *Rote Fahne*, 2 December 1918.

They console the masses with the promise of golden rewards from a future democratic parliament . . . but the healthy class instinct of the proletariat rises up against this conception of parliamentary cretinism. . . . The strike movement now unleashed is proof that the political revolution has crashed into the basic structure of society. The revolution returns to its basic roots, it pushes aside the paper props of ministerial changes and resolutions . . . and enters the stage on its own behalf . . . in the present revolution. The recent strikes are not trade-union agreements about trivial details . . . they are the natural answer of the masses to the enormous tremors which capital has suffered as a result of the collapse of German imperialism . . . they are the early beginnings of a general confrontation between capital and labour in Germany. . . . Acheron is on the move, and the dwarfs who carry on their little games at the head of the revolution will either be thrown off the stage or they will finally learn to understand the colossal scale of the historical drama in which they are participating.¹

This joyful indulgence in mass movement, this persistent call for action and clarity, helped to create the conditions for the hopeless January rising in which both Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were killed. Her writings, with their heightened tone and sharp revolutionary formulation, are often considered to have whipped up the unjustified and premature action. But this judgement assumes first of all that the *Spartakus* appeals in general and Rosa's writings in particular—certainly the best writing and the most provocative challenges of the day—received wide publicity, and were acted upon. No direct evidence of the effects of *Spartakus* propaganda on the masses is available; we do not know whether the mass demonstrations took place because of appeals by *Spartakus* or USPD sympathizers in the factories, or as a result of public announcements in the press, or spontaneously, or all three. The confusion of political allegiance in factories, councils, and other organizations make a clear identification of *Spartakus* influence almost impossible. Moreover, there is no substantial evidence that the mass actions which had overtaken the leading organizations before and on 9 November had ever been brought under any effective control. The case for connecting *Spartakus* propaganda directly and causally to the popular manifestations in November, December, and January has still to be proven.

Direct incitement to action was anyhow not the prime purpose

² 'Der Acheron in Bewegung', *Rote Fahne*, 27 November 1918. Acheron is the mythological river of woe that seals off Hades.

of Rosa Luxemburg's writing. Today this is obvious enough; in the revolutionary situation at the end of 1918 Rosa Luxemburg was thundering for clarity precisely because there was confusion in the ranks and crossing of lines. If the official Social Democrats were really the agents of temporarily frightened capitalists—revolutionary *shabbesgoyim*—and if the Independents were unconsciously assisting them in that role, then the continuous exhortations to be on guard could only be taken as calls for action by the masses, if they read them. Her essays, full of historical parallels and scientific analyses, may have been intended as rather emphatic commentary on events, but not to an excited mass of half-demobilized soldiers and unemployed workers. It was the situation which made *Rote Fahne* inflammatory, not its content. The only alternative was out of the question—adjusting the tenor of one's appeals to the tactical demands of the moment, hot and cold, stop and go, like the Bebel leadership of the SPD before the war.

The answer to this apparent dilemma is simply that Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, both of whom had already paid for their revolutionary determination during the war, accepted the full consequences of what they were doing as a part of historical necessity. If indeed the masses rose and were defeated then this would clarify the situation still further; it was part of the inevitable process of education in a revolutionary situation. In the last resort, leaders who are themselves willing to accept the sacrifice of their liberty and life are probably the only ones who can justifiably call upon their supporters to do the same, particularly when these sacrifices are a necessary part of distant though inevitable victory. That the whole conception of revolution may have been mistaken, that there was really no prospect of long- or short-term victory in Germany, is another question; given the circumstances and traditions of the *Spartakus* leaders, it is not meaningful to ask why they did not act 'Russian' during this period. The Independents' policy of compromise, accepting the inevitable Constituent Assembly and hoping to develop a revolutionary tactic within it, was anathema to *Spartakus*. When Kurt Eisner came from Munich to Berlin at the end of November for the conference of provincial Prime Ministers (he had by this time been elected Prime Minister of Bavaria), he had a long dialogue with Liebknecht. He attempted to persuade the latter to make common cause with the more

moderate revolutionaries, even to form joint governments with them, in order to ensure that present revolutionary achievements might at least be maintained and a decent peace obtained from the allies; but he was answered with a stern 'no'. 'The achievement of Socialism is only possible if everything is pulled down completely; only after the destruction of the entire capitalist system can reconstruction begin.'¹

If anything, the membership of *Spartakus* was even more revolutionary than the leaders. The pressure for action came from below—just as Rosa Luxemburg had always predicted. In December several mass demonstrations led to attacks on public buildings by groups of young *Spartakus* members. On 21 November an attempt, with resultant casualties, had been made to storm police headquarters, in spite of the fact that the Berlin Police President was a left-wing Independent—later a Communist—and probably the only senior official in the capital who sympathized with *Spartakus*.² On 8 December detachments went once more from a public meeting to the military headquarters and stormed it.³ And at many *Spartakus* meetings official speakers were often followed on to the rostrum by unexpected members of the crowd, who sometimes made hair-raising but seriously-meant demands, including the liberation of prisoners in all the jails and the instant capture of various prominent personalities. Almost each day there were rival meetings called by the different groups which sometimes clashed.⁴

Rosa Luxemburg knew that in revolutionary times irresponsible elements attached themselves to the revolutionary parties: 'The proletarian revolution will always have to reckon and fight with this particular enemy and tool of the counter-revolution.'⁵ In the crowds there were no doubt some footloose criminals, but the bulk were young uncompromising radicals, who wanted the constant warnings against any truck with the enemy translated into a complete personal break with all the coat-tails of society—and

¹ H. Roland-Holst, *Rosa Luxemburg*, pp. 189-90. The official note of the conversation, with a depressing hand-written comment on its failure, is in *Geheimes Staatsarchiv München*, Political Archives, VII, Series 115, hand-written note of conversation Eisner-Liebknecht, 24 November 1918.

² Eduard Bernstein, *Die deutsche Revolution, ihr Ursprung, ihr Verlauf und ihr Werk*, Berlin 1921, Vol. I, p. 71; *Geheimes Staatsarchiv München*, Political Archives, VII, No. 79, folio 7.

³ Pieck, *Reden*, Vol. I, p. 104.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution* (ed. Bertram D. Wolfe), p. 74.

into action, above all action. It was the unreal hysteria of Hervé all over again. During these stormy weeks, and particularly at the founding congress of the German Communist Party, the leadership collided with some of these elements, and was sometimes overruled by them. But they were part of the stuff of proletarian revolution; there were more important things to do than to condemn them for their impetuosity. That task can be left to German middle-class historians anxious to pick over the dungheap of the 1918 national disgrace.

XVII

IRRESISTIBLE FORCE AND IMMOVABLE OBJECT

HAVING obtained confirmation of their authority from the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Council, the provisional government of People's Commissars quickly set about making it real. Legitimacy was no limitation on power. Ebert—though the phrase 'I hate social revolution like the plague' cannot be attributed to him with certainty—decided that order and a return to normal were the immediate priorities of the situation. He was willing and able to accept all the responsibility. More than his two Social-Democrat colleagues in the government, Scheidemann and Landsberg, he had a strong sense of legitimacy, with regard both to the institutions he had inherited from his predecessors and the new forms of power which had tentatively emerged on 9 November. Ebert was a literal man. Most of the demands put forward by the pre-war SPD under Bebel's leadership and his own, as an unrealizable slogan, had unexpectedly become reality. The notion of revolutionary progression, in which the present stage was but a small step, seemed nonsense to him. What was needed was a bout of revolutionary digestion. Accordingly, the government asked for and obtained from the executive of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils increased powers to cope with the situation. And on 21 December 1918 the national Congress of German Workers' and Soldiers' Councils set the seal of its confirmation and approval on Ebert's government.

This same preoccupation with legitimacy, from which followed the urge for 'peace and quiet', made him resort without hesitation to any available means of achieving his mandate. The most obvious and convenient tool was the army. The High Command had sworn allegiance to the Republic, and this commitment was sufficient guarantee for Ebert, a man for whom an oath was an oath. He considered the delicate negotiations with the army as his personal function, and did not deem it necessary to submit them to the

approval of his USPD colleagues—for, after all, they were only intended to achieve an object that had already been agreed on by all the People's Commissars. As far as he was concerned, any over-eagerness on the part of the army to intervene was only a reaction to *Spartakus's* encouragement of revolutionary excesses—the inevitable results of a disturbed situation.

The course of events in December and January hinged largely on a number of incidents which appeared to disturb the slow process of consolidation by the government. On 6 December troops occupied the editorial offices of *Rote Fahne* and attempted to arrest the executive of the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Council, and were only with difficulty persuaded to leave; at the same time there were calls to make Ebert President. There is no conclusive evidence that Ebert inspired this or wished it to happen, but he did nothing to issue any denial or to denounce and punish the instigators.¹ None the less, these events were followed by mass demonstrations and strikes. Then, on 21 December, the government attempted to deal with the People's Naval Division (*Volksmarinedivision*), a unit of revolutionaries and mutineers, who had installed themselves in the Marstall, the stables of the Imperial Palace, and were pressing their somewhat mercenary services on the revolutionary government. Their idealism for the government of the revolution was heavily tinged with concrete demands for pay and privileges. The negotiations with the government, partly over these and partly over the continued presence and even existence of the unit, came to an abrupt end when troops under the command of Otto Wels, the Social-Democrat Commandant of Berlin, made an unsuccessful assault on the stables. This incident, and particularly the sharp manner in which the negotiations had been broken off and an attack mounted without warning, caused the three Independent members of the provisional government to resign. Henceforth the USPD was wholly in opposition once again. Finally, the government's attempt to remove the left-wing police president of Berlin, Emil Eichhorn, on 3 and 4 January, led directly to the events of the January rising, as a result of which Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were murdered.

Each of these incidents provoked a reaction which was in no

¹ Arthur Rosenberg, *Geschichte der deutschen Republik*, Karlsbad 1935, p. 84. For a view of Ebert's complicity, see Walter Oehme, *Damals in der Reichskanzlei, Erinnerungen aus den Jahren 1918–1919*, Berlin (East) 1958, pp. 62 ff. All the main sources carry slightly different versions of this controversial event.

proportion to its actual importance. The situation was largely beyond the control of both the government and its opponents. Having decided for itself that the government and its Independent supporters were mere agents of the counter-revolution, *Spartakus* saw all these events as signposts along a predicted road, and called out its troops on each occasion. Though it continued, at any rate until the end of the year, to call for the *advance* of the revolution, it was soon obliged to call its supporters not so much to advance as to defend existing achievements against the attacks of the government. These rallying cries for defence were actually a more effective tactic than any call for further advances. *Spartakus* was on its own in demanding rapid and total advance on all fronts, but it could and did find ready allies for the defence against counter-revolution, real or imagined. The workers of Berlin, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, as well as the USPD leadership—particularly after their members left the government—were much more disposed to support action of this kind, for it was precise and not vague or irresponsible. At times the People's Naval Division signified its support, especially when its own interests were threatened. But although events more or less forced co-operation on these groups, it was not too effective. *Spartakus* always mistrusted the intentions and good faith of its allies. While co-operating with them in practice, it went on demarcating its own position from theirs, and continued to show them up in public as cowards and weaklings. The rapid tactical realignments of Lenin had never taken hold in Germany, not even among the radicals. *Spartakus* was imprisoned in the limitations of its commitment to purity and principles as public weapons instead of a private hoard of strength. This made tactical adjustments impossible.

Now that the Independents were in opposition to the government once more, they began to split on the issue of co-operation with *Spartakus*. On 8 December one of their right-wing members, Ströbel, had stated openly that *Spartakus* and the USPD were irreconcilably separated by the difference between German and Russian methods. He saw *Spartakus* as the slavish imitators of Russian methods and the Bolshevik programme; the preoccupation with giving exclusive power to the Councils seemed alien and remote to Germany.¹ He and others advocated for the USPD a clear separation both from Left and Right. Too many

¹ *Die Freiheit*, No. 43, 8 December 1918.

compromises on both sides were responsible for the fact that the Independents were being pulled apart. The alternative was to make a decision between the two extremes. 'We have no policy. We have appeals and leading articles, we have speeches and resolutions, but we have no policy. . . . There are only two possibilities for the USPD: exit from the cabinet and adherence to *Spartakus*—or continuation in the government and sharp demarcation from the Left.'¹

This emphasis on 'German tactics for a German revolution' as opposed to foreign and alien methods plagued the leadership of the USPD. They too wanted revolution, but by indigenous means of unexceptionably German manufacture. At present they were in a blind alley; as Breitscheid had said, the party had either to evolve a policy of its own or to make a clear choice between Left and Right. We have already seen that the accusation of slavish imitation of Russian methods could not really be justified against *Spartakus*. The notion of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils had taken root in Germany spontaneously, even before *Spartakus* had become committed to the system. While *Spartakus* made no bones about its attachment to the Russian revolution and friendship for the Bolsheviks, Rosa Luxemburg had gone out of her way to emphasize the international aspect of the German revolution; her appeal of 25 November to the proletarians of all countries had strongly hinted that it was the German revolution which provided the pivot of the international movement and was the most important factor in the world situation.² As regards direct Russian assistance, there was none. Since the departure of the Russian diplomats following the closing of the Legation on 5 November, there had been no official Russian representatives in Germany until Radek arrived illegally in December. The notion of *Spartakus* as a Russian agent who had blindly adopted a foreign programme for application in Germany was grossly exaggerated. For the Independent leaders, however, the assertion of a German road to revolution was a matter of national pride—left-wing variety; they felt they had inherited the pre-war position of the SPD in the International. Unable to convert these aspirations either into a policy of their own or into a choice between their neighbours, the Independent leaders went on vacillating.

¹ Rudolf Breitscheid in *Der Sozialist*, IV (50), 12 December 1918.

² *Rote Fahne*, 26 November 1918.

The internal struggle between *Spartakus* and the Independent leadership for the control of USPD policy and the direction of its substantial membership came to a head in December. *Spartakus* had been pressing for a party congress and it was this issue which dominated the general meeting of the USPD of Greater Berlin on 15 December. An influential group of the USPD had altogether lost interest in discussing the problem of Councils or Constituent Assembly as alternatives; they considered it a 'waste of time'.¹ At the meeting Hilferding brought a resolution to the effect that the next task was to accept the elections as inevitable and to ensure the greatest possible success for the Independents. At the same time he stipulated the tasks as 'to ensure the safety and increase of our revolutionary achievements with complete decisiveness and without feeble compromise'.

Rosa Luxemburg made an impassioned speech against this whole conception. She and Haase appeared as main speakers on the question of policy and presented their different views. She sketched the history of the last few weeks.

Five weeks have passed since 9 November. 'The picture is totally changed. Reaction is much stronger today than on the first day of the revolution. And Haase tells us 'Look how wonderfully far we have come'. His duty should have been to show us the advance of the counter-revolution, supported by the government of which Haase is a member. . . . We are still prepared to enter the government today if it carries out Socialist policy based on proper principles.

Precisely the adherence to the policy of the existing government had cost the Independents votes in the elections for the first all-German congress of councils.

Haase has also accused us of bowing to the views of the masses. [According to him] we are not prepared to take over the government without the agreement of the masses. We do not bow, but we also do not simply wait around. . . . Yes, conditions within the USPD are intolerable, since there are elements in it who do not belong together. Either you agree to go the same way as the social patriots, or you join *Spartakus*. Only a party congress can decide this question, but in demanding a party congress, we find Haase's ears just as closed as we found those of Scheidemann when we made similar demands during the war.²

¹ Rudolf Hilferding in *Die Freiheit*, No. 57, 16 December 1918.

² *Die Freiheit*, No. 57, 16 December 1918.

Rosa Luxemburg submitted her own resolution against Hilferding's. She demanded the immediate exit of the USPD members from the government (it was six days before the Marstall incident), resolute opposition to the Constituent Assembly, the immediate seizure of power by the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, the dissolution of the Council of People's Commissars, and finally the immediate convocation of a USPD congress. Her resolution was lost by a large majority, 195 votes against 485 for Hilferding. The Berlin members did not want to accept the choice which Rosa Luxemburg and Breitscheid wished to impose on them. They felt that the middle position of the USPD could be maintained against both alternatives, and that it was the correct policy.

This vote also showed *Spartakus* how illusory for the moment were its hopes of discrediting the USPD leaders in the eyes of the membership, or of forcing them at least to submit to a vote of confidence by a party congress. The fact that Rosa really believed in the possibility of sweeping aside the USPD leadership is born out by her private assessment of the situation for Clara Zetkin's benefit. Rosa explained that people were really behind *Spartakus*. They admired and followed *Rote Fahne* far more than *Freiheit* and actually felt that *Spartakus* did not take the Independent leadership to task sharply enough. Only Haase and Hilferding defended their paper—weakly. "That is why we insist on the party congress."¹ Not that a party congress would in the event have produced an alignment different from that at the Berlin members' meeting. The delusion that negative votes of this sort were the result of the leaders' narrow manipulations, and that a broader discussion would also produce a more radical attitude, died hard. For the moment *Spartakus* was balked; and there was no point in continuing as an ineffective ginger group within the USPD. At once the leaders made preparations for the founding of a separate party of their own. It was the organizational break at last—but even now not without grave doubts on the part of Rosa and Leo Jogiches.

If they could not have a USPD congress, at least there was the national congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils four days later, on 20 December. Here was another opportunity of 'testing' the masses. *Spartakus* placed great hopes on the congress, called

¹ 29 November 1918, photocopy IML (B), NL5III-A/15, p. 83. A month later, still optimistic, she wrote that the USPD 'is in the process of complete dissolution . . . in the provinces the reunion of USP and the *Scheidemen* is in full cry' (ibid., p. 92). Did Rosa mean leaders or masses? One wonders!

for welcoming mass demonstrations—which would show the delegates how radical the masses were. 'The majority Socialists' analysis of the situation used many of the same words as *Spartakus*, but with strangely different meaning.

When William the deserter himself deserted, and the Junkers and middle classes took refuge in their rat holes, the entire working population of Germany looked hopefully towards the only political power which was left, the power of the labour movement. . . . The congress which begins today has the proud task of justifying this confidence, and of reinforcing it where it has already begun to weaken. Certain quarters have been pressing the slogan 'All power to the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils'. The congress has supreme power today, for it is the parliament of the revolution, which can break the revolution's government or give it the strong support which the government needs to master the incalculable difficulties before it. The majority of the congress . . . will be sensible enough to recognize the weakness of its composition. The elections which brought it into being were regrettably neither general nor equal nor direct, in many cases not even secret. Such as they were, they were only an expedient . . . ; for all these weaknesses the only remedy can be found in the spirit of the new orderly system of liberty, and in that strong sense of right which is part of the basis of the German working-class movement. . . .

The discussion 'Constituent Assembly or Councils' may have led to qualification even before its final discussions here. Social Democracy does not recognize these alternatives, since its sacred duty lies in giving the entire population as quickly as possible a full and democratic possibility of self-determination, thus bringing forward the elections for the Constituent [Assembly] to the earliest possible date. Until then the government of the Reich, supported by the confidence of the people, must have liberty of action. Additional governments . . . must not be tolerated . . . it depends on [the Left Independent-*Spartakist* movement] whether the sittings [of the congress] are carried out in a spirit of dignity and in full cognizance of the importance of the matters in hand. As far as can be seen, the Social Democrats, with which we equally count the right wing of the Independents, have a vast majority . . . the far Left . . . can be no menace at any elections. But was it not they who announced 'All power to the Councils'? All right then! They have recognized the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils as the highest power and will have to submit to the decision [of the Congress], even if they do not like it.

How easy it must have seemed to the leadership to hoist *Spartakus* with its own petard!

The recommendations to the delegates concluded with the following sentence:

The men who have the enormous task of leading the people in these troubled times must be restrained, clear, quiet and decisive. We need men of action, not men of words.¹

This declaration is quoted at length because it highlights the different conceptions of revolution held by SPD and *Spartakus*—part of the confusion arose from the absence of a distinct revolutionary vocabulary, and both sides had to use the same old words. As regards programme, the SPD was for consolidation. They recognized the revolutionary achievements as real, and believed that the Socialist society of their conception was at hand. They would go on clinging to this idea until in the 1920s they were pushed out of power by the same democratic system they had created; even when a Nazi government, as indifferent to classifying its opponents as the old imperial governments of Russia and Germany had been, persecuted Socialists indiscriminately with Communists, they still believed that the appearances of 1918 had been realities and that only the *Spartakus* excesses had revived forces which history had already pronounced dead.

But the differences between left- and right-wing socialists were not only programmatic. The Social Democrats saw themselves as men of action, 'restrained, quiet, decisive'; *Spartakus* were cheap manufacturers of revolutionary phrases, without any sense of responsibility. They were by definition cowards, fighting with words but risking the lives only of others.² The members of the SPD, on the other hand, saw themselves as courageous, serious, sensible—above all as responsible. Ascriptive phrases like 'calm deliberation' and 'worthy' abound in party speeches of the time. There was a strong sense of inheritance—not only of power, but of a tradition of rule which retrospectively made all the pre-war denunciations sound like envy. It was no longer the system which was blamed, but individuals: the Kaiser, Ludendorff, Bethmann-Hollweg. The class lessons were thrown to the winds. And yet, to the fury of the Left, the old words still served—there were no others—causing confusion and an almost hysterical fury at such theft.

¹ *Vorwärts*, 16 December 1918.

² This suggestion was to emerge forcibly in January 1919. See below, p. 770.

More than any differences in programme, this quarrel over an inheritance made any co-operation impossible, even in the future. In France and Italy, in spite of the same ideological splits, there was never the same sharp social differentiation; under certain future circumstances a 'Popular Front' co-operation between Communists and Socialists proved possible. In Germany this was not the case, and the two groups were unable to co-operate even against the rise of National Socialism, which menaced them equally. For this reason, too, the intermediate position of the USPD became impossible, so that inevitably its own Right and Left configurations soon split and joined the more natural habitats of SPD and KPD respectively. The choice was not only ideological but social, and therefore harsher.¹

The congress did as *Vorwärts* had predicted, in spite of every effort by *Spartakus* to impose its programme from within and without. *Rote Fahne* reprinted resolution after resolution at public meetings against Ebert and against the SPD majority of the congress, but all to no avail.² A resolution submitted by the delegation of the Stuttgart Council, which was largely *Spartakus*-orientated, for the admission of Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg as 'guests with a consultative voice' was defeated by a considerable majority. It may well be that Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht had tried to get mandates for the congress but failed.

There was in Berlin a rule with regard to the elections that only those who work in some industrial undertaking should be admitted to the congress. In the rest of the country no such restriction was imposed, but rather we based ourselves on the idea that, whatever happened, all the various representatives of Socialism, of the revolution, should be present at the congress.³

An orthodox SPD speaker from Berlin riposted that there was no point in admitting Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg since 'we in Berlin at least, but I think all over the Reich, know very well exactly what we have to expect from these comrades'.⁴ As it

¹ In spite of twelve years' common persecution, this social differentiation was carried through to 1946, and has been a feature of the SED in East Germany ever since—embodied in the isolation of the old SPD element within the united party.

² E.g. *Rote Fahne*, 17 December 1918.

³ *Allgemeiner Kongress der Arbeiter- und Soldatenräte Deutschlands vom 16 bis 21 Dezember 1918*, *Stenographische Berichte*, Berlin, no date, pp. 26–27. Speech by Unfried.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

turned out, the work-bench qualification for attendance had been imposed on the Berlin organizations under pressure from the Independents and *Spartakus* precisely to avoid a mass delegation of right-wing trade unionists. It was this fact, though it now worked against Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, which in part decided the majority Socialists at the congress to get their own back by voting against the admission of the two *Spartakus* leaders. When the vote was taken, one of the delegates called upon the congress 'to rise for a man who has sat in jail for four years', but he was shouted down with the traditional German '*pfui*'; had they not all suffered, if not like lions, then at least like lambs?

The Soviet government had attempted to send a delegation to the congress. Although the executive of the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Councils had recommended the government to admit this delegation, the local commanders in the East had refused to let it pass, and indeed the SPD/USPD government had decided after lengthy discussions not to allow the Russian Legation to return to Berlin for the time being.¹ There was complete agreement between majority and Independent Socialists on the dangers of Russian intervention in the German revolution, if on nothing else. When the delegation was turned back by the German military authorities in Kovno, Radek, a member of the delegation, obtained the agreement of the Soviet Council of People's Commissars to try and cross the frontier illegally. He arrived in Berlin on 19 or 20 December.² Though he could have attended the last two sessions of the congress, the *Spartakus* leaders told him that his presence there would be useless—everything was going against them. He arrived just at the time when they had definitely decided to found their party without further delay, and he assisted in the preparations.

As a good if recently-converted Leninist, his first questions concerned the *Spartakus* organization.

¹ Philipp Scheidemann, *Der Zusammenbruch*, Berlin 1921, p. 224. For the negotiations regarding the Soviet delegation to the congress, see *D. & M.*, Vol. II, p. 501 and Scheidemann, p. 227.

² See Radek, *Diary*, p. 132. Although Radek in his later writings on the German revolution became less and less reliable about facts as well as interpretation, he wrote this diary shortly after the events described, and some of the earlier details are borne out exactly by a recent biography: Willy Brandt and Richard Löwenthal, *Ernst Reuter. Ein Leben für die Freiheit*, Munich 1957. Reuter, the Mayor of West Berlin until his death and the predecessor of the present Mayor, Willy Brandt, was a Communist in the years immediately after the First World War, known as Reuter-Friesland. He had been a prisoner of war in Russia and, together with a man called Felix Wolf or Rackow, accompanied Radek in his illegal journey from Russia to Berlin.

How many people had we at the congress? There was not even a *Spartakus* caucus. Laufenberg and his Hamburg group occupied an intermediate position. Rosa spoke of him with great suspicion. And in the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Council? There too we had no organized group. In the provinces things were better here and there. In Bremen we had managed to capture a substantial portion of the council under the command of Knief. In Chemnitz, Brandler was working. 'And how large is our organization in Berlin?' I asked. 'We are only collecting our forces. When the revolution began we did not have more than 50 people organized in Berlin.'

I drove with Paul Levi to the offices of the central committee to meet Jogiches. It was like an apiary. The old secretary Mathilde Jacob met me . . . she led me to Jogiches. He had aged a lot, my old teacher. . . . There was still a certain amount of tension between us, since the split in the Polish Social Democracy in 1912 . . . we did not talk about these old matters. He asked after Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Dzierżyński. After a few minutes we were back to our old relationship, open and simple.¹

A curious moment, Radek's arrival in Berlin, the official delegate of the victorious Bolsheviks—a moment of mixed feelings and memories even in the midst of a hailstorm of present events. Radek, the outcast of Polish and German Social Democracy, the snide journalist with the poison pen who had clutched Lenin's coat-tails in 1914 for protection against Jogiches and Rosa Luxemburg, Radek the '*genus* whore' who had poisoned Rosa's relations with her Bremen friends, had deepened the split in the SDKPiL, had written that the 'Tyshka and Luxemburg clique is finished'—Lenin's plenipotentiary! Radek himself glided elegantly over the personal undertones of the first meeting. And we may well believe that Jogiches, who had really mellowed during the war, soon let the past remain buried—as with Lenin, actual revolution simply buried old personal feuds under its majestic rubble. But Rosa? Radek said nothing. But she stayed with him that first day not one moment longer than was necessary, and would not join them for dinner. The coldness of their encounter became proverbial in the Communist Party.²

¹ Radek, *Diary*, pp. 132–4.

² Ruth Fischer took an extreme view. 'Luxemburg refused even to see him and had to be persuaded by Levi that this was an impossible procedure.' *Stalin and German Communism*, London 1948, p. 76. Ruth Fischer was not then in Berlin and is generally unreliable; in places deliberately so. Consequently I am very reluctant to accept any interpretation of hers without corroboration. For example, 'Liebknecht and his friends opposed Luxemburg's concept as a dangerously unrealistic interpretation of the . . . situation in Germany.' (*Ibid.*) This story is, in fact, an inversion of the truth.

The programme for the new party was entirely written by Rosa Luxemburg and had been published on 14 December.¹

Rosa wrote a draft of a party programme. It was discussed among the leaders and caused no argument at all. The only argument arose over the relationship to the Constituent Assembly. Liebknecht said that he woke up in the morning opposed to participation in the elections, and by the evening supported it. It was a very tempting suggestion to oppose the conception of a Constituent [Assembly] with the slogan of the Councils, but the congress of Councils had itself opted for the Constituent [Assembly]. This fact could not be overcome. Rosa and Liebknecht admitted it, and Jogiches emphasized it continually. But the youths in the party [—like the 'youths' in the SPD of 1891—] were bitterly opposed to it. 'We shall chase them away with machine guns' [they said].²

Since she had taken over the elucidation and writing of *Spartakus's* policy in November, the early incessant hammering on tactical demands could now at last give way in part to a broader, more congenial analysis, anchored in history. The intellectual stomach of the masses was supposed to be strong enough for such a diet. Throughout these weeks Rosa was the most consistent exponent of the notion that success was really a long way off, and that the processes of revolution would, though inevitable, be slow. Now she could elaborate this idea, untrammelled by any tactical slogans. Liebknecht, too, admitted this, at least in private.³ But while he was much more influenced by the apparent revolutionary reification of his surroundings—he spoke at meetings almost daily and was in closer contact with the leaders of the USPD and Revolutionary Shop Stewards—Rosa Luxemburg maintained her stable, almost philosophical, vision intact. Her draft programme reflected this. She talked continually of a 'tough, inexhaustible struggle' over a long period of time.

For the benefit of her immediate party audience she also contrasted sharply the alternatives of chaos and victory, challenging the easy notion that victory was inevitable, irrespective of Socialist mistakes. 'There *was* an alternative, chaos—and while it might be good propaganda for the masses to demonstrate an optimism of historical inevitability, the new party itself needed a jolt out of its intellectual self-satisfaction. She had frequently hinted at this in

¹ 'Was will der Spartakusbund?', *Rote Fahne*, 14 December 1918.

² Radek, *Diary*, pp. 134–5.

³ A. Rosenberg, *Geschichte*, pp. 28, 61, 73. This author is most emphatic; also Radek, *Diary*, p. 133.

Rote Fahne; now she spelt it out for the young radical optimists in the movement who were piling on pressure.¹ She warned them solemnly that the counter-revolution would prefer chaos to admitting a Socialist victory. Naturally there were practical proposals too, divided into eight 'immediate measures for the safety of the revolution', eight for the next steps in the political and social field, and another eight economic demands. The programme was part offence, part defence; but the headings alone showed the leaders' defensive posture against 'the infantile disease of Left Communism'.²

The core of Rosa's ideas was contained in the summary at the end.

This is what *Spartakus* stands for.

And because it stands for these things, because it is the moving spirit, the Socialist conscience of the revolution, it is hated, persecuted and slandered by all the open and secret enemies of the revolution itself. 'Crucify it', cry the capitalists, trembling for their hoards. 'Crucify it', cry the lower middle classes, the officers, the anti-Semites, the newspaper satraps of the bourgeoisie, trembling for the fleshpots of class domination.

'Crucify it', the misled and deluded sections of the working classes and soldiers echo, those who do not yet realize that they are raging against their own flesh and blood when they rage against *Spartakus*.

In hate and slander against *Spartakus* all the counter-revolutionary, anti-social, dubious, dark and dangerous elements combine. This alone shows clearly that the real heart of the revolution beats with *Spartakus*, that the future is with it. *Spartakus* is not a party which wishes to obtain power over the working classes or by 'using' the working classes. *Spartakus* is no more than the self-conscious part of the proletariat, which points out to the broad masses their historic tasks at every step, which represents at every stage of the revolution the final goal and acts in the interest of proletarian world revolution in all national questions. *Spartakus* refuses to share the government with the servants of the middle classes, with Scheidemann-Ebert, because it considers such co-operation treason to the very foundations of Socialism, a source of strength to the counter-revolution, and the crippling of the revolution itself.

Spartakus will also refuse to accept power merely because Scheidemann-Ebert have gone bankrupt and because the Independents find themselves in a blind alley as a result of their co-operation with them.

¹ For these, see above, p. 715. For her analysis of the chaos alternative, above, p. 730.

² *Bericht über den Gründungsparteitag der kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands (Spartakusbund) vom 30 Dezember 1918 bis 1 Januar 1919*, Berlin, no date, pp. 53-55 (cited hereafter as *Bericht KPD*).

Spartakus will never undertake to govern other than through the clear and unmistakable wish of the great majority of the proletarian masses of Germany, and never without their conscious agreement with the ideas, aims, and methods of *Spartakus*. Government by the proletariat can only battle its way to complete clarity and readiness, step by step, through a long valley of sorrows, of bitter experience, of defeats and victories. The victory of *Spartakus* is not at the beginning but at the end of the revolution: it is the same thing as the victory of the great masses of the Socialist proletariat. . . .¹

To the well-ordered tranquillity of the historian, this appeal must seem naïve and highly romantic. And so, perhaps, it was. She had waited so long for the revolution, had defended its coming against so many powerful and learned detractors—and here it was, the apparent result, not of party manœuvres, but of conscious proletarian action in its own interest and on its own behalf, just as she had always claimed. But it would be absurd to dismiss this declaration of faith as an attempt to cover ice-cold calculations with a little attractive warmth. It was not just a mantle thrown over hard organizational realities, as so much of later Bolshevik propaganda; this was what *Spartakus* had to offer *instead of* organization.

It was optimistic, in the sense that there opened up enormous vistas of a better life, but at the same time the distance of the projection and the warnings of defeats and sorrows convey an aura of profound pessimism in practical, immediate terms. Contrary to appearances, the historical belief in objective situations tends to be pessimistic; those who rely on their own action, who draw the circle of their world tight enough to encompass only the range of their own personal possibilities—these are the real optimists. This declaration of faith, tacked on to a party political programme, reads like a testament. Lenin, too, pinned such a testament to the wall before dying; when the years of tactical polemics, of firm proposals for action, suddenly opened out on an objective situation almost beyond remedy, at this late moment he challenged his too-powerful lieutenants: 'I shall fight Great Russian chauvinism to the end of my life.' The *Spartakus* programme was Rosa's testament, just as it is also the concise summary of her life's work. Here was the famous statement that *Spartakus* would take power only with the support of the majority of the masses, which has led to such bitter squabbling between Social Democrats and Communists

¹ *Bericht KPD*, pp. 55–56.

over Rosa's intellectual corpse. It was this idealism, this apparent commitment to orthodox liberal democracy, which later brought a powerful section of the German Communist Party under the leadership of Ruth Fischer to diagnose Rosa Luxemburg's influence in the German working-class movement as 'syphilitic'.¹

We already know that to look for vestigial traces of orthodox or mere majority democracy in Rosa's thought is misleading.² Emphatically she did not believe—and continually fought against—the idea that the genius of a central committee and a lot of power sufficed to establish a correct policy. But equally there was no question of waiting for, or soliciting, the masses. The masses meant action—in the right situation; through action to a majority and not, as in orthodox democracy, consensus first and maybe action later.³ Rosa Luxemburg had no doubt that the support of the masses must come with action and could come in no other way, but that it was a sporadic and not a continuous process; finally, that it coincided with the seizure of power and the advent of Socialism. The creation of only two alternatives, Bolshevism or Social Democracy as they developed, retrospectively narrowed the area of choice; at the time Rosa's ideas were a lively third alternative.⁴

Nor is there any need to suppose that Rosa's formulation was merely a propaganda move to attract mass support. Quite the contrary: the whole programme, though it made concessions to the immediate requirements of *Spartakus*, was a declaration of faith, included more for the party members than the masses. If anything, it contradicted the urgency of the daily blare in *Rote Fahne*. The

¹ See below, pp. 800, 806.

² Arguing against national self-determination in Poland and those who claimed support for it from 'a majority in the nation', Rosa Luxemburg had written as far back as 1908: 'Woe to the Social-Democratic party that should ever consider this principle [of legitimate majority rule] authoritative. It would be equivalent to a death sentence on Social Democracy as a revolutionary party. . . . "The will of the nation", or of its majority, is not a sort of God for Social Democracy, before which it humbly prostrates itself; on the contrary, Social Democracy's whole historic mission depends above all on revolutionizing, on forming the will of the "nation"—that is, its working majority.' (*Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, No. 6, August 1908; *Wybór Pism*, Vol. II, pp. 155 ff.) The sentiment is genuine enough, though the pregnant phraseology was more suitable for 1908 Poland than 1918 Germany. Later Bolshevik critics of Luxemburgism's excessive preoccupation with majorities and democracy were clearly unfamiliar with this excerpt—as with almost all her Polish writing.

³ For the analysis of this argument, see above, Chapter XII.

⁴ This narrowing corridor between a Stalinist 'Left' and a *petit-bourgeois* 'Right'—or otherwise minute sectarianism—is despairingly illustrated for a later (still narrower) period in Simone de Beauvoir's novel of post-1945 French politics, *Les Mandarins*.

most important evidence for the claim that the incitements in *Rote Fahne* were intended as situational analyses—albeit optimistic—rather than tactical directions for action, can be found in the official *Spartakus* programme itself.

The decision to found an independent party was not taken lightly, as we have seen. In spite of the failures at the USPD meeting and the Council congress, Rosa Luxemburg in particular was still preoccupied with the need to remain inside an existing organization and so keep contact with the masses. In isolation even doctrinal purity was no good. Isolation meant not merely an organizational vacuum, it meant leaving the real world of Socialism for a void. Here—and here only—there is some justification for an analogy with Social Democracy as against Bolshevism; the idea of splitting and re-forming without any apparent loss of contact with the masses was unknown and held to be selfish and absurd. But even then the distinction from Bolshevism can be carried too far. Once in power, the Bolsheviks adopted the same, if not a more rigorous, attitude to splits, as being a descent into the darkest void. In the end, however, Rosa Luxemburg accepted the majority's decision to organize a separate party; of the leadership, only Jogiches actually voted against it—and he the organizing expert. Only the delegates from Brunswick voted with him.¹ Nevertheless, Clara Zetkin was persuaded by urgent letters from Rosa and Jogiches to remain in the USPD for the time being. There were still right-minded members to be stolen, and it was her job to steal them.² Jogiches' doubts about the wisdom of the organizational break merely confirmed the doubts of no less a Leninist than Radek; even at the party congress itself, 'I still did not feel that I was in the presence of a party'.³

¹ Hans Wenzel, *Das Revolutionsjahr 1918–1919 in Braunschweig*. Unpublished thesis (Brunswick), p. 119; *Die Oktoberrevolution und Deutschland, Protokoll der wissenschaftlichen Tagung in Leipzig 25–30 November 1957*, Berlin (East) 1958, p. 137.

² Clara Zetkin, *Ausgewählte Reden*, Vol. II, Introduction, p. xiii; also pp. 100 ff. She left the USPD only after the party congress in May 1919.

³ Radek, *Diary*, p. 136. When Radek remonstrated with Rosa Luxemburg about the extreme tone of her articles she replied that 'when a healthy child is born, it struggles and yells and doesn't bleat'. The same argument, in practically the same words, was used in the discussions of the Central Committee of the RSDRP about the German terms for peace in January 1918. Lenin said that 'the Western revolutions were still foetal while the Russian revolution was a healthy and loudly yelling infant demanding the right to be heard' (*Protokoly Tsentral'nogo Komiteta RSDRP, Avgust 1917–Fevral' 1918*, Moscow 1929, p. 198). This is another incidental example of the strikingly common pool of left-wing similes.

But by an overwhelming majority a preliminary all-German conference of the *Spartakusbund* decided on 29 December 1918 to go ahead with the creation of a new party. The founding congress of the KPD followed on immediately in the reception hall of the Berlin City Council, from 30 December 1918 to 1 January 1919. The political situation was very tense. After the incidents with the People's Naval Division on 24 December, groups of *Spartakus* members had again occupied *Vorwärts* and forced the production of issues sympathetic to their own cause. The Independents had left the government a few days earlier and were now officially in opposition. The first groups of *Freikorps*—volunteer associations of soldiers and officers to combat the revolution—had been formed, and leaflets calling for the murder of the *Spartakus* leaders were already in circulation. There were persistent rumours that Karl Liebknecht had been killed and on 7 December an attempt had in fact been made to kill him.¹ It was in this atmosphere that the KPD was constituted.

Reports were made by various members of the executive on the major questions of the day. The congress laid down the conditions for further co-operation with both USPD and the Revolutionary Shop Stewards; in theory this still depended on their unqualified adherence to *Spartakus* policy. A telegram of greetings and solidarity was sent to the Soviet government. When Radek spoke in the name of the Russian party and officially welcomed the founding of the KPD on its behalf, there was a minor sensation; all the journalists reporting the congress, which was held in public, rushed off to telephone the news that an illegal Russian representative had arrived—and what a representative! But sly and cautious Pieck had temporarily had the doors locked.²

Then came the climax of the proceedings. Shortly after half-past two on the last day of 1918, Rosa Luxemburg made a long speech on the subject of 'our programme and the political situation'.³ The bellyful of compromises, of submissions to the organizational exigencies of large parties, of loyalty to an old though ruinously betrayed idea—all this had finally come to an end. For the first time Rosa Luxemburg was able to weave a German party directly into the very tissue of Marx and Engels, unadulterated by the glosses and dilutions of their patrician disciples. Her speech was full of

¹ *Ich war, Ich bin, Ich werde sein*, Berlin (East) 1958, Introduction, p. 20.

² Radek, *Diary*, p. 136.

³ *Bericht KPD*, pp. 18–42.

references to the Communist Manifesto. In a famous passage she referred to the introduction which Engels had written to the second edition of Marx's *Class Struggle in France*. Engels seemed there to deny the validity of armed struggle in modern times—Rosa had wrestled with Engels's interpretation of this before—and appeared to emphasize the primacy of legal action.

Here Engels added a lengthy criticism of the delusion that in modern conditions of capitalism the proletariat could achieve anything by revolution in the streets. I think it is time, seeing that we are standing in the middle of a revolution, and for that matter in a street revolution with all that goes with it, to take issue with the conception which was the official one of German Social Democracy right up to the last, and which is entirely responsible for the events of 4 August 1914. I do not wish to imply that Engels, through his statements, bears the responsibility for the developments in Germany: I only say that what he produced was a classical text for the notions which flourish in German Social Democracy, or rather which have helped to kill it. . . . And when the introduction says that with today's development of armies it would be madness to suppose that the working classes could deal satisfactorily with soldiers equipped with the latest arms, then it assumes that these soldiers are anyway, and will always be, a pillar of the ruling classes—an error which would be incomprehensible in the light of today's experiences for a man at the head of our movement. But we know under what actual circumstances the particular document was written. To the honour of our great masters and particularly of Engels, who died much later, it must be emphasized that Engels wrote his introduction under the direct pressure of the Socialist deputies in the Reichstag of the time. . . . In order to deal with radical elements in the SPD Bebel and other comrades nagged Engels, who lived abroad and had to rely on their view of the situation, to save the German working classes from going off the rails into anarchism. . . . Engels did not live to see the results, the practical consequences of the use of his introduction. I am certain that if one knows the works of Marx and Engels, just as if one knows the living revolutionary spirit which breathes from all their work, one is bound to be convinced that Engels would have been the first . . . to protest with all his power against the interpretation which led to total reliance on parliamentary means. He would have pulled back the coach with all the means at his disposal, to prevent it slipping into the mud. . . .¹

It was an interesting argument because this introduction had in fact been used by Kautsky and the SPD leadership to justify their

¹ *Bericht KPD*, pp. 22–24.

antagonism to mass action, and never more so than during the 1910 mass-strike debates. Five years after Rosa Luxemburg's death Ryazanov, then head of the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute in Moscow, published the original full text of Engels's introduction and it was found that the SPD executive had actually left out those bits referring to the positive aspects of armed revolution, and had thereby tailored the sense to fit with their conception of what was tactically required.¹ Rosa, like everyone else, had no idea that the original had been edited. None the less, she found time in the middle of her revolution to reinterpret at least the sense of the document, because it remained a clear obstacle to the desired radicalization of policy. One of the aspects of the new party was that greater respect would be paid to the texts of the Old Masters. In this sense the founding of the KPD was the Marxist Reformation, against the indulgences of Pope Kautsky. The Bolsheviks never admitted that such a thing was needed—Kautsky the renegade had 'turned away' from truth; they were the worse historians for it.

Rosa's speech was, oddly enough, one of the least propagandistic and most philosophical that she had ever made. Apart from the impatient rank and file at the congress, here she was at last in a circle of people who had surmounted all the hurdles of the last few years, who really were devoted to the same ideals, to whom one could talk 'straight'; this meant that there was no reason now to compromise with the real language of Marxism.

We are at a moment when the Social-Democratic, or Socialist, programme of the proletariat must be put on a totally new basis. Party comrades, we shall now take up the thread which Marx and Engels first spun 70 years ago with the Communist Manifesto. . . . Consciously, and in contradiction to the results of the last 70 years, together with the entire conception on which the Erfurt programme was based, we liquidate all of this and with it the consequences that led directly to the

¹ The full text of Engels's introduction appeared for the first time in German in *Internationale Pressekorrespondenz*, No. 141, 1924. A letter of protest dated 1 April 1895 from Engels against the misuse and amendment of his introduction was reprinted in Karl Kautsky, *Der Weg zur Macht*:

'I was astonished to see in today's *Vorwärts* an extract from my introduction, reprinted without my approval and tailor-made in such a manner as to present me as a peaceful worshipper of legality at any price [*friedfertiger Anbeter der Gesetzlichkeit quand même*]. I shall be all the more pleased to see the whole thing now reprinted in *Neue Zeit* to remove this unworthy impression. I shall certainly tell Liebknecht my views very clearly and also those, whoever they are, who gave him the opportunity to misrepresent my intentions.'

But this letter hinted only at distortions, not suppressions.

world war. 'There is no longer a minimum and a maximum programme. Socialism is both of these at the same time, and is itself the minimum that we have to achieve.'¹

But the spiritual echo of like-thinking friends led even Rosa to a degree of charismatic optimism at one moment.

The hopes of Ebert-Scheidemann of controlling the proletariat with the help of brutalized soldiers have already been largely destroyed [instead of her more usual: 'will fail']. . . . 'The proletariat has lost all its illusions that the government of Ebert-Scheidemann-Haase is a Socialist government. . . . The government daily loses the support of great masses of the proletariat. Apart from the lower middle classes, there remain only bits, sad bits, of the proletariat to support them, and it is very doubtful how much longer [any] will continue to support them at all.'²

Finally, Rosa Luxemburg again elevated the masses into the mainstream of the revolution.

The battle for Socialism can only be carried on by the masses, directly against capitalism, in every factory, by every proletarian against his particular employer. . . . Socialism cannot be made and will not be made by order, not even by the best and most capable Socialist government. It must be made by the masses, through every proletarian individual. Precisely there where the proletarians are chained to capital, the chain must be broken. That is Socialism, only in this way can Socialism be created. And what is the form of the struggle for Socialism? It is the strike. And that is why we have seen that the economic phase has now moved into the foreground in the second period of the revolution.'³

Nothing shows more clearly that Rosa Luxemburg had retained her basic concept of revolution since 1906, and was far from adopting Bolshevik methods in Germany. But the less one forgets the less one learns, and this doctrine of mass confrontation was central to her thought.

The congress murmured approval of the Marx formulations, of the commitment to the masses, of the rather arid and formal remarks

¹ *Bericht KPD*, pp. 19, 26.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 29-31. The *petite bourgeoisie*, or lower middle class in non-Marxist jargon, was a highly abstract concept for Rosa; a sort of *Lumpen-bourgeoisie*. As with the peasantry, she never managed to infuse this class with any social vitality. See above, p. 342.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 33. These sentences had all been marked for deletion in the copy of the *KPD Bericht* used by the present author. 'This belonged at one time to a Communist journalist of the thirties, who had been editing a new version of the speech for publication—without the emphasis on economic 'spontaneity'.

about agriculture: 'The most important conception of the Socialist economy is to remove the contradiction and the division between town and country. Industry cannot even be reorganized in a Socialist direction without a live connection with an equally reorganized agriculture.' The storms of applause came when Rosa attacked the SPD and USPD leaders personally. She pointed to the build-up of troops in the East, to the government's horse-trading with the military leaders in Germany. The congress had applauded Karl Liebknecht too when he said: 'We only remained in the USPD to drive it forward, to keep it within reach of our whip, to steal its best elements. . . . We may not have captured the leaders, but a good part of the masses.'¹ But in other matters Rosa Luxemburg and her immediate friends did not find things so easy. The congress turned down the executive's proposal to participate in the elections for the Constituent Assembly. On the first day Rosa's appearance had been met with the enthusiasm befitting a distinguished revolutionary leader. But her speech in favour of participating in the election was met by 'weak applause'.² Paul Levi, who had presented the executive's resolution on the subject and supported it at length, had to face repeated dissent, while the floor speakers who fulminated against participation were greeted with great enthusiasm. Participation was finally lost in a vote of 62 against 23. Rosa mildly rebuked the delegates, with the memory of the Duma boycott in her mind.

We understand and value the motives from which stems the opposition to the executive's point of view. Our pleasure is, however, not wholehearted. Comrades, you take your radicalism rather too easily. With all our stormy impatience we must not lose the necessary seriousness and the need for reflection. The Russian example against the Constituent [Assembly] does not apply. When the Constituent [Assembly] was driven out, our Russian comrades already had a Trotsky-Lenin government. We still have Ebert-Scheidemann.³

Leo Jogiches, on the other hand, who alone had opposed the creation of a separate party on such very weak organizational foundations, now proposed to his colleagues that in view of the leadership's defeat on such a vital question of tactics the whole KPD project and congress should be abandoned—though he was soon persuaded to withdraw this suggestion.⁴

¹ Ibid., p. 4.

² Ibid., pp. 10-11.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Paul Levi, 'The Congress of the Communist Party', *Die Internationale*, 1920, Vol. II, No. 26, p. 43.

An SPD historian later underlined the essential contradiction of the Communist Party Congress. 'If the Communists considered that the immediate removal of the government was out of the question as a political aim, they should have avoided raising the hope among their followers with all the means at their disposal that the government could be overthrown. Under those circumstances it was frivolous to drive the workers into the streets. . . .'¹ Neither then nor later did her opponents understand the difference between a speech to party members and an appeal to the masses which in Rosa Luxemburg's eyes were two fundamentally different things, and yet were both halves of the truth. When Radek challenged her about the extreme tone of her articles, far in excess of the real potential of *Spartakus*, she said: 'When a healthy child is born, it struggles and yells and doesn't bleat.'² Strong language was a fatal habit in Polish and Russian politics.

In spite of the pressure of events, and the admitted infancy of the new party, it was a great occasion. If the new party was not the result of Rosa's ardent wish, here it was none the less—at least the like-minded now shared a communal yet exclusive organization. Now that the decision had been made to 'go it alone', Rosa had no regrets or doubts. She was more optimistic than at any time since 1914. 'The separation from the USPD had become absolutely inevitable for *political* reasons,' she wrote to Clara Zetkin, 'even if the *people* [in it] are still the same as they were at Gotha [the USPD's founding congress] the situation has entirely changed.' And she berated her absent and easily despairing friend for taking the negative vote against the executive over participation in the Constituent Assembly elections far too seriously.

Our 'defeat' was merely the triumph of a somewhat childish, half-baked, narrow-minded radicalism. In any case that happened at the beginning of the conference. Later contact between us [the executive] and the delegates was established . . . an entirely different atmosphere [*Resonanz*] than at the start. . . . *Spartakisten* are a fresh generation, free from the cretinous traditions of the 'good old party'. . . . We all decided unanimously not to make the matter into a cardinal question [*Kabinettsfrage*] and not to take it too seriously.³

¹ Hermann Müller, *Die Novemberrevolution. Erinnerungen*, Berlin 1931, p. 252.

² Radek, *Diary*, p. 133.

³ Photocopy IML (B), NL5 III-A/15, p. 118.

We have already speculated on the valedictory note in the programme and its accompanying speech, and it would add drama if we could show some awareness in Rosa that these were the last weeks of her life. But, hindsight apart, the evidence suggests the contrary. Rosa was always conscious of the possibility of death in action, and repeatedly mentioned it to her friends—though not always without a touch of rhetoric.¹ But this was a general, almost abstract preoccupation, not even heightened by the events at the end of 1918—except perhaps in the very last days. On 25 December Rosa wrote to Clara Zetkin that she had received ‘urgent warning “from official sources” that the assassins are looking for Karl and myself, and we shouldn’t sleep at home . . . it finally got on my nerves and I simply went back to Südende’. And on 11 January, perhaps the last actual letter from Rosa’s pen: ‘Right now the battle is raging through Berlin, a lot of our brave boys have fallen. . . . Now I must close.’² There was of course plenty of very real danger, only Rosa was not fully conscious of it or simply ignored it. Perhaps she did not take *Rote Fahne* literally!

Little is known of how Rosa Luxemburg lived during these two months. The work of writing and editing *Rote Fahne*, of drafting the programme and appeal of *Spartakus*, would have been a full-time job under any circumstances. *Rote Fahne* was her main worry—‘will it come out, will it not come out. At last, here it is . . . technically not yet up to much’, she wrote to Clara Zetkin on 18 November.³ She insisted on seeing every word that appeared.⁴ All the *Spartakus* leaders, but particularly Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, were living two or three full-time lives at the same time. While Rosa was writing and editing, Karl Liebknecht

¹ ‘My dear young friend, I assure you that I would never flee even if the gallows threatened . . . because . . . I believe sacrifices to be part of a Socialist’s stock-in-trade.’ (Letter to Walter Stöcker, 11 March 1914, IML (B); see *Selected Works*, Vol. II, p. 304.)

² Rosa Luxemburg to Clara Zetkin, 11 January 1919, IML (M), photocopy IML (B), NL 5 III-A/15, partly quoted in Luise Dornemann, *Clara Zetkin*, Berlin (East) 1957, p. 288. Clara Zetkin had asked for advice a week earlier on whether she should come to Berlin. The letter only reached Rosa in Berlin on 10 January and she answered it the next day. Clara Zetkin’s final reply, her last letter to her closest friend, had an almost prophetic echo of impending doom. ‘Will this letter, will my love still be able to reach you? . . . Oh Rosa, what days! I see before me so clearly the historic greatness and meanings of all your actions, but my knowledge of these things cannot still the urgent demands of my heart, I cannot overcome my terrible worry and fear for you personally.’ (Clara Zetkin to Rosa Luxemburg, 13 January 1919, *ibid.*, p. 290.)

³ Photocopy IML (B), NL III-A/15, p. 75.

⁴ Clara Zetkin, *Reden*, Vol. III, p. 423.

was negotiating continually within and on behalf of *Spartakus*. There were long and regular meetings of the *Spartakus* executive. Both made continual appearances at public meetings. Apart from the large open gatherings, which took place several times a week, there were meetings in factories in various suburbs of Berlin. By the end of December it was no longer possible for Rosa and Liebknecht to remain safely in their own apartments. At first Rosa lived for a few nights at a time in various hotels, calling at the flat only for mail and clothes; during and after the January risings they were billeted with different sympathizers and changed lodgings every night. It was only during Christmas that Rosa was able even to visit her own home, much less live in it. Mathilde Jacob was her post office once more.

Occasionally Rosa was able to walk anonymously among the crowds of Berlin, to obtain the 'feel' of the revolution as an outsider as well as a participant. Radek describes a dinner with Liebknecht, Jogiches, and Paul Levi on the day after his arrival in Berlin. 'The owner of the tavern regarded Liebknecht with special affection, and gave him far more to eat than us. . . . Afterwards we went for a walk. Great masses of people in the streets. Not pedestrians and strollers as usual, but swarms of people talking about politics, their faces full of interest and joy. We talked politics with one of the drivers in another café.' Later that night Radek spoke at a meeting, and was challenged as a reactionary when he spoke of the hardships in Russia. 'Some worker . . . had misunderstood my remarks about conditions of the battle. They could not imagine what a revolution was really like . . . I spent New Year's Eve with Liebknecht. In spite of his exhaustion he was as happy as a child.'¹

During these hectic weeks Rosa made a sporadic effort to maintain her connections with at least a few of her closer friends. On 18 November she wrote to Adolf Geck expressing her sympathy on the death of his son, who had died in the last battles of October in eastern France.² Even after the New Year, Rosa found time to write to Marta Rosenbaum, with whom she had developed such a close friendship while in prison.

Berlin, 4 January 1919.

My dear, dear Martchen, I am finally sending you, with a thousand best wishes, the first number of *Rote Fahne*, the effort for which has

¹ Radek, *Diary*, pp. 133-4, 136.

² *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 173.

been keeping me at full stretch from morning to night all these days.¹ I feel a desperate need to see you, to put my arms round you and to talk with you. Kurt [Rosenfeld] told me that you felt hurt through me. I felt as if a brick had dropped on my head. Have I not generated, through all the time of our friendship, sufficient confidence to make misunderstandings out of the question? I feel terribly hurt. Well, I will have to accept that too; we will have to talk, and no shadow must remain between me and my dear Marta with her golden heart. I tried to reach you on the telephone yesterday, but I was unable. Later I did not have a free second. I will try to make it today. Meantime, I embrace you with all my old love and loyalty a thousand times, and with the best regards to you and your husband, your Rosa L.

She did not see Luise Kautsky or any of them again. There was no time, and the world was too divided. But Rosa hoped that all would be well again later, during the inevitable ebb. Meantime her universe was public meetings, the editorial staff of *Rote Fahne*—including faithful Mathilde Jacob and Fanny Jezierska—and the colleagues of the *Spartakus* executive. A narrow universe but warm, kept warm by the events outside.

No doubt this was the way that Rosa had always wished to live, all her natural impatience and energy absorbed in the manifold activities of real, not theoretical, revolution, with a few intimates only. Rock-like though reserved as ever was Leo Jogiches, still her oldest, closest friend. The glimpses of him during these weeks are of the briefest, but there he was, his main preoccupation the support and protection of Rosa, to whose pre-eminence he at last almost subordinated his own strong personality. And perhaps his presence helped her to develop that extraordinary reserve of nervous energy. It was as though the forcible contraction of effort during the years in prison now catapulted her forward more fiercely than ever. Those who knew her in these weeks all spoke of her inexhaustible energy, of her disregard for tiredness and the constant headaches and nausea. What price would she have paid with her health if she had survived?

The event that sparked off the January fighting began in a small way, like all the others since 9 November. The continuous large crowds on the move in Berlin, the demonstrations and uncon-

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, pp. 168-9. The reference to the 'first number' is confusing as this appeared on 9 November. But Rosa was running weeks behind in those of her private affairs to which she could attend at all.

trolled mass meetings, the many minor and more serious incidents, finally caused the government to take action against the police president, Emil Eichhorn. Under his command, the police seemed to be turning into a revolutionary institution. The SPD was determined that this sensitive post should no longer be occupied by one of its Independent opponents. The government put in Ernst, a right-wing Social Democrat; someone reliable. The last straw was Eichhorn's refusal to submit himself to the authority of the Prussian Ministry of the Interior; he claimed that he was responsible in the last resort only to the executive of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council. *Vorwärts* had been running a campaign against him since 1 January, hinting that he was a Russian agent since he had once worked for a Russian news agency; it was a handy and effective denunciation, even though it was entirely unfounded.¹

There was no reason to suppose that this legitimate if inadvisable dismissal would lead to more than the usual protests and demonstrations. On 4 January he was officially sacked, but refused to leave his office. On the evening of the same day a routine meeting of the executive of the USPD organization of Greater Berlin reacted to the news with a unanimous resolution that 'the attack on Eichhorn must be repelled', but what to do or how far to go was not settled or even discussed at any length.² For once the USPD decided to put the potential of the masses to the test, before deciding on any course of action. But while the Independents merely called for a protest demonstration on 5 January, *Rote Fahne*, in line with its usual practice, called for the strongest popular reaction.³ *Spartakus* could not afford to admit the need of a popular thermometer. A meeting of the KPD executive specifically rejected any attempt to take over the government—'we can hold out for two weeks at the most'—but a call was made for the usual arming of the workers and disarming of the troops.⁴

The demonstrations of the 5th turned out to be larger than anyone had expected. The revolutionary leaders, particularly the

¹ Paul Hirsch, *Der Weg der Sozialdemokratie zur Macht in Preussen*, Berlin 1929, pp. 133 ff. *Vorwärts*, 1 January 1919 onwards; also *Preussischer Untersuchungsausschuss, Bericht über die Januar Unruhen in Berlin*, No. 4121A, Col. 28 ff. Eichhorn's own story is in Emil Eichhorn, *Über die Januarereignisse*, Berlin 1919, pp. 60 ff.

² Richard Müller, *Der Bürgerkrieg in Deutschland*, Berlin 1925, p. 30. All the sources agree that no decision on any course of action was taken at this meeting.

³ *Ledebour-Prozess*, p. 44, testimony of Ledebour; *Rote Fahne*, 5 January 1919.

⁴ Richard Müller, *Bürgerkrieg*, loc. cit.



Eden Hotel, 16 January 1919. The soldier at the table (third from left, with drooping moustache) is Rosa Luxemburg's murderer, Runge. (For a note on this photograph, see the List of Illustrations, p. vii)



Karl and Sonia (or Sophie) Liebknecht on a hike, shortly after their marriage

KPD, now saw complete justification for their policy; if such a turn-out did not call for action, nothing ever would. It was reported—wrongly, as it turned out—that the troops too were ready to join in.¹

The great moment seemed unexpectedly to have struck, and the revolutionary groups bowed to it. A fatally loose organizational co-operation was worked out. On 5 January the Berlin USPD leadership, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, and the executive of the KPD issued a joint proclamation, calling on the masses 'not to accept the attempt of the government to stifle the revolution with bayonets. With the attack on the Berlin police authorities, the entire German proletariat, the entire German revolution is at stake.'² A similar call for further demonstrations was made on the 6th. By this time the *Vorwärts* offices had been occupied once more by demonstrators, and a revolutionary issue appeared on the 6th under the anonymous sponsorship of 'The Revolutionary Workers of Greater Berlin', specifically calling for the removal of the traitors Ebert and Scheidemann, seizure of power by the Council, and arming of the masses.³ Almost simultaneously, that same Workers' and Soldiers' Council—the object of the revolutionaries' affection—announced to the population its own confirmation of Eichhorn's dismissal and thus removed the last ground of legitimate complaint.⁴

The first-fruits of the co-operation of the three revolutionary groups was the formation of a Revolutionary Executive of thirty-three members. This in turn created a directorate of three: Liebknecht, Ledebour, and Scholze, representing the KPD, the Independents, and the Revolutionary Shop Stewards respectively. Much doubt exists as to the exact purpose of this executive—whether it was merely to direct the movement, as its participants later claimed, or whether it was to take over the government once the existing incumbents had been removed.⁵ This was the classic 'unmade' revolution as propounded by the German Left: let the events dictate the institutions; mass pressure on institutions could make them infinitely flexible. The concept may have been peculiarly Rosa Luxemburg's, but for the moment it was accepted even by her personal opponents in the USPD.

The exact motives of each group and the precise connection of

¹ *Ledebour-Prozess*, p. 51.

² *D. & M.*, Vol. III, p. 10.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁵ *Ledebour-Prozess*, p. 53.

events have never been entirely clarified. At the meeting of 5 January, consisting of delegates from all three groups, the decision to overturn the government had been approved against the opposition of a strong minority from among the Revolutionary Shop Stewards; precisely the group that had been most active in bringing their organized workers out on the streets. Nor had the executive of the KPD by any means committed itself to the removal of the government; indeed, most of the evidence shows that the representatives of the KPD in the joint meetings, Liebknecht and Pieck, agreed to the sharp resolutions and maximum demands *against* the specific instructions of their party.¹ Apparently, the news of the occupation of *Vorwärts* and other newspaper offices reached the revolutionary executive after it had made its non-decisions about the future, and caused considerable surprise.² This in turn gave rise to a general wave of euphoria.

The *Volksmarinedivision*, the People's Naval Division, whose continued existence had been assured by popular support during its conflict with the government at the end of December, now refused to come in on the side of the insurgents. They remained neutral, their leaders making themselves conspicuous by their absence when attempts were made by revolutionary emissaries to enlist their aid.³ Thus the insurgents lost the services of the only body of armed revolutionary troops.

Already by the afternoon of the 6th the Revolutionary Executive was in some doubt as to its ability to control events, and began to support the initiative of the official USPD leadership for negotiation with the government. It was clear probably by the evening of the 6th, certainly by the morning of the 7th, that there was no chance of overturning the government, and troops were known to be moving steadily into Berlin. But having been carried along like everyone else on the wave of events, the Communists saw negotiations at this stage as a complete betrayal, the old SPD executive tactic of 1910. Rosa Luxemburg wrote of 'the complete neglect of the most elementary rules of revolutionary action'. Instead of occupying the real positions of power, only a few newspapers and

¹ R. Müller, *Bürgerkrieg*, pp. 32 ff. Pieck, *Reden*, Vol. I, pp. 115-16. See also Karl Heinz Luther, 'Die nachrevolutionären Machtkämpfe in Berlin', *Jahrbücher für die Geschichte Mittel- und Ostdeutschlands*, Vol. VIII (1959), p. 212.

² *Ledebour-Prozess*, pp. 62, 82.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 189-94, testimony of sailor Milowski; also Eric Waldman, *The Spartakist Uprising of 1919 and the Crisis of the German Socialist Movement*, Milwaukee (U.S.A.) 1958, p. 176.

news agencies had been captured. For this, however, she blamed the leadership, not the masses. In any case,

when one is in the middle of the sharpest struggle against the government of Ebert-Scheidemann, one does not at the same time start 'negotiations' with the government. . . . Such negotiations can only lead to one of two results: either to a compromise or—far more probably—to a dragging out of the situation, which will be used by Ebert's men for the most brutal measures of repression. . . .

'The masses are ready to support any revolutionary action, to go through fire and water for Socialism. But they need clear guidance, and ruthless determined leadership. . . . Germany has always been the classic country of organization, and still more of the fanatic organization mentality, but . . . the organization of revolutionary actions can and must be learnt in revolution itself, as one can only learn swimming in the water. . . . The lesson of the last three days calls loudly to the leaders of the workers: do not talk, do not discuss endlessly, do not negotiate, act.¹

Almost quixotically, Rosa Luxemburg and the KPD were springing to the defence of a revolutionary effort which they had not initiated, whose aim they could not support, but which equally must not be allowed to fail. The lesson was clear—and it was the old lesson of 1907–10: you cannot manipulate the crowds into revolutionary action and then manipulate them out again. For that reason she and her colleagues had initially opposed the insurrection designed to remove the government. But once the masses were out on the streets, you could not negotiate over their heads, even though the result might be a bloody defeat. The same lesson was repeated more emphatically in her other articles; all turned on this question of commitment to the masses, irrespective of tactical results.² The emphasis is continually on the leaders and their failures. Nor was this unjustified: the revolutionary leadership was able neither to drive the movement forward nor to negotiate whole-heartedly to bring it to a rapid end. Thus the government was able to mount its counter-action undisturbed, to turn stalemate or disengagement into victory. Radek had all along been firmly against the whole thing, and especially against Communist participation. He now advised complete about-turn and withdrawal; the KPD must propose formally to the Revolutionary

¹ 'Versäumte Pflichten', *Rote Fahne*, 8 January 1919.

² 'Was machen die Führer?', *Rote Fahne*, 7 January 1919. 'Das Versagen der Führer', *Rote Fahne*, 11 January 1919.

Shop Stewards that fighting must cease; if necessary the armed workers must give up their arms. At the same time, a manifesto was to be issued justifying the retreat and calling for new elections to the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils.¹ This was the Leninist tactic of liquidating mistakes brutally and quickly. The proposal was supported in principle by the KPD executive. How to make it effective?

Next day, the 10th, the KPD Central Committee claimed that it wrote to the Revolutionary Executive withdrawing its two representatives, 'even in their consultative capacity . . . [since] the clarity and strength of the revolutionary movement demands an immediate revision of our relationship with the Revolutionary Shop Stewards. We are always available for an exchange of views . . . and will fight shoulder to shoulder . . . if a really thorough revolutionary action is envisaged.' The letter, signed by Pieck himself—to give the appearance of solidarity; did Liebknecht refuse to sign?—could not be delivered by hand as intended owing to the practical disintegration of the Revolutionary Executive; it was printed instead in *Rote Fahne* on 13 January 1919. Thus it had no practical value, and perhaps was never intended to have; the editorial comment accompanying it in *Rote Fahne* suggested that it was part of the 'clarity' process by which the KPD executive dissociated itself from the vacillating leadership of the revolt. Was the letter ever sent, or meant to be? We do not really know.

Little is known of the details of the internal discussions. In any case, a tradition later grew up in leading Communist circles according to which the KPD delegates to the Revolutionary Executive, Liebknecht and Pieck, acted against the instructions of their party executive, and the KPD leaders tried unsuccessfully to end the participation of their representatives in the disastrous venture. Pieck in his memoirs glided over his own part by painting a picture full of objective difficulties.

The executive of the KPD could not be kept informed about these decisions, nor was it possible to inform them of what was decided [by the Revolutionary Executive]. Only at a later meeting of the KPD executive it appeared that they were in agreement with the struggle against the government's measures, but not with the aims of the enterprise: the fight for government power. Out of this arose considerable differences of opinion, with regard to the activities of Liebknecht and

¹ *Illustrierte Geschichte*, p. 282. Radek's letter to the KPD executive dated 9 January and expressing these negative views was reprinted only here. A discussion of KPD attitudes is in Eric Waldman, *The Spartakist Uprising*.

myself among the Revolutionary Shop Stewards during the enterprise. The cause of this was the lack of decision and lack of clarity on the part of the USPD and the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, as a result of which the USPD leadership began negotiations with the Social Democrats and naturally had not the least interest thereafter in intensifying the common effort. The KPD executive none the less supported the action with all its strength, and enormous masses followed its appeal for demonstrations.¹

A later historian put it more bluntly: 'On January 10 the *Spartakusbund* tried again to end its connection with the Shop Stewards. Again it forbade the participation of Liebknecht, but without effect.'² The KPD leadership disapproved both of the 'putsch' mentality of the Revolutionary Executive, and of the tentative negotiations attempted both by the USPD and a section of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards. What it advocated instead, however, is not clear. According to Rosi Wolffstein, the *rapporteuse* of the KPD founding congress, who was not in Berlin during the January events, Rosa taxed Liebknecht with the following reproach when he returned to the party offices after one meeting of the Revolutionary Executive: 'But Karl, how could you, and what about our programme?'³

Rote Fahne certainly did not reflect Radek's advice to write off the action as ill advised and premature, and to withdraw from it in as good order as possible. Instead, the mass action was reported as a victory; only the negotiations were clearly labelled as a betrayal and capitulation of the revolutionary workers. 'The Communist Party naturally does not participate in this shameful policy, and refuses any responsibility for it. We continue to regard it as our duty to drive the revolution forward . . . and to warn the masses with the sharpest criticism of the dangers of the Shop Stewards' policy of hesitation and the bog[ged down] policy of the Independents.'⁴

The constant hammering on clarity, at a time when the mass action had failed and the city was being occupied by troops bent

¹ Quoted in Pieck, *Reden*, Vol. I, pp. 115-16.

² Ruth Fischer, *Stalin and German Communism*, London 1948, p. 97. Ruth Fischer had every interest in showing up the January action as a good example of the disorganized conditions which her later policy of 'Bolshevization' was designed to remedy. She was not present in Berlin during January, but reported—perhaps exaggerated—a tradition that became well established a few years later.

³ In an interview with the author. Rosi Wolffstein is the widow of Paul Frölich. The story had already become a KPD legend within a few weeks of Rosa's and Karl's deaths.

⁴ *Rote Fahne*, 11 January 1919.

on revenge and repression, contained more pathos and courage than good sense. To analyse the situation on 13 January as though profound historical insights were being opened up by current events, as though history itself was now writing the indictment of the Independent leaders as the working class's false friends, can hardly have contributed much to keeping up the spirits of defeated workers.¹ Emphasis on the perspective of history at a moment of defeat is typically the consolation of an intellectual élite.

But leaders who sincerely believed that the long-term prospect could carry any amount of present failure could naturally resort to this kind of analysis on the grounds that it could actually contribute to greater success next time. The implication was clear: it was the co-operation with the Shop Stewards and the Independents—both indecisive elements—which had brought about the failure of the present action. Next time the masses must follow the lead of the only organization able to recognize reality beneath all the fictions and pretences—the KPD.

What of the glaring contradiction between the desire of the Communists to disengage, and the public castigation of the revolutionary leadership for negotiating? Negotiations of this sort were a betrayal of the masses, and deliberately both Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in their last articles preferred once again to commit *Spartakus* in public to the action of the masses, however disastrous. In future it would be possible to show that *Spartakus*, which had not wanted or called for the overthrow of the government, had still supported the people while the other leaders, who had first set themselves and the masses impossible goals, soon betrayed their followers once it was politic or necessary to do so. There was no time to develop this idea; by the evening of 15 January both Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were dead. But already the outline of the future apologia was clear. As for the differences within the Communist leadership, these could await serious self-criticism as soon as the situation was calmer.

The attempt to negotiate had anyhow not succeeded. On 11 January the government insisted on acceptance of all its conditions, otherwise their counter-attack would begin with an assault on the captured *Vorwärts* building. Although by this time mass support for the whole action had ebbed considerably, the government troops under Noske formally paraded into central Berlin from the

¹ 'Kartenhäuser', *Rote Fahne*, 13 January 1919.

suburbs on 13 January and took the *Vorwärts* building by storm. On 12 January the senior military leaders had informed the government that they did not wish to have further negotiations with *Spartakus* under any circumstances; this might make their own troops unreliable. This was pure military propaganda, since *Spartakus* itself deliberately refused to participate in any of the negotiations; in fact it was the only group to do so. It is to be noted that the name *Spartakus* had now become the invariable synonym for all insurgents—used by the government, SPD, and military alike. Delegates sent to negotiate with the government, who consisted largely of Revolutionary Shop Stewards and Independents, were invariably referred to as *Spartakists*.¹ At the same time the government's determination to impose its will in exemplary fashion on the Left was not matched by similar toughness towards the army. Whatever the truth of the story of Ebert's sell-out to the military as early as November, by the beginning of January the government had placed itself formally in the hands of the armed services. Kautsky wrote: 'From a purely military point of view the government could permit itself to refuse more or less outright any further negotiations. . . . It may truly emerge victorious from this battle and indeed have gained in strength, but only by ceding larger powers to the middle class and military factors, with whose help it was able to triumph.'² And indeed victory in the January fighting made the government undertake a wholesale offensive against even the relatively harmless Workers' and Soldiers' Councils as undesirable revolutionary institutions—still under the guise of dealing with *Spartakus*, of securing law and order.

In the eyes of the public the blame for the revolt appeared to lie largely with *Spartakus*. The Revolutionary Shop Stewards, who had never had either the talent or the means for propaganda, remained largely anonymous and now went underground in their factories. Ledebour had already been arrested on the night of 10–11 January, and the USPD leadership fell into the hands of less committed right-wing leaders. *Spartakus* as a group was easily the most exposed. Middle-class organizations and *Freikorps* leaders encouraged the belief that if the Communist leaders could be dealt with personally, the end of all these troubles would be in sight. This notion, which led to the production of handbills calling for the killing of Liebknecht, was never discouraged by the SPD. Such

¹ Noske, *Von Kiel bis Kapp*, p. 73.

² *Die Freiheit*, 13 January 1919.

personal attainders had been appearing since November, but now reached a crescendo. On 13 January a poem appeared in *Vorwärts* under the name of Arthur Zickler, a regular contributor, which roundly accused the *Spartakus* leaders of cowardice by skulking in their hiding places while honest workers were being killed.

Many hundred corpses in a row,
Proletarians,
Karl, Rosa, Radek and Co.,
Not one of them is there,
Proletarians.¹

The atmosphere in Berlin at this time can therefore be imagined. Both Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, the best-known figures of *Spartakus*, were particularly exposed. At least unofficially there was a substantial price on their heads, offered by right-wing private enterprise, and Scheidemann may well have known of this and encouraged it.²

Both were now on the run, moving from flat to flat every night. Whatever their differences over the tactics of the revolt, their situations were identical, for in the eyes of the world they *were* *Spartakus*, two halves of a hermaphrodite whole.³ The offices of the

¹ The poem reads:

‘Vielhundert Tote in einer Reih—
Proletarier!
Es fragen nicht Pulver, Eisen und Blei,
ob einer rechts, links oder Spartakus sei—
Proletarier . . .
Wer hat die Gewalt in die Strassen gesandt,
Proletarier?
Wer nahm die Waffe zuerst in die Hand
und hat auf ihre Entscheidung gebrannt?
Spartakus!
Vielhundert Tote in einer Reih—
Proletarier . . .
Karl, Rosa, Radek und Kumpane!—
Es ist keiner dabei, es ist keiner dabei,
Proletarier!’

Shortly after the murders, *Vorwärts* carried an apology by the author. ‘Today I regret this poem. Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were first of all no cowards, but proved to be very brave; secondly, they did not start the mad revolt, but tried to hold it back. Others were responsible . . . now, of course, the gentlemen of the *Rote Fahne* are accusing me (knowing my dislike for court proceedings) of having encouraged the murder of Liebknecht and Frau Luxemburg. . . . This to a Socialist who has sat enthusiastically at the feet of these two, and has himself suffered enormously during this sad period. . . .’

² Frölich, p. 330.

³ The idea of a party being headed equally by a man and a woman was an unattractive by-product of revolutionary socialism in the eyes of the *gente per bene*. There were repeated hints of orgies and at the very least Rosa and Karl were believed to be lovers—an idea that has proved remarkably durable.

KPD were occupied and ransacked by the military. Even then, it took persuasion and the arrest of three leading colleagues to convince Rosa and Karl to take better measures for their own safety.¹ They still insisted on continuing the editing of *Rote Fahne*. On the 12th and 13th they stayed in the working-class district of Neukölin. Apparently the comings and goings in connection with *Rote Fahne* made this hiding place too conspicuous and on the 14th they moved to a middle-class district in Wilmersdorf. It was from there that Rosa Luxemburg wrote her last article, 'Order reigns in Berlin', and Karl Liebknecht 'In spite of all'.²

'Order reigns in Berlin' was a bitter attack on the rule of bourgeois 'order', with all its brutalities and repression.

But even in the middle of the battle, amid the triumphant screams of the counter-revolution, the revolutionary proletariat must make its reckoning with recent events and measure these and their results on the scale of history. Revolution has no time to lose, it marches on—over the graves, not yet filled in, over 'victories and defeats'—towards its great tasks. To follow its direction in full consciousness is the first task of the soldiers for international Socialism.³

Could a final victory of the revolutionary proletariat and the removal of Ebert-Scheidemann have been expected, Rosa asked. Could a revolutionary dictatorship have been established? No, if the degree of ripeness of the German proletariat is taken into account. The *permanent* victory in this context was not yet possible. Not that the revolt was pointless or unnecessary, for it was the provocation of the government that had brought it about.

It was a *matter of honour* for the revolution to ward off this attack with all its energy, if the counter-revolution was not to be encouraged to further efforts. . . . It is an inner law of revolution not to stand still on its achievements. Attack is the best form of defence. . . . The revolutions so far have brought us nothing but defeat, but these inevitable defeats are themselves one stepping-stone on top of another to the final victory. . . .

But the leadership has failed. None the less, the leadership can and must be rebuilt by the masses out of the masses. The masses are crucial, they are the rock on which the final victory of revolution will be built.

¹ Pieck, *Reden*, Vol. I, p. 118.

² 'Die Ordnung herrscht in Berlin', *Rote Fahne*, 14 January 1919; 'Trotz alledem', *Rote Fahne*, 15 January 1919. This was the last date of publication before the paper had to go underground. It did not appear again legally until February.

³ *Rote Fahne*, 14 January 1919.

The masses were up to the mark, they have forged this defeat into the chain of those historical battles which are themselves the strength and pride of international Socialism. And that is why a future victory will blossom from this 'defeat'.

'Order rules in Berlin.' You stupid lackeys! Your 'order' is built on sand. Tomorrow the revolution will rear ahead once more and announce to your horror amid the brass of trumpets: 'I was, I am, I always will be!'

The next day Karl Liebknecht added his own valediction:

Hold hard. We have not fled. We are not beaten . . . for *Spartakus*—that means fire and spirit, heart and soul, will and deed of the proletarian revolution. For *Spartakus*—that stands for all the longing for achievement, all the embattled resolution of the class-conscious proletariat . . . whether or not we shall survive when all is achieved, our programme will live; it will dominate the world of liberated peoples. In spite of all.¹

The farewell was intended to be temporary, actors whose play had come to the end of the run, whose backers had withdrawn. But in fact the two leaders were saying goodbye to life itself.

On 15 January a section of troops arrested Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg towards nine o'clock in the evening. No one knows how their hiding place was discovered, but it may well be that the presence of these two strange guests in this respectable middle-class block of flats caused some other tenants to notify the military, or one of the anti-revolutionary defence organizations.² Pieck was present by accident; on the instruction of the Communist executive he had brought them false papers and the latest information from party headquarters.³ The owner of the flat, Frau Markusohn, later described Rosa's appearance to Luise Kautsky. 'Her sunken cheeks and the dark rings under her eyes from so many sleepless nights were evidence of her physical exhaustion, but her strength of will remained unimpaired.'⁴ When the soldiers came she was resting; she now suffered constantly from headaches. She packed a small case, and took some books—a further spell in jail was inevitable. An attempt to give false names was of no avail; the soldiers knew well with whom they were dealing.⁵ Karl Liebknecht was taken away first, then Rosa Luxemburg and Pieck followed in

¹ 'Trotz alledem.'

² H. Roland-Holst, op. cit., p. 207.

³ Wilhelm Pieck, 'Der 15 Januar 1919', first published in *Internationale Pressekorrespondenz*, Moscow, 10 January 1928. Reprinted in Pieck, *Reden*, Vol. I, p. 432. The account of the arrest given below follows Pieck's narrative.

⁴ H. Roland-Holst, loc. cit.

⁵ Frölich, p. 332.

another car which drove to the Eden Hotel, the temporary headquarters of one of the para-military divisions in the centre of Berlin. Their arrival had been notified in advance, for Rosa Luxemburg was greeted with sarcastic taunts and much abuse. She was taken to the first floor of the hotel, where a Captain Pabst went through a formal interrogation.¹ It was already late at night.

It has never been entirely clear how premeditated the subsequent murders were, and how many people knew of them before and immediately afterwards. Pabst himself—who survived all the subsequent events in Germany with profit though without much honour—stated in 1962 that ‘in practice the authority of the State was in the hands of the *Freikorps*, but they had the full support of Noske’, then a member of the government and People’s Commissar in charge of military affairs.² Possibly Rosa’s stinging replies helped to enrage the officers still further.³ According to investigations carried out shortly afterwards by Jogiches and published in *Rote Fahne* during February, the whole plot was worked out in advance, as soon as it was known to the leaders of this particular division that Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht had been apprehended and would be brought in to their headquarters.⁴ The obvious participants were later brought to trial before a military court in which the soldier Runge was sentenced to two years and two weeks’ imprisonment, while Lieutenant Vogel got four months. The other accused were acquitted. Reference to these events, particularly as far as knowledge and approval of them were concerned, was made in a number of libel actions ten years later.⁵

¹ Pabst’s role in the affair has had some unexpected recent publicity. Pabst himself, who is still alive, published an account of the events of 15 January 1919 in a German newspaper in January 1962. Following this, the ‘Bulletin of the Press and Information Office of the German Federal Republic’ commented officially that the account given by Pabst was substantially correct, and that the murder of the two revolutionary leaders was ‘an execution in accordance with martial law’ (*Standrechtliche Erschiessung*). *Bulletin des Presse und Informationsamtes der Bundesregierung*, 8 February 1962, No. 27, p. 223.

Der Spiegel, the editors of which were shortly thereafter indicted for treasonable activities on other counts, published a sarcastic interview with Pabst (*Der Spiegel*, No. 16, 18 April 1962). Karl Liebknecht’s widow, Sophie (or Sonia) Liebknecht, at present living in East Berlin, announced that she would take proceedings against the head of the West German Information Department for ‘glorifying murder’. To date there has been no further news of these proceedings.

² *Der Spiegel*, No. 16, pp. 38–39.

³ Maurice Berger, *La nouvelle Allemagne*, Paris 1919, p. 275.

⁴ *Rote Fahne*, 13–16 February, 19 February 1919.

⁵ These mostly centred round Jörns (or Jorns), the examining magistrate charged with the investigation of Rosa’s murder. He was strongly suspected of

There is little point in going through the mountains of conflicting evidence, but within certain limits the course of events is moderately clear. The government certainly did not issue express orders for the murder of any of the *Spartakus* leaders. At the same time Noske did nothing to restrain his bloodthirsty auxiliaries. The *Freikorps* members, at the time and later, felt they could rely on Noske's support in any subsequent proceedings, should these arise. In addition, a number of precedents for unpunished summary action had already been set. The negotiators on behalf of the group that had occupied the *Vorwärts* building were shot down on 11 January while carrying their flag of truce, and some of the other occupants were severely beaten up.¹ No proceedings were ever taken or envisaged against those responsible. The maltreatment of individual revolutionaries had by then become a common occurrence.

None the less, the officers of the *Garde-Kavallerie-Schützen-Division*, of which Pabst was first Staff Captain, knew that the murder of these two well-known *Spartakus* leaders was an event of greater importance than any shooting of hostages in the course of street fighting. Probably when the news was telephoned through that the two leaders had been captured the problem was discussed and it was decided to deal with them summarily. Soldier Runge, who later felt that he had been shabbily treated by his superiors and unloaded his own version in the newspapers, was persuaded or bribed or ordered—or all three—to stand by the side door of the Eden Hotel and to hit the emerging *Spartakus* leaders over the head with his rifle butt.² For the sake of appearances the official instructions were to take Liebknecht and Luxemburg to the civil prison at Moabit, where all the other leaders of the revolt so far captured had been taken. Pieck, waiting in the passage outside the

suppressing evidence, or rather of ensuring that nothing came out that might require suppression. In 1928 this allegation was printed in *Das Tagebuch* (e.g. 24 March), and Jöns accordingly sued the editor, Josef Bornstein, for libel. At that time Jöns was already well-established as a Reich Procurator (*Reichsanwalt*). The fact that he was a thoroughly political lawyer is shown by his later career in the Nazi People's Court. For the evidence of political loading of the administration of justice against the Left, even in the early days of the Weimar Republic, see J. Gumbel, *Vier Jahre Mord*, Berlin 1923, particularly pp. 81, 101–2, where a comparative table of sentences against Left and Right is given. See also F. K. Kaul, *Justiz wird zum Verbrechen*, Berlin (East) 1953, p. 280.

¹ *Ledebour-Prozess*, pp. 206 ff. Hermann Müller, *Novemberrevolution*, p. 267.

² See his own 'confession' made to *Rote Fahne*, 11 January 1921. Though his evidence tallies precisely with Pieck's, he was quite clearly capable of saying whatever suited the occasion. Cf. also below, p. 781, note 1.

interrogation room, heard the officers say to each other that not one of the three would leave the hotel alive.

Karl Liebknecht was led out first before the curious and unsympathetic eyes of the soldiers and a few hotel guests. So this was what the legendary *Spartakist* looked like! As he emerged from a side door into a deserted street—nothing indicates premeditation more than this complete absence of passers-by—Runge carried out his instructions, and hit him hard over the head with his rifle butt. Liebknecht was then half dragged, half hustled into a waiting car, which went off in the opposite direction to that of the prison. In the Tiergarten he was made to get out of the car and was shot within a few yards. The fatal shot was actually fired by Captain von Pflugk-Hartung.¹ The body was delivered to a local mortuary as that of an unknown man found by the roadside. On return to the Eden Hotel this section reported to their chief that Liebknecht had been 'shot while trying to escape'.

Shortly afterwards it was Rosa Luxemburg's turn. Already in the lobby of the hotel some of the soldiers had been exercising their muscles on her. Pieck heard one of the maids say, 'I shall never forget how they knocked the poor woman down and dragged her around.'²

The transport of Rosa Luxemburg was in charge of a Lieutenant Vogel. Runge punctiliously performed again and, half-dead, she was dragged into another waiting car. There the messy proceedings were quickly brought to an end inside the car by a shot in the head from the officer in charge. The car stopped at a bridge over the Landwehr Canal and the body was thrown over into the murky waters, where it remained until 31 May. Here the story was that an angry mob had stopped the car and carried Rosa Luxemburg off to an unknown destination. The soldiers were unanimously sorry; they had nothing definite to report about her fate.

Although the Communist leaders knew that the report that Liebknecht had been shot while attempting to escape was a lie, they had no facts as yet to set against the story of his death and Rosa Luxemburg's disappearance. Since *Rote Fahne* was out of action

¹ By a curious coincidence, I met this same Pflugk-Hartung in a prison camp at the end of the Second World War. I was at that time unaware of his role in these events, but he hastened to inform me of the significant role he had played in freeing Europe from Bolshevism, and suggested this as a valid reason why he should instantly be released from captivity. The whole incident had clearly been a source of permanent pride to him, as to the other participants.

² Pieck, 'Der 15 Januar 1919'.

for the moment, it fell to the Independents' *Freiheit* on 17 January to challenge the official government announcement regarding the two deaths; this was of course based on the agreed version of the murderers.¹ However, long before her body was found, the real facts began to emerge and were published in *Rote Fahne*. Certainly by April the government knew the facts if not the motives, but still refused publicly to amend the statement of 16 January. For a time a Barbarossa-type myth about Rosa Luxemburg was in circulation, that she had gone underground to direct operations and would emerge once more in due course. However, *Rote Fahne* made it its business to scotch this false hope.

There was a widespread feeling of horror, even in SPD circles. When *Rote Fahne* began its disclosures, *Vorwärts* wrote on 13 February that 'the full force of the law must be invoked against the murderers'. Representatives of the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Council for a time sat in on the judicial proceedings against the murderers. But no prosecution could be made to stick. Demands for a civil as opposed to a military court to try the murderers were refused by the government on the grounds that this would interfere with the process of justice already in motion. 'The old Socialist conviction about the class 'justice' handed out by the imperial courts had withered away into a more anacemic respect now that six Socialist ministers *were* the Reich government. Besides, the regiment claimed jurisdiction; the allegations referred to acts committed on duty. The minimal sentences actually handed out were based on the derisory charge against Lieutenant Vogel of failing to report a corpse and illegally disposing of it, and against Runge of *attempted* manslaughter. The latter maintained that he had indeed hit Rosa Luxemburg—unexpectedly, there were witnesses—but not enough to inflict serious injury. Vogel's role did not emerge at all. The military court did make an attempt to penetrate the regimental solidarity of the murderers' 'don't knows', but to little avail. Even then, Vogel was hurried away by his friends,

¹ This announcement, in part published by *Vorwärts* on 17 January, is reprinted with comments in Ferdinand Runkel, *Die deutsche Revolution*, Leipzig 1919, pp. 217–20. The SPD version is in Hermann Müller, *Novemberrevolution*, pp. 271–9. The *Freikorps* view also got a public airing. All was the fault of the bloodthirsty Socialist government, who ordered the soldiers to do it; the latter were mere instruments of legitimate authority. F. W. von Örtzen, *Die deutschen Freikorps 1918–1923*, 2nd ed., Munich 1937, pp. 284–9. The shifting of all responsibility on to a higher authority which the war criminals of the Second World War were to make so notorious, did not begin with Hitler.

with false papers, after a very short period of arrest, and waited abroad for the inevitable amnesty. By the end of February Jörns, the investigating magistrate, had succeeded in manoeuvring the representatives of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council into a state of impotence; by the time the trial itself took place, they renounced their participation, and there was no one except *Rote Fahne* to ask awkward questions.¹ Besides, other trials were waiting: there were fresher murders to tickle the public palate—Eisner assassinated in Munich in February, Haase shot at the end of 1919; hardly a year passed without at least one sensational political murder. The death of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht very soon lost its flavour of tragic immediacy.²

This attempt to stifle the real story of the murders, with all its political implications, should not merely be seen as an attempt of a small if powerful and obstinate clique operating behind the scenes. The January fighting represented a high-water mark of the revolutionary tide in Germany. Afterwards there was a strong reaction against disorder, which found expression in widespread if tacit support for the government. The waverers came down on the side of law and order—that very 'order' which Rosa had pilloried in her last article. In reporting the death of the *Spartakist* leaders, the bourgeois press did not even attempt to mumble the usual hypocritical phrases. 'Totally incomprehensible in life and actions to the vast majority of middle-class Germans, the death of the *Spartakist* leaders seemed no more than the inevitable consequence of their madness. *Tägliche Rundschau* wrote that the deaths of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were the 'proper expiation for the blood bath which they unleashed . . . the results of her own action killed the woman from Galicia [*sic*]. . . . The day of judgement on Luxemburg and Liebknecht is over. Ger-

¹ For the reports of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council's delegate to the Council itself on their efforts, see *Protokoll*, 56, 57. *Sitzung des Zentralrates der deutschen Sozialistischen Republik*, 15 Feb. 1919. These protocols are in typewritten form in IISH, shortly to be published.

² This brief account of the proceedings is based on the newspaper reports and later testimony of the participants in a string of libel actions connected with Jörns, the examining magistrate. In addition, the official record of the public proceedings is still available (Prussian Ministry of Justice papers, now *Bundesarchiv* Koblenz, P.135/11759), but adds little that was not published in the newspapers. Almost all the witnesses were waiters, male and female (a profession with a curious propensity for inconclusive testimony at police proceedings, when not actually employed by the police or the secret service). Only one 'inside story' from the side of the participants was ever published, that of Runge.

many has peace, it can breathe again.' And the *Deutsche Tageszeitung* on 16 January took the line that newspapers always did when reporting murder trials. The fate of *Spartakists* was that of 'criminals pure and simple who without any self-restraint had long lost all power to distinguish between good and evil'. With the reassertion of such opinions under the aegis of the Socialist government, no enthusiasm for punishing what were considered to be society's executioners could have been expected. Though the issue was settled in the capital, *Spartakists*, at least in the eyes of their beholders, were still flickering wanly in the north and in Munich; there was little point in public sympathy for those who, though dead, were still kicking fitfully.

The news of the murder naturally did evoke sympathy and immediate outrage against the government from the articulate sections of the working population. Telegrams of protest came in from the Soviet Union and many other countries. The executive of the Communist Party, now underground, issued an appeal on 17 January written by Leo Jogiches, in which they asked their supporters to avoid 'terroristic attempts at revenge against the leaders of the treacherous government . . . the moment for the final battle has not yet come, and we warn you against rash attempts.'¹ The Independent leaders also issued an appeal, calling for a protest strike and warning their supporters that what the government was doing to the *Spartakists* today, it would do to all workers tomorrow.² A meeting on the same day of the Plenum of the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Council expressed their deep disgust for the murders and protested against the government's excessive use of terror following their successful defeat of *Spartakus*.³ But the workers were exhausted; the strike was feebly supported.

After the defeat of January, a new chapter in the relationship between *Spartakus* and the rest of society had begun. For with these murders, the abyss which the Communists had pictured in theory had become real and, unmistakably, it was the abyss of the grave; above the arguments about revolutionary theory and tactic towered the inescapable responsibility for the murder of the two great leaders, condoned if not actually encouraged by the SPD leadership.

Among Rosa's few close friends there was an irreparable sense

¹ *D. & M.*, Vol. III, pp. 85 ff.

² *Die Freiheit*, 17 January 1919.

³ *D. & M.*, Vol. III, p. 104.



(a) Rosa Luxemburg,
about 1910



(b) Karl Liebknecht,
probably just before 1914



Rosa Luxemburg's corpse, March 1919. Probably an official photograph

of loss and tragedy. Outwardly tough, as befitted a veteran revolutionary, Leo Jogiches sent Lenin a laconic telegram on 17 January: 'Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht have carried out their ultimate revolutionary duty.'¹ Clara Zetkin in Stuttgart wrote a letter on 18 January to Mathilde Jacob. She had read of Rosa's arrest in the papers on the 16th, of Rosa's probable death on the morning of the 17th. This good-hearted, loyal woman could hardly find words to express her sense of personal and political loss when the brightest star on the Socialist horizon was extinguished.²

Franz Mehring was in a sanatorium on the outskirts of Berlin, old and very weak; his friends hardly dared to bring him the news. Finally one of his and Rosa's mutual friends was charged with the terrible task.

You can imagine how he reacted to the terrible news. The old man did not want to believe that such a thing was possible . . . he wandered up and down his room for hours . . . until his old body sank exhausted into a chair. But then he immediately got up again and continued his restless pacing. His eyes were dry but his face marked with scorn and hatred. 'No government has ever sunk lower', he kept murmuring.³

His wife was ill herself and could not help him; a few days later Mehring contracted pneumonia and had not the strength to survive it. He died on 29 January 1919, in large part the victim of the death of his friends.

Jogiches was less demonstrative. But he more than anyone must have felt the whole point of his existence crumbling. As much as was possible for such a highly political person, he had lived these last weeks mainly to keep Rosa going—there was no longer a trace of discord between them. He himself had been arrested on 14 January but had managed to escape without being identified. Karl Radek saw him late in the evening of the 16th when he appeared at the secret flat looking ten years older. 'Feverishly he began to speak of the past, of our old quarrels. "Now that Rosa is no longer with us, we must reassemble all our old friends".' He was waiting more anxiously than ever for the return of Marchlewski from Russia which had been requested in December by Rosa Luxemburg and the KPD executive to help them in their work.⁴ The two men met again next day. Radek asked him whether

¹ Clara Zetkin, *Reden*, Vol. II, p. 444.

² *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 71.

³ Quoted by Schleifstein, *Mehring*, p. 76.

⁴ *Julian Marchlewski*, p. 92; Pieck, *Reden*, Vol. I, p. 547.

he had not thought of leaving for the south and safety, but Jogiches answered with a smile: 'Somebody has to stay, at least to write all our epitaphs.'¹

Jogiches and Clara Zetkin went to work on Rosa's papers, or such as were left after the soldiers had finished their searches in Rosa's flat in Südende. Though Jogiches now took over the leadership of *Spartakus*, his heart was in the past; he was above all concerned with the identification and punishment of the murderers and the saving of as much of Rosa's writing as possible. 'Now that she has gone, we must all stick more closely together', he told Clara Zetkin. They discussed the future almost exclusively in the context of the past. 'Much of this stuff could be thrown away, since Rosa changed her mind on all that', he is reported to have added, his mind on her certain immortality.²

Jogiches himself had not long to live. His own safety hardly mattered to him any longer. On 10 March he was arrested and this time identified at once. At police headquarters in the Alexanderplatz one of the detectives in charge was an ex-Sergeant-Major Tamschick, a notorious bully who had once been the terror of his recruits. He knew Jogiches as one of the leaders of *Spartakus* and shot him in cold blood at the first opportunity. No attempt to punish him was ever made.³

Pieck himself managed to escape after a few days. He was carrying false papers when arrested together with Liebknecht and Rosa, and was apparently not identified—indeed, he was hardly known. There was never any suggestion that he was in any way concerned with the arrest of the two leaders, but Pabst stated later that he was released because he had supplied information about other *Spartakus* personalities, which facilitated their arrest. Pabst's own statements are confusing and contradictory. However, there were sufficient grounds for suspicion to enable Thälmann, later the leader of the KPD, to bring charges against Pieck in retaliation for participating in an unsuccessful attempt to wrest the KPD leadership from him in 1928. A party Court of Honour was constituted in 1929 under the chairmanship of Kiepenberger, who

¹ Radek, *Diary*, pp. 139-40.

² Ibid., also Clara Zetkin, *Reden*, Vol. II, p. 387.

³ Soon afterwards Tamschick also murdered Dorrenbach, one of the leaders of the People's Naval Division, in the same way—a shot in the back. Tamschick enjoyed a peaceful career with promotion in the Prussian police. For his military past, see the highly coloured memoirs of one of his recruits in *Neues Deutschland*, 13 June 1959.

was in charge of the Communist military apparatus and a member of the *Reichstag*. The findings were not disclosed and no further action was taken at the time. Kiepenberger later fell out with Ulbricht in exile in Paris and was among the first of many German Communists to be quietly executed in Russia in 1936.¹

On 25 January 1919 thirty-two comrades killed in the January fighting were buried with Karl Liebknecht. An empty coffin was placed at his side. Only on 31 May was the body of Rosa Luxemburg washed up unexpectedly at one of the locks of the canal, and was taken to its last resting place on 13 June. The government feared large-scale demonstrations, and Noske ordered the body to be kept at a local army camp pending burial. Although the train of mourners was large, the demonstration was silent and orderly. The funeral was at the Friedrichsfelde Cemetery, which in time became a common shrine for all prominent Communist leaders. On 13 June 1926 a memorial was unveiled to commemorate their last resting place: Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Franz Mehring, Leo Jogiches, and Julian Marchlewski, who had died in 1925 in an Italian sanatorium, a respected senior Bolshevik official.² The cemetery was razed to the ground under the Nazis and rebuilt after the war by the East German government; party members make organized annual pilgrimages at which they see much of Ulbricht and less of the shrine.

Both Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht had considered death in action to be the highest honour for a Social Democrat.

¹ This story is set out at length in Erich Wollenberg, 'Der Apparat; Stalins fünfte Kolonne', *Ost Probleme*, Vol. III, No. 19, 12 May 1951, pp. 576-8. This account, in a none too impartial journal, ties Kiepenberger's execution to a definite intrigue by Pieck, for which there is no other evidence. The fact that there was an investigation against Pieck proves nothing except the existence of a rumour and the methods of power politics inside the KPD; the campaign against Thälmann's leadership was based on a financial scandal involving not him but his brother-in-law. It was Stalin personally who overruled the KPD Central Committee's decision to remove Thälmann rather than any private intrigue by Pieck. The latter's reputation among his colleagues in the 1920s was that of a tough, resourceful, if devious militant.

None the less, Runge's own story—which Pieck certified as accurate (*Rote Fahne*, 11 January 1921)—contains the following rather odd passage (in italics). Runge had been ordered to shoot the *Rote Fahne* editor (wrongly thought to be Pieck) in the corridor of the hotel. 'I had doubts . . . the man from the *Rote Fahne* came up to me and said *he had a commission to carry out [Auftrag zu erledigen]*. He was led away into a room and when he emerged an officer instructed one of the guards: "Take this man away *and see to it that nothing happens.*"' (My italics.)

² *Die Rote Fahne*, 15 June 1926. Marchlewski's ashes were returned to Poland at the request of the Polish government in March 1950.

For Rosa it was a fitting end which helped to preserve her from Stalin's special form of Bolshevik dishonour. There was something larger than life about her ideas and the rigid prescription she had set herself in a life devoted to revolutionary politics, yet always combined with a deep respect for human values and culture. She died in the firm belief that her cause would win in the end; that she could advance it by dying as much as by living. At the time of her death she recognized a temporary defeat in Germany, but in the context of great advances there and in Russia. A truly Marxist party had been created under her auspices in Germany and, as far as she could, she had set guiding lines for its future development. Her eyes closed on a German revolution at last beginning to come into its own as the centrepiece of the international revolution in which she so fervently believed. Her presence in Germany for so many years, in a milieu basically antipathetic to her, seemed fully justified. Although she recognized the success of the Bolsheviks in Russia, she was not willing to accept their direction of the international movement, or to subordinate her party to the Bolsheviks. In the last two months she treated Lenin as a friend and an equal—no more. A hasty letter she wrote him in Russian on 20 December 1918 shows the respect of an equal but no deference. Eberlein carried it in his pocket.

Dear Vladimir,

I am profiting from uncle's journey to send you all hearty greetings from the family, from Karl, Franz [Mehring] and the others. May God grant that the coming year will fulfil all our wishes. All the best! Uncle will report about our life and doings, meantime I press your hand,

With best regards,

Rosa.¹

When the preparations for founding a new International were made in Moscow at the end of December 1918, she instructed the German delegates to vote against the creation of a new International at this time and in present circumstances. She considered it premature with only one Socialist party, the Bolsheviks, precariously on top in one country, and was afraid that, if formed, the new International would be entirely under Russian domination—as indeed it was.²

¹ *Pravda*, 15 January 1925; reprinted in facsimile in *Selected Works*, Vol. II, opposite p. 624. The 'uncle' is obviously a code name for Hugo Eberlein.

² Hugo Eberlein was the only German delegate able to make the journey. He found a haphazard gathering. Representatives of various nationalities who happened to be in Moscow constituted themselves as delegates of their countries.

After her death German Communist policy—in fact the whole party—was suspended in a vacuum for a time. The January rising in Berlin was followed by successful local insurrections in Bremen and Munich, while attempts were made in other cities. The government was able to deal with all these in turn; only in Munich had the forces of the Bavarian countryside to be thrown against the revolutionary capital, and here too the Communists took over a hopeless situation which they had originally opposed, and suffered the consequences. Eugen Leviné, who should have gone to Russia with Eberlein, was sent to Munich instead, and executed in June 1919. The leadership in Germany went underground. Only in February was *Rote Fahne* able to appear again. Its first concern was to identify the perpetrators of the murder. For a time, Communist political activity was confined to the periphery; Marchlewski worked in the Ruhr, and Clara Zetkin in Württemberg. After the death of Leo Jogiches the leadership of the party passed to Paul Levi and his main task for the next twelve months was the creation of an organization and the regrouping of Communist forces. Levi at any rate had learnt his lesson in January. When the activists made another attempt in March 1920 to raise the banner of revolt, this time with more careful ‘planning’ and better ‘organization’, but less popular support, he opposed them bitterly and eventually threw the weight of Rosa Luxemburg’s words against them by publishing her pamphlet on the Russian revolution and hinting at the disputes within the Communist leadership in January. Another in the series of dramatic exits from the KPD took place. Both Levi and the Central Committee claimed the authority of Rosa Luxemburg for their point of view, and fired suitable quotations from her writings at each other. This too was to become a habit of left-wing politics for the next ten years.

Communist leaders in Russia and elsewhere were well aware that German revolutionary Socialism had lost its outstanding

At the start, the Russians offered to meet the objections of the vital German party and treat the proceedings as preliminary rather than constituent. But Eberlein was soon under considerable Russian pressure not to oppose the plans of the Bolsheviks, and in the end abstained from the constituent vote of the International, rather than vote against it as instructed. See *Der 1 Kongress der Kommunistischen Internationale: Protokoll der Verhandlungen in Moskau vom 2 bis zum 19 März 1919*, Hamburg 1921, Vol. I, p. 131. The official Russian version emphasized the Russian party’s forbearance with Eberlein’s crisis of conscience and his spontaneous conversion rather than any Bolshevik pressure on him to swing the vital German vote into line. See report of G. Zinoviev, *Vosmoi s’ezd RKP(B), mart 1919 goda, Protokoly*, Moscow 1959, p. 135.

leaders. In Leningrad and Moscow meetings were held at which the Bolshevik leadership paid tribute to their German comrades. Inevitably this blow in Germany was bound to set back the hopes of international revolution. But for the Russians the event had its useful side, for with Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches there disappeared two determined opponents of Bolshevik control of international Socialism. Henceforth the Russians were the more easily able to impose their will on the German party, and after the adhesion of the larger part of the USPD to the KPD in the summer of 1920, a real mass base was at last available to the Communists. In spite of all the sects and personalities which were thrown off the main body of the party like sparks from a catherine wheel for the next twelve years, as the Russians tightened their grip and oscillated the orientation of German Communism to suit their present needs, the KPD never again lost its organizational hold on at least a part of the masses.

What would have happened if Rosa had remained alive? There was no doubt that the January fighting had ended the revolutionary phase of German post-war development which nothing could have revived for the time being. The government used its victory to impose its will and weight on all the revolutionary institutions in Germany, and in its shadow the army stood waiting, swollen with the support of the *Freikorps*, enthusiastic volunteers against the revolution. Now both lunged forward into the power vacuum. Rosa Luxemburg's sarcastic prediction that the *bourgeoisie* would soon rid itself of its Social-Democrat agents and assume power on its own account nearly came true in the Kapp *putsch* of March 1920; only the unexpected general strike called by the right-wing trade-union leaders she had always so heartily despised actually prevented the success of the military mutineers. All this was inevitable after January.

The fascinating question obviously is how a Communist leadership under Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht would have utilized the mass strength which came through the adhesion to the USPD. The terms for the merger were in fact dictated from Moscow, and probably would have been similar if Rosa had written them. Rosa Luxemburg always dreamed of this particular eventuality, pushing aside the Independent leaders and taking over their supporters. With such a mass base, she would have been better able to resist Zinoviev's take-over on behalf of the Third

International and the Russian party, but whether she could have revitalized the engine of revolution within Germany is another question. No doubt she would have resisted the further Communist attempts to seize power in March 1920 and in 1923, both carefully engineered and prepared—and hopelessly unsuccessful. But this is as far as we can go. Why should she have been able to stand out successfully against Stalinization when no one else could? Or would she have left with Paul Levi, if the March 1920 action had been imposed in the face of her opposition?

What of the long run? SPD or KPD, Nazi concentration camp or emigration—and if so, West or East? In 1933 the world of Stalin would have been grotesquely unfamiliar to a woman of sixty-three—and for this woman, dangerous. Would it have been Harvard, a special professorship, a thick black book of apologia, with all the aseptic admiration of young, neutrally academic professionals in their discreet bow-ties? Or perhaps sociology, that refuge of clever European Marxists? Or suicide, the last resort, with Marta Rosenbaum and so many others whose hearts were broken? We cannot tell, for Rosa had something in common with them all.

It is always convenient for biographers to take the death of their subject as the end of a period. Apart from the seductive convenience, it may sometimes even be justified. The principles for which Rosa Luxemburg stood and the influence she exercised might not have survived even if she had remained alive. Without a successful German revolution, the increase of Russian power and control over Communist parties everywhere was inevitable; there was no reason why Germany should have remained outside this development. The painful dislocation of loyalties which this brought about for so many Communist leaders was spared Rosa Luxemburg, though her ideas—largely the misrepresentation of her ideas—served as a football for the power game within the world Communist movement. Having died orthodox, she exercised a claim to be heard. She could never be written off as someone who had consciously departed from what was to be the correct course, like Trotsky or Bukharin or Karl Kautsky.

The long process of litigation over Rosa Luxemburg's intellectual and political heritage is itself a history of distortion. The truth, and Rosa's position in it, are simple enough. Marx left two great alternatives—one basic, one derived. The basic variable

was revolution—formal or real, objective or subjective, an event that happened or one that had to be made. (Extreme positions, these, with an infinity of possibilities in between.) The irreparable break, which transformed possibilities into irreconcilable alternatives, took place in 1910 with Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Kautsky holding the two sawn-off ends. (The revisionist controversy was about ‘how’, not ‘what’; about the small present, not the great future—really a second-rate dispute.) From this first break derived the second variable: Socialists *making* the revolution, or *leading* it. The pull of the Russian October revolution prevented any intermediate positions from developing and produced a new break right away—only Rosa Luxemburg’s death prevented her from developing and defending her leadership of an alternative revolutionary Marxist tradition against other claimants. But none the less, the position was rightfully hers—not the reward of those, including Trotsky, who later broke out of the Bolshevik collectivity, but of the forceful, perpetually foreign woman who belonged to many Socialisms and to none. Only Rosa Luxemburg was actively concerned with both the great divisions of modern Marxism, and partly helped to create them. That is her role in history, and the reason for this book.

XVIII

LUXEMBURGISM—WEAPON AND MYTH

WITH the explosive murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in January 1919 and the bullet in the back that destroyed Leo Jogiches in March, the young KPD lost its effective leadership. Mehring, too, was dead. The party—which was not a party but a group of intellectually incisive leaders looking for an enlightened and *engagé* following among the restless masses—had as yet no cadres, no collectivity, to roll forward the heavy stone of revolutionary Marxism on its own. The only thing was to carry on the policy of the dead leaders as closely as possible—in the manner in which it was understood. The men who took over the party were personally little known, and were wholly committed to the ideas of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. Most of the survivors of the KPD *Zentrale* had had some experience of clandestine activity during the war; in the second half of 1919 the situation was not unlike 1916, in the months after Liebknecht's and Luxemburg's arrest. Now, as then, it was a young leadership with Paul Levi at the head, supported by Ernst Meyer, Wilhelm Pieck, and Hugo Eberlein (then in Moscow to attend the foundation congress of the Third International). March 1919 did not bring an end to the casualties; Eugen Leviné, one of the strongest youngsters, was himself executed after the Munich uprising in the summer of 1919. Of the older generation, only Clara Zetkin remained; Julian Marchlewski had been specially sent from Russia to help and was dispatched to the Ruhr immediately upon arrival to supervise the incipient Communist organization in that great industrial centre. His old friends Rosa and Leo were dead; there was little for him to do in Berlin.

All the new leaders fully subscribed the guiding lines of policy laid down by Rosa Luxemburg in the foundation document of the KPD and subsequent policy statements in *Rote Fahne*. On nearly

all subjects her word was law. The messages of condolence from Russia all emphasized the outstanding importance and status of the dead leaders—in the very home of successful revolution Rosa was held as a shining example to follow.¹ And even after the personal element of tribute had gradually died away, her work was still the fount of all orthodoxy in Germany. In an evaluation of Rosa Luxemburg's theoretical contribution to Communism Thalheimer, writing early in 1920, lavished the highest praise on the entire corpus of her work. 'Her writings are the only ones which are still worth-while and fully valid today.' Even where she differed from Lenin—as over the national question—she was given full marks. *The Accumulation of Capital* still 'provided the key to imperialism'. Her critics (unnamed) were merely 'Marxist pharisees', among them even 'the good Marxist brains showed insufficient comprehension' of her ideas.² There was of course no question of confronting Lenin and Luxemburg; at a time when the Communist movement was growing together (in France and Germany the Left Centre was about to be absorbed) it was unthinkable to dig up the remote polemics of the movement's infancy.

The KPD leadership found itself pressed to the wall after the unsuccessful risings in Berlin, Bremen, and Munich, and had to go underground for almost a year. It used every means at its disposal to bring the murderers of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht to justice. Under Jogiches' direction *Rote Fahne* devoted much space and skill for six weeks to the unravelling of these crimes—in their personal as well as their political context. The consequence of finding itself outlawed and alone was that it laid the murders at the door of the SPD as the allies and protectors of the right-wing soldiers who had carried out the physical assassination. The SPD's policy accurately fitted this analysis; Noske's cold-blooded official dispositions for Rosa's funeral reflected reality more accurately than any hypocritical lamentations in *Vorwärts* or the sentimental tributes of Rosa's old political enemies—coupled as these were with head-shakings at her incomprehensible solidarity with such

¹ E.g. speeches at the session of the Petrograd Soviet, 19 January 1919, reprinted in German as Trotsky and Zinoviev, *Zwei grosse Verluste*, Petrograd 1920. Lenin's messages, too, were impeccably honorific. There was no sign of the later Communist tendency to decry the principle of *de mortuis nil nisi bonum* as decadent and *petit-bourgeois*.

² August Thalheimer, 'The theoretical work of Rosa Luxemburg', *Die Internationale*, 1920, Vol. II, Nos. 19/20, pp. 19–20.

blood-drenched propagators of brute force as the Bolsheviks.¹ As a political weapon against the SPD and the Independents, the murders overshadowed almost all other issues for a time. It was not until the end of 1919 that the leadership of the KPD tackled the problem of its future policy in a world in which immediate revolutionary perspectives had for the time being become obscured. The charismatic appeal of Karl and Rosa had gone; their voices could now only be reproduced from the grave. But whatever new problems had to be faced, the authority of Rosa Luxemburg's views was automatically sought and cited; in Germany she still provided the best, indeed the only, legitimation of the KPD. In the aftermath of the Bavarian Soviet Republic, to which the Communists had committed themselves only when the situation already looked hopeless, a clear distinction had to be made between the self-conscious and 'rational' policy of the new Communist Party and the 'confusion' of the other participants in this disastrous experiment. 'What we need', wrote Hörnle in 1919, 'are not [anarchists like] the Töllers and the Landauers, enthusiastic as they may be; what we need instead are clear heads and determined protagonists like Rosa Luxemburg, Leo Jogiches and Leviné.'²

Probably the most pressing task was the creation of party organizations at grass-root level. The high-pitched and superbly written appeals which had issued from Rosa Luxemburg's pen, designed to influence the masses still organized in the USPD, were silent now, and could not be replaced; the old policy of maximum publicity and openness at the centre was bound to give way—in a period, moreover, of illegality and clandestine activity—to quieter, more conspiratorial efforts at the periphery. The KPD *Zentrale* ceased for a time to be the old, splendidly volcanic source of ideas, and instead turned itself into a hive of organizational activity.

Even if the new German Communist leaders had not appreciated the full stature of their dead comrades, they were still being reminded of it by the tributes which continued to flow in from all over the world. The dead leaders had achieved truly international

¹ For Noske's dusty answer to posterity, see Gustav Noske, *Von Kiel bis Kapp: Zur Geschichte der deutschen Revolution*, pp. 72 ff. Among the SPD's tributes to Rosa one of the most touching was Eduard Bernstein's 'secret tenderness' for his old opponent and denigrator—even though she had fallen irrevocably 'into the mire of the illusionists [who believed in] a policy of force' (*Die deutsche Revolution*, p. 171).

² E. Hörnle, 'The Communist Party and the Intellectuals', *Die Internationale*, 1919, Vol. 1, Nos. 11/12, p. 226.

stature. Everywhere in western Europe Communism was now emerging as a closed, self-sufficient entity from the shattered womb of pre-war Social Democracy. It sought comfort from its traditions and now honoured its first martyrs. For some eighteen months after her death Rosa Luxemburg's name and work shone with the lustre of a twofold pre-eminence, the inspirer and theoretician of a European Communism still struggling for mastery in a capitalist world—and for its separate identity among the tentacles of left-wing opportunism—and the martyr whose death in action would serve as a torch for those who remained to carry on the struggle. As yet there was no conflict between these two roles. We shall see how subsequent history separated them and eventually brought them into conflict.

The first occasion on which Rosa Luxemburg's name was used for controversial purposes came in the debates in the KPD during and after the Kapp *putsch* in March 1920.¹ The leadership had found itself in conflict with the enlarged consultative body representing party members, and the subsequent full party congress endorsed the latter's opposition. The immediate issue of a temporary alliance with other left-wing parties against the military insurgents—it was still unthinkable for many to co-operate in any way with the SPD 'murderers' of Rosa Luxemburg—had escalated; for the first time since the spring of 1919 the KPD had to face an issue with national implications. Some basic disagreements on policy, already reflected in the foundation congress of the KPD, now rose to the surface in acute form. Both sides in the dispute laid emphatic claim to the most valuable party heirlooms—Rosa Luxemburg's words. Paul Levi emphasized Rosa Luxemburg's well-known aversion from anything that smelt of 'putschism', to which Frölich replied:

The principle in the *Spartakus* programme that we shall only take over power on the basis of the clearly expressed wish on the part of the great majority of the working classes—a principle the formulation of which I already opposed at the founding congress—is now being used . . .

¹ It would be irrelevant to expand this chapter into a narrative history of the KPD from 1919 onwards. Though no modern or really adequate history of the party during the entire Weimar Republic exists, readers should consult Ossip K. Flechtheim, *Die Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands in der Weimarer Republik*, Offenbach 1948—the most concise and balanced account covering the entire period.

by Comrade Levi as a means of complete [political] castration. For Comrade Luxemburg its purpose was to avoid Putschist tactics. Now however [it is being used] to hinder and weaken all action. Nobody would have contradicted such an unrealistic application of her phrase as sharply as Comrade Luxemburg, who herself stated with unmistakable clarity that [in one sense] revolutions can never come too soon but at the same time are always premature [in another sense]. . . . Rosa Luxemburg, with all her critical reservations during the January risings, herself provided a shining example of [the proper] tactic.¹

Meantime Lenin himself had attacked the extreme and abstentionist radicalism in vogue among influential sections of the German and Italian Communist parties. With the now classic characterization of this attitude as 'an infantile disease of Communism', he endorsed Levi's policy of making the most of the opportunities offered by society in order to increase popular support for Communism.² This salvo from Russia was useful but not, in those days, decisive; polemicizing against Levi's opponents in Germany, Thalheimer himself made use of Lenin's splendid phrase but was careful to point out that he was not leaning on Lenin simply for justification, and certainly not in order to refute those who quoted Rosa Luxemburg against him. 'We are not in the least concerned merely to justify ourselves by using the due authority of Lenin.'³ Far from it. But the occasion seemed to provide a necessary opportunity to take stock of Communist policy in Germany on the basis of the recent events. Levi followed the best traditions of Rosa Luxemburg in providing a general and up-to-date analysis and sharpening of accepted doctrine, which harmonized the dialectic with the latest experiences. 'There is not one Communist who does not regret that the creation of a [separate] Communist party did not take place long before the war; that the Communists, even though they were only a small sect, did not get together and found their own distinct army in 1903.' Once the masses were in action, however, and the process of revolutionary clarification had begun, 'the Communist party cannot be founded late enough'.⁴ In a revolutionary situation—as opposed to the preparations for one—separation became sectarian-

¹ *Die Internationale*, 1920, Vol. II, No. 24, p. 31.

² Lenin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXXI, pp. 1-97, May 1920.

³ *Die Internationale*, 1920, Vol. II, No. 25, p. 16.

⁴ Paul Levi, 'The Congress of the Communist Party', *Die Internationale*, 1920, Vol. II, No. 26, pp. 42-43.

ism. It was an unacknowledged but subtle combination of Leninism and Luxemburgism; the first and last of such attempts on the part of a leader of the Communist party—and one of which Rosa Luxemburg would almost certainly have approved. Historically speaking, both Lenin's insistence on separate organization at all costs and Rosa Luxemburg's doctrine of growing class-consciousness in action, of organization as a process, were dialectically combined and reconciled.

Levi was not to lead the party for long. He fell out with his colleagues over the preparations for the so-called 'March action of 1920' when Brandler and Thalheimer, strongly urged by the emissaries of the Comintern, unsuccessfully attempted an insurrection. Not content with disagreement Levi, convinced of his opponents' folly, moved on to open criticism and opposition and thus received the full weight of Lenin's—and consequently the Comintern's—hostility, even though Lenin admitted that Levi's factual assessment of the situation had been correct. The days when differences about party tactics could be fought out in public, which had been such a feature of pre-war Social Democracy, were over for good. In the continuing debate between Levi, now an outsider, and the Communist leadership, Rosa Luxemburg's ideas for the first time became live ammunition. Among other things, Levi now published Rosa Luxemburg's draft manuscript on the Russian revolution which contained the most systematic criticisms of the Bolsheviks and their October revolution—far more generally incisive than her various articles in the *Spartakus* letters during the war.¹ It was a moment of considerable embarrassment and annoyance not only for the German Communists but for the Russians as well. The position of Rosa Luxemburg now became a central issue. No less an authority than Lenin was obliged to enter the field with a polemic against Levi in which a characterization of Rosa Luxemburg's role and importance could not be avoided. Typically, he made no mealy-mouthed concessions.

Paul Levi now wants to achieve popularity with the bourgeoisie by republishing precisely those works of Rosa Luxemburg's in which her errors appear. We answer this with a short extract from a good old Russian fable: an eagle can sometimes fly lower than a chicken, but a chicken can never rise to the same heights as an eagle. Rosa Luxemburg was mistaken over the question of Polish independence. She was

¹ For the circumstances in which this was written, see above, pp. 697–8.

mistaken in 1903 in her evaluation of Menshevism, she was mistaken in her theory of the accumulation of capital, she was mistaken when, with Plekhanov, Vandervelde, Kautsky and others, she stood for the unification of the Bolsheviks with the Mensheviks in July 1914. She was mistaken in her writings from prison in 1918 (although after leaving prison she largely corrected her mistakes at the end of 1918 and at the beginning of 1919). But in spite of these mistakes, she was and is an eagle, and not only will she be dear to the memory of Communists in the whole world, but her biography and the *complete* edition of her works ([in the publication of] which the German Communists are [falling] incredibly behind, and they can only partly be excused by the enormous sacrifices of their struggle) will be a very useful lesson in the education of many generations of Communists.¹

Once more Lenin had produced a telling phrase: the homely parable of the chicken and the eagle was gratefully used by less talented Communist writers for some nine years. Rosa Luxemburg became the eagle—capable of plunging into surprising depths but always capable of soaring to the Olympian heights reserved only for very great Marxists. Levi—and other opponents to follow—were and would remain chickens scratching soullessly round their miserable, dung-filled yards. But the question was too important to be settled merely with an edict from Lenin's pen. This might by now do for the Russian party and the Comintern. Rosa Luxemburg, however, was also a specific German problem and it was necessary to answer Paul Levi on his own home ground as well. Accordingly, two old colleagues and friends of Rosa were now pressed into service to take issue with the revelations contained in *The Russian Revolution*. For the first time German readers were treated to textual exegesis and criticisms of Rosa Luxemburg's views—albeit much of it shamefaced and apologetic.² Adolf Warszawski, sitting in Moscow, managed his task by emphasizing Rosa Luxemburg's—and for that matter all the Poles'—conversion to the Russian revolution after the end of the war; if Rosa Luxemburg had criticized the Bolsheviks before, she was in good company and in any case all her criticism was 'good revolutionary work'. Clara Zetkin had recently returned from Moscow to Germany. Lenin had persuaded

¹ Written in February 1922, first published in *Pravda*, 16 April 1924; *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXXIII, p. 184.

² See Clara Zetkin, *Um Rosa Luxemburgs Stellung zur russischen Revolution*, Hamburg 1922; Adolf Warski (Warszawski), *Rosa Luxemburgs Stellung zu den taktischen Problemen der Revolution*, Hamburg 1922. For discussion of content, see above, pp. 716–18.

her with difficulty that Levi had to be punished as a renegade for his public opposition, however right his assessment might at one time have been. Moreover, Clara Zetkin was herself in trouble in the KPD as Levi's supporter and friend—and opponent of the Brandler executive. The choice between adhesion to the movement to which she had given most of her life and possible disloyalty to her old friend was agonizing. She solved it reluctantly by criticizing Rosa Luxemburg where she could not be shown to have amended her views before her death. Clara Zetkin—of all people—thus wrote of Rosa Luxemburg's somewhat 'abstract and naïve' view of democracy. She followed Lenin closely in his characterization of Rosa's mistakes. Above all, she admitted that Rosa Luxemburg had failed to grasp the essence of proletarian dictatorship with its now well-established theoretical enthronement of terror. But she too emphasized that Rosa Luxemburg had largely 'changed her mind', and this became the official Communist interpretation from then onwards.¹ Whatever Clara Zetkin's own feelings, the book earned her the contempt and hatred of Rosa Luxemburg's personal friends like Luise Kautsky and Henriette Roland-Holst. Angelica Balabanoff, though never close to Rosa, and now retained in Moscow in conditions of growing disillusionment with the hitherto greatly admired Lenin, also thought Clara Zetkin's capitulation spineless.

The best evaluation of Rosa Luxemburg, typical of this period, was made by one of the few men capable of grasping the implications of the whole and not merely an arbitrary selection of parts. In two essays published in January 1921 and January 1922 respectively, Georg Lukács confronted Rosa Luxemburg's most positive and most negative contributions. There was the author of *Social Reform or Revolution*, who had provided the best Marxist dialectical analysis and methodology to emerge from the flood of publications during the revisionist controversy.² On the other hand, a fundamental critique was badly needed of the other Rosa Luxemburg, who polemicized against Lenin and the Bolsheviks in 1917 and failed to grasp the essence of the doctrine of proletarian revo-

¹ The veracity of this claim is examined above, pp. 716–18. It is not untrue but certainly exaggerated; it would be more correct to speak of the irrelevance of this problem rather than its solution by any self-conscious change of mind.

² Georg Lukács, 'Rosa Luxemburg as Marxist', first published in *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, Berlin 1923, reprinted in a recent edition, *Histoire et Conscience de Classe*, Paris 1960, pp. 47–66.

lution as it evolved and came to be applied in Russia.¹ Lukács did not deal with Rosa Luxemburg's work of 1917 as a problem of limited cognition, excusable on account of the particular circumstances, as did Zetkin and Warszawski. He treated Rosa Luxemburg's ideas as a coherent whole with universal application. So for the first time Luxemburgism as a system now made its appearance—though not yet under that name. Lukács's work conceptualized the official, respectful view of Rosa Luxemburg in this period. He also provided a bridge to the future, when Luxemburgism would be acknowledged as a recognized but fallacious system of ideas, first to be 'paired' with other deviations like Trotskyism and then to be almost totally confused with them.²

With these events Rosa Luxemburg's status and authority in the German party began to change. The primacy of the Russian party in the International, and the growing deference on the part of struggling revolutionary parties in Europe towards the one and only successful revolutionary élite in Russia, all helped to invest Lenin's comments with the authority of dogma. Henceforward there were no more deliberate attempts to combine Lenin and Luxemburg into one single valid dialectic, much less any defence of her views against his. That she had made errors was now universally accepted. The question was: how many of them had she herself corrected—specifically or by implication? She could no longer compete with Lenin on any objective scale of wisdom or revolutionary righteousness; his only errors were those which he himself had admitted and corrected. Yet her 'errors' were still only a small part of her rich heritage—relevant only because renegades like Levi chose to scratch them to the surface at this time. For the rest Rosa Luxemburg was and remained an eagle. As Lenin had ordered, her works were to be collected and published in their

¹ 'Critical remarks on Rosa Luxemburg's critique of the Russian revolution', *ibid.*, pp. 309-32.

² It is interesting that Rosa Luxemburg's important and positive contribution in the revisionist debate was henceforth largely to be taken for granted. After Lukács there was no orthodox Communist analysis of *Social Reform or Revolution* and no effort to reprint it; anti-Communist Marxists, however, took it up strongly, and potentially deviant Communists like Gramsci kept referring to it. Gramsci also took up and specifically concentrated on the aspect of Socialist morality contained in so much of Rosa Luxemburg's work. See Aldo Garosci, 'Totalitarismo e storicismo nel pensiero di Gramsci', *Pensiero politico e storiografia moderna: saggi di storia contemporanea*, Vol. I, Pisa 1954. The connection between Rosa Luxemburg and Gramsci has been deliberately ignored by official Communist writers; both have suffered from immurement in official silence.

entirety as soon as possible. Paul Frölich, Rosa Luxemburg's former opponent and now one of the more eminent theoreticians of the German party, was charged with this task to which he devoted himself with considerable enthusiasm.¹

It was during this period, too, that Rosa Luxemburg's legacy in specifically Russian questions was finally eradicated. Many of her closest colleagues in the Polish party had joined the Bolsheviks after 1917 and had made important careers in post-revolutionary Russia. They accepted the Bolshevik thesis in all its variety except in one particular—the national question, more specifically the right to self-determination of the nations on the Russian periphery. The problem was still being strenuously argued at the highest level as late as the eighth congress of the Russian Communist Party in March 1919, when Marchlewski, entirely unrepentant, still insisted that Lenin's nationality policy was wrong.² In the end the whole thing had been settled not so much by party debate as by events themselves; it can certainly be argued that the policy actually carried out by Stalin and Ordzhonikidze was much closer to Rosa Luxemburg's than to Lenin's—whatever the official line.³ In the Polish Communist Party, where the nationality problem was almost at home, it was not until the second congress of 1923 that the anti-national platform was specifically revised and the official Russian line adopted. In one sense, it was obviously easier to Bolshevize the Polish party than the KPD. Outlawed and per-

¹ He even spent some months in Moscow to tackle her Polish writings, but found that Warszawski had insufficient time to help him as arranged. Frölich accordingly returned to Germany in the hope that the Polish part of the project could be tackled later. It never was. Between 1922 and 1928 three volumes of Rosa Luxemburg's collected works appeared. *The Accumulation of Capital* and the *Anticritique* (Vol. VI—1924), her writings against revisionism (Vol. III—1925), and finally her writings on trade unions and the mass strike (Vol. IV—1928). Two further volumes were in preparation. The publication of Rosa Luxemburg's writings on economics, particularly her *Introduction to Political Economy* (Vol. VIII), was endlessly delayed owing to litigation with Paul Levi who had first published this work in 1925; the other was the volume on imperialism (Vol. V) which was in proof in January 1933. The reception of the published volumes was a microcosm of the varying attitudes to Luxemburgism. The first two to be published met with cautious enthusiasm, and mere reference to the errors without much discussion. Vol. IV drew, *inter alia*, a long, officially inspired review by Z. Leder from Moscow who warned the editor, Paul Frölich, that it was dangerous to enthuse too much about Rosa Luxemburg in introductory prefaces—'qui prouve trop prouve rien'—even though Rosa herself had undoubtedly been 'a great personality'. (*Kommunistische Internationale*, 1929, No. 6, p. 313.)

² See O. B. Szmidt, *SDKPiL: Materiały i dokumenty*, Vol. III, pp. 335–7; also Lenin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXIX, pp. 152–3.

³ See below, Appendix 2, p. 859.

secuted at home, the Poles were almost totally dependent on Moscow, especially after the failure of the invasion, over which Marchlewski and Radek had been almost grotesquely wrong. The public washing of theoretical linen was largely unnecessary; events themselves confirmed Lenin's gloomy prognosis about Poland's readiness to embrace revolution exported by the Red Army. On the other hand, the Poles had the most intimate connection with the Bolshevik leaders. It speaks more for the importance of so many of 'her' Poles in the Russian movement than for any Russian sympathy with Rosa Luxemburg's views that the final and effective verdict on self-determination took so long. It was not until 1925, just before his death, that Feliks Dzierżyński, hitherto the bitterest and most distinguished opponent of national self-determination—and one of Stalin's chief assistants in turning Lenin's national policy inside out—officially recanted, admitting that the SDKPiL's opposition to Lenin's policy had been an error.¹

This period ends with the failure of the second and larger German insurrection in 1923. Lenin was now out of action and soon to die. A struggle was in progress for the succession in Russia; the victory of Stalin and his allies coincided with the temporary abandonment of revolution in Europe as a practical possibility and the acceptance of a period of capitalist stability. Accordingly, the international effort was replaced by more parochial preoccupations within the Soviet Union. Grandiosely—and certainly prematurely—these were to be called 'Socialism in one country'.

As a consequence, the relationship between the Russian party and European Communism necessarily changed. The latter parties were 'Bolshevized'. Not only was the Russian organizational model uniformly imposed, but the Russians obtained a tighter grip on the Comintern and through it on the policy and tactics of their European allies. From this it was but a small step to a fundamental

¹ See below, Appendix 2, p. 856.

Another major and painful Polish revision of Rosa Luxemburg's former policy was the peasant question: see Wera Kostrzewa (Maria Koszutska), 'Źczy agrarne' (Thesis on agriculture), *Pisma i przemówienia*, 3 volumes, Warsaw 1961-2, Vol. I, pp. 52 ff.

The difference between the Polish and German embrace of Leninism was simply that in the Polish party the problem was at this stage a genuine revision of previously accepted policies, while in Germany it was largely a reflection of current personal and political battles.

change in the very nature of these parties; from being autonomous if junior colleagues of the victorious Bolsheviks, they became increasingly the foreign executive arm of the Soviet state. Once revolution ceased to be an immediate possibility the purpose of their activity became closely tied to the foreign policy needs of the Soviet Union. After Rapallo much of the heat went out of Russo-German relations; a secret dialogue with the hated German militarists even became possible. It was the bleak dawn of *Realpolitik*; both Germany and Russia were international pariahs. But we must not look too far into the future. The relationship between the KPD and the Russian Communists was still a party relationship, not one between German party and Soviet state; accordingly, the complicated internal developments in the Russian party, where a protracted struggle for power was to be fought for nearly ten years, were mirrored with surprising faithfulness in the tussle for leadership and control in the KPD. Once more Rosa Luxemburg played an important if posthumous part. She had left the German Communist Party equipped with a proprietary prescription for revolution, competing with and in part contradicting the experience of the Bolsheviks. This now had to be specifically undone if the German party was to be truly Bolshevikized—more so perhaps than was necessary anywhere else. Most of the other European Communist parties had already emerged in a state of theoretical as well as practical dependence on the Bolsheviks; all that was needed was to get rid of a few independent leaders and their fractious followers. Accordingly, it was inevitable that someone in Germany should sooner or later undertake a specific onslaught on Rosa Luxemburg's whole legacy. This task was to fall on Ruth Fischer and her close ally and friend Arkadi Maslow. It must be said that they carried it out with exemplary enthusiasm, even joy.

The 'ultra-Left' onslaught on and capture of the leadership in the main European parties—of which Ruth Fischer and Maslow were the German, and the most significant and violent, exponents—used as its theoretical battering ram an adulation of Bolshevism which went far beyond anything attempted hitherto. For the first time since the events themselves the entire history of pre-war Social Democracy was passed in critical review. Where previously the Bolsheviks had been seen to be right in their own context and with regard to their particular problems—organization, revolution,

dictatorship of the proletariat, the national question—their actions and ideas were now blown up to universal validity and favourably contrasted with everyone else's contribution. It was no longer a question of individual problems but of whole alternative systems. The most important of these faulty systems was Trotsky's—the Russian contender for power. Ranking it closely, however, a new system or theory now saw the light of day, an edifice of error which would have amazed its alleged author and her contemporaries—Luxemburgism.

As always in the political application of Marxism, the immediate tactical requirements of a given situation were closely but confusingly linked with quite fundamental theoretical formulations. This was the period of the great assault on Trotsky by the Stalin-Zinoviev-Kamenev *troika*, and it was Stalin who first conceptualized his policy—'Socialism in one country'—and then insistently hammered on its validity against the postulated version of his opponent, Trotskyism. A purely political contest for power was not respectable. One of Stalin's most important adaptations of Leninism was precisely the master's own well-developed habit of assaulting his opponents not so much as individuals but as spiders weaving a systematic web of errors. This massive confrontation of system against system rather than person against person was the essence of Stalin's elaboration at the fourteenth party congress in April 1925. It set in motion an echoing wave; the onslaught on Trotskyism in all its manifold shapes and forms was soon under way in Germany as well.

What Trotskyism was to Stalin in Russia, Luxemburgism became for the Stalinists or Bolsheviks in Germany: the local version of Trotskyite indiscipline and error. Throughout the spring and summer of 1925 Ruth Fischer and her immediate allies mounted a great offensive against the 'remnants of Social Democracy in the party'. These were people who, however much they had deplored the chauvinistic collapse of the Second International and later fought against the official Social-Democratic leadership as well as against the Independents, had none the less done so in terms of upholding pre-war Social Democracy against its betrayers and not as allies and supporters of the Bolsheviks. *Spartakus* was alleged never to have made a really clean break with the Second International. The only genuine and untainted Communists were the Bolsheviks—and since no one before 1917 in Germany could

conceivably claim to have followed the Bolshevik line in every respect, this left a small circle of those who in fact had not even been in Germany before the war. Ruth Fischer came from medical studies in Austria, Maslow was a Russian who had lived in Germany but had not been active in the *Spartakusbund*. For all the others, only a complete denial of their own past could now undo the taint of adherence to pre-war Social Democracy.¹

However important Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht may have been as personalities, the time had come to admit openly that 'even they have burdened us with great errors which we must eradicate'—as Ruth Fischer hectoringly told the tenth KPD congress.² Writing for party workers—the new élite cadre which symbolized the process of Bolshevization—she was even more outspoken, and referred to Rosa Luxemburg and her influence as nothing less than a syphilis bacillus.³ And, wherever possible, Ruth Fischer's supporters made a point of drawing an entirely false analogy between Rosa Luxemburg and Trotsky—thus bringing the particular and local German struggle against Luxemburgism in the KPD within the orbit of the Russian struggle against Trotskyism. The mere statement that while the Russian problem might be Trotsky the German one was Luxemburg was insufficient and undialectical; the relationship, if not proved, had to be at least constantly reasserted. It was necessary to show not merely that these were two historical versions of the same thing but that they were in fact logically and historically interdependent, two versions of the same evil. 'From the opposition to the [Bolsheviks on the part of *Spartakusbund* and pre-war Social Democracy] which in many cases (not in all) corresponds precisely to the opposition of Trotsky to the Russian Communist Party, the main defects in the German revolutionary movement may be observed.'⁴

The heat engendered by this onslaught was sufficient to singe even the hitherto sacrosanct personality of the dead leader. When

¹ Ruth Fischer, 'Our most important task', *Die Internationale*, 1925, Vol. VIII, No. 3, pp. 105–11.

² *Protokol X KPD Parteitag 1925*, p. 513.

³ I have been unable to trace the exact reference to this famous remark which was probably in an article in *Der Funke*, a Communist journal for party workers published in the mid-1920s, all numbers of which were not available to me. However, the remark itself is well attested; see below, p. 806, note 1. See also A. Maslow, 'Some comments on our party congresses', *Der Funke*, 1925, Nos. 13/14.

⁴ Ernst Schneller, 'Regarding Trotskyism in the German Communist Movement,' *Die Internationale*, 1925, Vol. VIII, No. 3, p. 119.

one writer declared that there were still 'comrades much in demand as speakers at public meetings who none the less are not wedded organizationally to their movement to an extent which earns them the confidence of comrades in their daily task', he had intellectuals specifically in mind, and no one more obviously than Rosa Luxemburg.¹

The technique of 'pairing' opponents, however ill-suited they might be, had been established Leninist practice and was now resurrected with enthusiasm. Not only were Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg 'paired' but they were joined by the discredited leaders, Brandler and Thalheimer—scapegoats for the unsuccessful uprisings of 1920 and 1923. Ruth Fischer, once more to the fore, wrote of the necessity for 'an unceasing struggle against similar opportunist deviations such as Luxemburgism, Brandlerism and Trotskyism'. It was a very loose and unjustified association.² One thing they did *appear* to have in common was that their doctrines were all doctrines of action (or further action) in contrast to Stalin's then official version of Leninism as a doctrine of discipline and stability. But neither then nor later could Communists ever admit to such an antithesis. Officially Leninism remained the doctrine of action *par excellence*.

It was in the process of this campaign and the systematization of a deviant doctrine that Rosa Luxemburg's individual errors first became converted officially into Luxemburgism. As a 'system' it made its public début in the course of 1925. The progression is easy to see: first a faulty view on certain problems (i.e. different from that of the Bolsheviks); then a distinct characterization of these differences into errors (i.e. judgement); finally the creation of a *system of errors* condemned by contrast with Bolshevism—then currently being refashioned into the autonomous dogma of Leninism.

What exactly was Luxemburgism in this period? *The Accumulation of Capital* had already been identified as the cornerstone of a deviant philosophy. 'The German party based its theory and practice in the main on the accumulation theory of Rosa Luxemburg, the source of all errors, of spontaneity theories, of false attitudes with regard to the problem of organization.'³ Bukharin

¹ J. Lenz, speech at the Lenin Circle, *ibid.*, No. 2, p. 95.

² *Ibid.*, p. 234. The fact that Trotsky eight years later agreed with Stalin and claimed Rosa Luxemburg as a potential supporter for the Fourth International does not justify this claim one whit.

³ Ruth Fischer, *Die Internationale*, 1925, Vol. VIII, No. 3, p. 107.

undertook to demolish Rosa Luxemburg's economic arguments in detail and with them the whole web of political mistakes which had been spun from this book.¹ And the most important element of error in *The Accumulation of Capital* was the theory of spontaneity. This was the heart of Luxemburgism. Its discovery was an essential aspect of Luxemburgism itself—in the relationship of base to superstructure; for nearly all the manifold errors which were to be thrashed out in the next few years were, according to the critics, finally anchored in this theory of spontaneity. We have already seen in our own discussion of Rosa Luxemburg's book how this interpretation was possible.² Briefly, *The Accumulation of Capital*, a logical vehicle driving inexorably to the destruction of capitalism as a system of *economic* relations, was interpreted in a *political* sense very much akin to Kautsky's inevitable Socialism; had it not been for Rosa Luxemburg's revolutionary actions and writings, the total analogy with Kautsky would have been irresistible. Instead of a theory of attrition, Rosa Luxemburg was credited with a theory of spontaneity in which the final steps in the long process of rational self-enlightenment would enable the masses to take the necessary and correct revolutionary steps when the situation demanded it. The party was a mere abstraction, neither distinct from nor related organizationally and politically to the proletariat—the class. Instead of a clearly defined relationship between party and class—a consensus of role expectations, in sociological jargon—all Rosa Luxemburg had produced was diffuseness and overlap; every man his own party.

The construction of Luxemburgism with its essential theory of spontaneity became a convenient organ on which the individual notes of Rosa Luxemburg's individual deviations could now be piped out as a massively heretical harmony. Her dispute with Lenin in 1903 over organizational questions was related to Luxemburgism—the undervaluation of the party's role; likewise her critique of the Russian revolution. Her false theory of capitalist accumulation fed a sustained base-note of theory into this political composition; her obtuse insistence on reconciliation between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks corresponded neatly to her failure to call for an open split between opportunism and radicalism in the

¹ N. Bukharin, 'Imperialism and the Accumulation of Capital', *Unter dem Banner des Marxismus*, Vienna/Berlin, 1925/1926, Vol. II, pp. 288 ff.

² See above, pp. 535, 542-3.

German party—a neglect of the party's role once again. Finally, and most important, there were the masses, that essential harmonic construction without which no Marxist music could be played but which for Rosa Luxemburg had become a substitute for all the precise tactical and strategic definitions on which Lenin had insisted. It will be obvious that any serious analysis of Rosa Luxemburg's writings would have cast more than doubt on this interpretation, particularly on the concoction of a coherent system of error; even less tenable was the identification with Trotsky. But for present purposes Stalin's example showed the way: political identification of all enemies as rooted together in the same fallacious, even dangerous, theory; extrapolation of all individual views into common systems. The process worked down from the top. Luxemburgism and Trotskyism were postulated as similar in origin and intent; there was then no more need to show correspondence in detail. As long as similar origins were authoritatively asserted, the elaboration of the various systems could be developed independently—for the moment.¹ And, of course, these 'wrong' systems were balanced by the 'correct' system—Leninism. Each depended on the other for its very existence.

Lenin himself would probably never have thought of ascribing to himself a distinct corpus of doctrine worthy of an 'ism' in its own right. He considered his writings merely to be the current application of Marxism, ever flexible and productive. What he had to say—indeed the entire process of revolution in Russia—

had to be admitted to have some fundamental significance on an international scale. Of course it would be a great mistake to exaggerate this truth and to apply it to more than a few of the fundamental features of our revolution. We must not make the error of forgetting that once the proletarian revolution has been victorious in at least one of the advanced countries, things will in all likelihood change very considerably, i.e. Russia will shortly cease to be the model country and become once more the backward country, in a 'soviet and socialist' sense.²

But with the general struggle against errors in the Communist movement, and the particular fight for the great man's mantle,

¹ For an interesting if slightly puckish argument in favour of the causal connection between Bolshevik policy and the elaboration of a suitable philosophic 'system', see A. MacIntyre, 'A Mistake about Causality in Social Science', in P. Laslett and W. G. Runciman, *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, Second series, Oxford 1962, pp. 48–70; particularly pp. 63 ff. for the period of the Stalin purges.

² Lenin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXXI, p. 1. This was written as late as May 1920

the creation and claim to exclusive possession of a distinct body of doctrine which could be ascribed to Lenin became inevitable. In April 1924 Stalin delivered a lecture at the Sverdlov University, which he called 'The Foundations of Leninism'.¹ From then onwards, for nearly thirty years, he would revert again and again to the elaboration of the doctrines of Leninism as a distinct entity. Stalin was a sufficient dialectician to allocate a finite historical role to his invaluable asset—'Leninism is Marxism in the age of imperialism'—but this did not make it any less valid. Indeed, everything Stalin did with it was to make it more sharply distinctive. And the international Communist movement accepted his thesis in proportion to his rise to power. Stalin was building on sound foundations of precedent once again; systematization—of his own and his opponents' views—had been Lenin's own weapon. He had elevated opposing views into a system because in this way they could be demolished more easily and more impressively than as a series of isolated blunders. In Stalin's hands the main features of Leninism became the necessity for Communist organizational autonomy; the permanent institutionalization of the party under a centralized directorate leading the masses—and not merely the most advanced expression of proletarian activity; the elevation of the dictatorship of the proletariat into an essential stage of the dialectic, during which the power of the state must grow greater and not less, rather than simply some vague transitory stage between the inception of revolution and its completion. Finally, the notion of revolutionary egoism: Socialism in one country and not some immediate causal linkage between revolutions in different countries. It is obvious that Luxemburgism could easily be shown to differ sharply from all this by implication even more than by actual quotation; the claim that Leninism was in fact the only valid Marxism of a new era consigned Luxemburgism at the very best to a lower stage of historical development. We shall see how the relationship between Leninism and Luxemburgism changed from a differentiation of stages—with the latter still justified as having limited but real historical validity—to the claim that Leninism had a timeless and ubiquitous validity which no longer admitted Luxemburgism even as a possible reflection of a particular historical situation. This made it a conscious, deliberate heresy. But in any case it is essential to recognize that Luxemburg-

¹ Reprinted in English in *Leninism*, London 1940, pp. 1-85.

ism was, right from the start, a function of Leninism; that as Leninism grew and changed, so Luxemburgism changed and diminished accordingly. All deviant doctrines were functionally correlated to Leninism; indeed it is possible (though probably excessive) to argue that Leninism—like Luxemburgism—was never an autonomous body of doctrine at all but merely the product of a need for a deterrent which in turn could only exist by conjuring up an opposing threat of the same magnitude.

The ultra-Left ascendancy was short-lived. With victory the anti-Trotsky *troika* in Moscow broke apart. At the fourteenth party congress in December 1925 Stalin and Zinoviev met head on, and the latter was defeated. Stalin's supporters now swarmed into the higher echelons of the party in increasing numbers. His new allies in the leadership were Bukharin, Tomsky, and Rykov; the so-called Right now had its brief day. The realignment soon made itself felt in the Comintern and of course in Germany. Ruth Fischer's venomous assault on the German party's cherished traditions had been bitterly resented and her opponents, encouraged by the change in Moscow, now openly hit back. At the meeting of the executive of the Comintern in February–March 1926 the German ultra-Left, already censured privately by Bukharin and the Comintern leadership, now came under public attack. Ruth Fischer was not only to be defeated but soon to be expelled altogether from the KPD.

Rosa Luxemburg was largely rehabilitated in the process. Instead of being the fount of all errors, she 'had been well on the way to creating a truly Marxist party in Germany and she would have created it had her death not made this impossible'.¹ Ruth Fischer was paid out specifically for some of her grosser slanders and no one was better qualified to do this than Rosa Luxemburg's old friend, Clara Zetkin. The campaign against Rosa Luxemburg had been nothing less than a combination of 'evil and slander . . .':

Comrade Fischer missed no opportunity to debase the tradition of the *Spartakusbund*, to extinguish all memories of its revolutionary importance, to degrade it and to sully it. . . . On the contrary Rosa Luxemburg belongs to the best traditions not only of the KPD but of the entire world proletariat. Lenin called her an eagle, but Ruth Fischer a syphilis

¹ K[arl] S[chmidt], *Die Internationale*, 1925, Vol. VIII, No. 10, p. 611.

bacillus. Apart from the tastelessness and indecency of this remark, it is incredibly scurrilous in a political sense as well.¹

Another speaker, himself at one time a member of the ultra-Left but shortly to be expelled from the party for right-wing deviation, added that 'a leadership capable of stigmatizing Rosa Luxemburg as the syphilis of the working-class movement—the person who had that printed is sitting here in the room—all one can say is that such a leadership is utterly out of the question.'²

But if Rosa's personal reputation was salvaged and restored, any rehabilitation of Luxemburgism was short-lived. For Ruth Fischer had not invented Luxemburgism, she had only exaggerated it and made it into a political battering-ram with which to pulverize her enemies—a German version of Trotskyism. Stalin's international policy had not really changed, only the allies who helped him carry it out—and Bukharin, the new Russian Comintern expert, certainly had no sympathy for Rosa Luxemburg's theoretical ideas. Indeed, Bukharin had eagerly seized the opportunity of making his own substantial contribution to characterizing and demolishing the concept of Luxemburgism (Chapter XII, p. 533). Ironically, the errors of Luxemburgism were now paired differently, with Ruth Fischer and the ultra-Left instead of with Trotsky—albeit cautiously and with subtlety instead of with the previous barrage of mud-slinging. Luxemburgism was now presented as 'the pre-stage to the recognition of the superior theoretical and tactical basis of Leninism'. Luxemburg and Lenin were presented as 'the two antipodes of revolutionary Marxism'; a choice between them was held to be consciously necessary and possible. 'The Left had chosen to develop not the correct possibilities of Leninism but the incorrect limitations implied in Luxemburgism. 'One must not use the errors and insufficiencies of a yet undeveloped situation in the revolutionary class struggle to create a wrong system of class policy . . . now that one sixth of the world is under the dictatorship of the proletariat, utopian-revolutionary hopes and aims are no longer good enough.'³

¹ *Protokoll, Erweiterte Executive der Kommunistischen Internationale, 17 Februar–15 März 1926*, Hamburg 1926, p. 249. See also *Rote Fahne*, Vol. IX, Nos. 43–66. The syphilis remark is also quoted by Otto Wenzel (*Die KPD im Jahre 1923*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Berlin 1955, p. 281), from the gleeful comments on the debate made by the SPD press (see *Sozialdemokratische Parteikorrespondenz 1923–1928*, Supplementary Volume, Berlin 1930, p. 434).

² Arthur Rosenberg, *Protokoll EKKI*, p. 186.

³ 'The Renaissance of Luxemburgism', *Rote Fahne*, 11 August 1926.

Luxemburgism is here presented as a system of ideas anchored in a particular situation. The right progress from it was Leninism—adoption of which was made all the easier by the subsequent historical developments which should have been plain for all to see. The pairing of the ultra-Left with Luxemburgism was thus not an inherent logical necessity—which was the way in which the ultra-Left had previously presented the relationship between Luxemburgism and the Brandler-Thälheimer leadership—but a deliberately wrong-headed development of Luxemburgism in unjustified directions. "The concepts [of Luxemburgism] are the same but the content has altered [into counter-revolution, utopianism and back-sliding]. The theoretical armament still has part of its old and brilliant fire but it has lost its use and has become valueless."¹ Ruth Fischer's ancestry could thus be traced to Rosa Luxemburg, but the latter could not be held responsible for the excesses and dangers of Ruth Fischer.

The strong reaction against Fischer-Maslow and the ultra-Left also proved of limited duration. By 1928 the temporary 'Right' course of the KPD gradually gave way again to a more left-wing one, without of course rehabilitating or justifying Ruth Fischer. By this time Ernst Thälmann had emerged as the strong man of the KPD—the ex-protégé of Ruth Fischer charged with her political liquidation. The reason for the change was Russian, not German.

Stalin began the great alteration of course which was to put an end to the relative 'liberalism' of the New Economic Policy and tighten the screws for the coming great leap forward into collectivization and the first five-year plan. In Europe also a sharper confrontation with society was called for, and in particular the knife-edge was levelled at Social Democracy once more. Within Communist parties this meant greater vigilance, sharpness, and ruthlessness. Brandler and Thälheimer, previously shunted aside from the leadership, were now noisily expelled. Rightism was the main enemy once more—and in the new circumstances a new thesis emerged: with the party itself fully to the left, no still-further left position was theoretically possible. Opponents who a few years before had been labelled ultra-Left now indiscriminately became Rightists—the only possible deviation. Ultra-Leftism became identified with right-wing opportunism—a preview of the later

¹ Ibid.

'pairing' in Russia of both Bukharin and Zinoviev with Trotsky as a single and largely undifferentiated group of counter-revolutionary traitors.

For Rosa Luxemburg and her 'system' this meant the old wind of criticism once more. The notion of Luxemburgism as a half step to Leninism was abandoned. A whole series of pseudo-scientific articles reviewed Rosa Luxemburg's work in the critical light of the new requirements. For the first time the well-established historical thesis of her change of mind during the German revolution was challenged; instead of raising herself painfully towards Leninism in the last weeks of her life she was now shown to have refused to make the required adjustment. The final proof was that she and her friends had deliberately neglected the recruitment of allies among the peasants, so clearly postulated by Lenin long before—the first, but not the last, reference to this particular failing.¹

In contrast to 1925 the task now was not to evaluate the importance of the Left radicals as a whole but to pinpoint their weaknesses; the partial rehabilitation of 1926 had led by implication to a tendency to promote the German Left as a system—naturally at the expense of the Bolsheviks. 'We do not want to diminish the importance of the honourable revolutionary work of the Left radicals before and during the war. . . . But we must avoid all demagogic confrontation of the Left with the Bolsheviks.'² In view of the current, more favourable view of *Spartakus*, it was for the moment safer to play down the importance of Luxemburgism as a system. But this temporary phase of 'unsystematic' discussion could not last. Without systematization even the sharpest criticism of deviants was little better than opportunism.

In actual fact the stimulus for the whole discussion was provided by a recent book—no theoretical elaboration without a handy text to criticize. Radek had republished his essays on the German revolution with a foreword in which he claimed that the object of the

¹ 'The Programme of the Spartakusbund', *Rote Fahne*, 30 December 1928. Either deliberately or more probably through ignorance, no reference was made to Rosa Luxemburg's own justification of this 'neglect' in terms of deliberate policy in her article on the national question in 1908. (See Appendix 2, p. 851.) But compare the late (1928) correction of this error in Germany, with its large revolutionary urban working class, with the much earlier correction in Poland (1921–1922).

² N. Lenzner, 'The German Left radicals and Bolshevism', *Kommunistische Internationale*, No. 11 (1928), p. 604. See also a long analysis of Rosa Luxemburg's errors about mass strikes by P. Langner, *Der Massenstreik im Kampf des Proletariats*, Leipzig 1931, particularly pp. 27–31.

German Left was 'to prepare the progressive workers of the Left for the immediate struggle for Socialism. . . . They could have learnt much from Bolshevism but they could not have been Bolsheviks. Owing to the war the shape of the revolution in Germany was different from that in Russia. In the course of eight months Russia moved from the democratic to the proletarian revolution.'¹ The German situation, however, was one in which Socialism had been imminent for some time and the tactics of the Left had therefore to be adapted to it. Considering the time and place, Radek's thesis was curiously heretical—and of course entirely accurate; it was instantly challenged in Russia as much as in Germany. For he implied that the German Left recognized the imminence of the final revolutionary stage in Germany, while the Russians seized an unexpected opportunity to turn a democratic revolution—to which all their tactics had been adapted—into a Socialist one.²

A combination of Russian politics and German loyalty to indigenous tradition (it is significant that beneath all the criticism Rosa Luxemburg had subtly acquired exclusive German nationality by this time) thus raised Luxemburgism to a new level of respectability, at least in the eyes of its enemies. It had all happened on the quiet; no one had dared to rehabilitate it officially. Perhaps—it was thought—Luxemburgism slipped in unseen with the ritual cleansing of the great revolutionary's personal reputation—a ceremony solemnly performed every 15 January and 5 March. The separation of Luxemburg from Luxemburgism between 1922 and

¹ Karl Radek, *Die Deutsche Revolution*, Leipzig 1926, Introduction, pp. 14–15.

² It was significant that Lenzner even marshalled Rosa Luxemburg's support for the Bolshevik tactics in the 1905 revolution against Radek, in order to destroy the latter's claim that the Left radicals were in advance of the Bolsheviks in their theory of imperialism before 1916 (Radek, Introduction, pp. 10–11). The reason and circumstances which induced Radek to publish this version at this particular time remain something of a mystery, but seem to indicate an attempt on the part of Trotsky's former allies to profit from Stalin's official adoption of the policy which they had previously advocated against Bukharin and the supporters of the New Economic Policy. The attempt proved short-lived—and merely made them conspicuous. Compare E. Proobrazhenskii, 'Marxism and Leninism', *Molodaya Gvardiya*, Moscow 1924 (special Lenin commemoration number), p. 217:

'If to our great loss Lenin had died before the outbreak of the first world war, it would not have occurred to any of us to talk about Leninism as a special version of Marxism. . . . Lenin's position in the battle against the Mensheviks *does not rise above the general framework* of the battle of revolutionary Marxism against opportunism.' (My italics.)

Stalin himself had already taken issue with Radek over the same question earlier: 'The October revolution and the tactics of the Communists', *Sochineniya*, Vol. VI, pp. 358–401.

1925 and after 1926 would have to be critically reviewed. More probably, however, the loyalty to indigenous tradition, especially among participants like Radek, Paul Frölich, and Ernst Meyer, was strong enough to reassert Luxemburgism whenever the official heresy-hunt was not in full cry. Accordingly the momentary state of peace and quiet could not be allowed to endure for very long; a return to a clash of systems became inevitable. Within a short time massive Russian support even had to be mobilized against new disagreements about how to interpret history in the German party.

In 1929 an authoritative article of Russian origin set out a new and, it was hoped, final version of Luxemburgism. Rosa Luxemburg herself was once more assigned an honourable place in the history of proletarian revolution. The thesis of choice up or down from her position was elaborated in a modified and critical form; one could either surmount her errors and reach Leninism, or follow an equally possible avenue down to the refuse pit where Kautsky reigned. But Luxemburgism, though still an historical stage, was no longer inevitable but deviant. Once more it became a system of errors, a blind alley—from which only a conscious effort of will could lead to Bolshevism. Any contemporary repetition of or insistence on her views led instantly to the pit of Kautskyism. For the purpose of current political requirements this downward path had been taken by Brandler and Brandlerism; the former in the process of physical expulsion, the latter in the process of elaboration and simultaneous dialectical destruction. What more convenient than comparing Brandlerism with Luxemburgism in its degenerate form? At least Rosa Luxemburg herself had avoided the ultimate indignity of descent. 'She herself has entered the balance sheet of history with a great profit balance.'¹ Person and system were shown as connected but still historically separate.

But the position did not rest there. After Brandler and Thalheimer it was the turn of the conciliators. Ernst Meyer, Ewert, Gerhard Eisler were winkled out of their positions in the party's Central Committee. The new Left course was fully established in policy and personnel. By 1930 the Stalinist campaign for collectivization in Russia was in full swing. There seemed no obvious theoretical or political need for a new campaign against Luxem-

¹ A. Martynov, 'From Rosa Luxemburg to Lenin or from Luxemburg to Kautsky', *Kommunistische Internationale*, No. 3 (1929), pp. 100-16, particularly p. 115.

burgism as the scapegoat for current deviations. Yet it was Stalin himself who now put the cat among the puzzled pigeons. In 1931 he wrote an open letter to the editor of the Bolshevik historical journal *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya* in which he accused the editors, and particularly Slutskii, of fostering deliberate falsification of party history, clearly inspired by Trotskyites. The immediate political causes of this onslaught, which was to have far-reaching consequences (including Slutskii's own liquidation in the first of the great purges) are still obscure.¹ Perhaps the official bridling of the excesses of collectivization signalled by Stalin's letter, 'Dizzy with success', to *Pravda* on 2 March 1930 had once more produced a reaction greater than had been intended—at least in the suspicious minds of Stalin and his close collaborators. In any case a new and hitherto unparalleled era of theoretical witch-hunting now began.

The immediate question raised in the journal had been the attitude of the Bolsheviks and the German Left to Kautsky and the 'Centre' before the war. Slutskii had pointed out what Lenin had himself admitted: that Rosa Luxemburg's indictment of Kautsky as a time-serving theorist preceded Lenin's by four years. However correct the Bolsheviks had been in the context of their own party struggle against the Mensheviks, they could not claim to have recognized opportunism with equal vigour in all its different

¹ Slutskii's article is in *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya*, No. 6, 1930, which presumably appeared in the summer of 1930. On 20 October 1930 the editors were forced into a public admission that Slutskii's article was an 'error'; the subject, however, was still 'timely and important'. Stalin's public assault on the editors and on current party history as a whole only saw the light of day more than six months later; no one quite knows why.

It has been suggested that in the course of 1930-1931 there was a massive return of exiled Trotskyites into state and party institutions. This allegedly caused Stalin to react sharply to any attempt to interpret his warnings against the excesses of collectivization as a general relaxation in the campaign against the various oppositional groups within the party.

An alternative explanation is connected with the international rather than the Russian movement. Trotsky and his supporters expected to sink into oblivion after his expulsion from the Soviet Union, but instead developed a lively counter-attack both in propaganda and organization. This was the period when Trotsky began his critical analysis of Communist policies in Germany and with regard to the Spanish revolution. There was considerable Trotsky support both in Germany, Poland, and elsewhere. Certainly Stalin's letter ushered in a new period of anti-Trotskyite exposures; in England the 'Balham' group was identified and noisily evicted in 1932. Stalin's particular identification of Luxemburgism with Trotskyism may have been due to an attempt to 'excuse' potential Trotskyites as being really Luxemburgists. In this analysis Stalin's letter makes sense as a command to deal with 'Trotskyites' not in terms of verbal disputation but of physical expulsion ('Bash the Trots', as it was known in English Communist Party circles). Trotskyites were no longer to be excused as deviant Communists but to be pilloried as bourgeois spies in the Communist movement.

national manifestations. Stalin, however, denied this thesis most vigorously. Far from *following* the German Left, the Bolsheviks had *encouraged* the German Left to take their stand against Kautsky; without such encouragement Rosa Luxemburg might never have been pushed into her open polemic against Kautsky in the first place! The disagreements between Bolsheviks and German radicals before the war were due, according to Stalin, to nothing less than the recognition by Lenin and his colleagues that the German Left were not sufficiently vigorous in their fight against opportunism. The honour of leading this fight belonged without doubt to the Bolsheviks and to no one else. Any other version was Trotskyite slander and falsification. At the same time all the other mistakes of the German Left were paraded once more with heavy sarcasm—so much so that Stalin felt impelled to remind his readers that the German Left did have ‘some important and serious deeds to their credit’.¹

Stalin supplemented this entirely absurd but none the less authoritative revision of party history with an even more spurious answer to two queries which reached him from within the Russian party. The first of his correspondents suggested that it would be logical to simplify the whole process of historiography by postulating that Trotsky and his colleagues had never been anything but Mensheviks. Stalin, who had no love of simplification, rounded on Olekhnovich with the assertion that not only was this thesis untrue but that it implied that Lenin had permitted evident Mensheviks to join the Bolshevik party—either because he had been absurdly tolerant or because he was blind. No, Trotsky had joined the Bolsheviks and had acted as a Bolshevik in order to destroy and weaken the Bolshevik party with his clandestine opposition. On his eviction (by Stalin) he had returned to his previous open Menshevism.²

Aristov, the other correspondent, had not even tried to make clever suggestions about simplifying party history. His point was one of detail: surely Trotsky had invented the doctrine of permanent revolution and not Rosa Luxemburg—however enthusiastically she might (or might not) have subscribed to it? Stalin corrected

¹ ‘Regarding some problems of the history of Bolshevism’, *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya*, No. 6 (113), 1931, reprinted in Stalin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XIII, pp. 84–102.

² *Bolshevik*, No. 16, 30 August 1932, reprinted as ‘Answer to Olekhnovich and Aristov’, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XIII, pp. 127–32.

this appeal to the demonstrable facts with almost purposeless cynicism. It had been Parvus and 'Trotzky who had 'campaignaged against Lenin with the theory of permanent revolution . . . Rosa Luxemburg remained in the background and preferred not to enter the lists . . . but the *theory* of permanent revolution was thought up [*sochinili*] by Rosa Luxemburg and Parvus . . . not 'Trotzky but Rosa Luxemburg and Parvus invented the theory . . . not Rosa Luxemburg but Parvus and 'Trotzky campaignaged against Lenin in 1905. . . . Later Rosa Luxemburg too fought against Lenin's revolutionary concept but that was after 1905.¹ All that had been achieved was muddle—but muddle which perhaps effectively linked Rosa Luxemburg, Parvus, and Trotsky as joint creators and propagators of a heretical theory which happened to stand in the blackest contrast to the official enthronement of 'Socialism in one country'.

By this time Stalin's word was law—on history as much as anything else; a chorus of welcome for this clear and brilliant interpretation of history dutifully arose in the KPD as well as in the Russian party. But it is interesting to contrast the effect of Stalin's letter on Polish and German party historians. Rather than engage in elaborate acts of self-flagellation by reinterpreting their current work, the Poles preferred to shut up shop. Confined to Moscow, and largely dependent on Russian hospitality and aid, they were even more vulnerable than sceptical Russian party members. Marchlewski, Dzierżyński, most of their Bolshevik ex-colleagues, were dead. Accordingly *Z Pola Walki*, their equivalent of *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya* (the two journals had interchanged materials and brought out similar articles simultaneously), decided to discontinue publication even though the current number had already been set in proof. Future Polish articles on party history were confined to *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya* and followed the new line though without specific acknowledgement of any change; only impeccably meritorious Bolsheviks like Hanecki were allowed to go on writing at all.² Then, and afterwards, the Poles raised the art of oppositional

¹ *Sochineniya*, Vol. XIII, pp. 130-2.

² The last number of *Z Pola Walki* to appear was No. 11/12, Autumn 1931. This number contained a lengthy discussion of the SDKPiL in the 1905 revolution which still attempted to distinguish an autonomous and valid Polish line, though differences with the Bolsheviks were of course analysed to the latter's advantage—very much like German comment eight years earlier. The Poles, who had been in advance of developments in Russia and Germany for forty years, had now at last slipped behind.

silence to most sophisticated heights. The Germans on the other hand indulged in a festival of self-criticism and adulation for Stalin's historical perception.

Two illustrations from the mass of current literature suffice to show what was at stake and how it was dealt with. Following Stalin's personal involvement in the minutiae of party history and his elevation of such matters into a major political issue, the question could no longer be left merely to party historians. The big guns of the Central Committee of the Russian party fired off supporting salvoes in all directions. On 1 December 1931 no less a figure than L. Kaganovich spoke specifically in support of Stalin's thesis. With all the strength and coarseness typical of the man, he hacked away at the remaining shreds of validity and authority which Stalin had left to Rosa Luxemburg. Where only two years earlier Martynov had still separated Luxemburg from Luxemburgism, Kaganovich now dissolved this artificial distinction.¹ Soon afterwards N. Popov, author of the official *Short Course of Bolshevik History*, made his own contribution. According to him Rosa Luxemburg had been simply a Menshevik in Russian matters (*vide* her 'intimate correspondence' with the Menshevik leaders in 1905 and also her attitude on the national question). In Germany, 'the Left did not have the courage to decide on armed uprising and preach the mass strike as the ultimate weapon. . . . They did not as a result struggle for the capture of the party machine or the party masses, they accepted for themselves the role of a powerless literary opposition allocated to them by the centrist party leadership.'²

Several important consequences followed. First, Luxemburgism was impugned not only as a postulated system of errors but as a living deviant tradition—deliberately propagated by Rosa's followers. Rosa Luxemburg was now indistinguishable from Luxemburgism. The role of the old German Left had been grossly overvalued. In the process of debasing it to its proper historical level the 'new' historians took a side-swipe at hitherto respectable Bolshevik historians. Yaroslavskii's official history of the CPSU, in which 'Rosa Luxemburg had never wavered with regard to centrism' (Volume II), was now pilloried as an inadmissible con-

¹ *Internationale Pressekorrespondenz (Inprekorr)*, 15 December 1931, Vol. XI, No. 117, pp. 2661–8.

² N. Popov, 'The idealization of Luxemburgism is the flag of our enemy', *Inprekorr*, Vol. XI, No. 117, p. 2678.

cession to Luxemburgism. According to Popov it was 'no wonder that a party led by pupils of Rosa Luxemburg, with Brandler and Thalheimer at their head, went bankrupt in 1923'.

Secondly, Luxemburgism was now no longer an important but specifically German deviant from Leninist orthodoxy but an international phenomenon which appeared to have validity—and therefore required destruction—in Russia as well. For if Leninism had been universally valid since the beginning of the twentieth century, then any doctrine specifically opposing it necessarily had equally universal—if pernicious—application. If, as Stalin said, 'Leninism is not merely a Russian but an international phenomenon rooted in the whole of international development', then Luxemburgism, too, had by definition to be equally broadly based.¹

Thirdly, Luxemburgism now became a general term of abuse and not, as hitherto, a specific set of doctrines which might be linked or paired but was not identical with already established official refuse-bins like 'Trotskyism or Menshevism—or for that matter Kautskyism. Thus the very intensity of the onslaught on Luxemburgism for a lurid moment elevated it to a unique level of significance—while at the same time debasing it with a lack of specificity which in practice robbed it of any particular meaning. It was a fate shared by all oppositional 'isms' in the Leninist tradition, from 'economism' to 'liquidationism'; but Lenin's essentially analogical attempts at pairing became in Stalin's hands a process of emptying all contents with a stomach pump.² It was to be peculiarly a feature of the Stalin epoch—and its excesses therefore finite; unlike Trotskyism, which has (as yet) retained its Stalinist diffuseness to this day, Luxemburgism reverted to increasing specificity after the war.

With such Olympian thunderbolts from Russia the German Stalinists had a field day. *Rote Fahne* reprinted substantial extracts from Kaganovich's speech, and turned the new artillery on to the immediate political preoccupations in the German party. There was, commented *Rote Fahne*, a close relationship between 'Leninist clarification of party history and the present tasks of the revolutionary movement'. These were the 'Bolshevization of our party

¹ Stalin, 'The Foundations of Leninism', *Leninism*, p. 1.

² Compare the relative specificity of Trotsky on Stalinism (and the regular ritual revisions in order to keep it specific) with the increasing emptiness and lack of meaning of Stalin on Trotskyism.

and the excretion of Social-Democratic, centrist, and Luxemburgist remains within the KPD'.¹

The most significant German contribution was a book which in effect elaborated the thesis hinted at by Olekhovich in Russia, but expanded it with German thoroughness.² Sauerland divided Marxism basically into two kinds: creative Marxism—Leninism—and dogmatic Marxism—which was everyone else. The unequivocal identification of all non-Leninist forms of Marxism with each other was elaborated into a specific thesis. The differences between opportunists, centrists, and the Left radicals now became mere shades of temperament and attitudes—in doctrine they were fundamentally the same. The whole of the Second International was one long spasm of opportunism; no positive contribution to the class struggle had been made at all. With such a theoretical approach, however, the *political* element of error now became of secondary importance. Sauerland, an intellectual snob, was much more concerned with showing the lack of theoretical contribution made by the Social Democrats, whom he paraded in review, than their political mistakes. This was partly his undoing. Sentences like 'Stalin thus facilitated my task', or 'we must not confine ourselves to quoting what Lenin and the Bolsheviks had to say about individual problems . . . concerning the theoretical and tactical errors of the German Left. We must go further . . . and apply Lenin's criticisms also to those theoretical works of the German Left which the Bolsheviks did not

¹ 'The Remains of Luxemburgism', *Rote Fahne*, 8 January 1932.

The history of the KPD now read as follows: the battle against the KAPD (left-wing deviation in 1919) = the practical defeat of Luxemburgist spontaneity theory and its negation of the party's role. Under cover of this, hidden centrists crept back into the party, especially after the Halle USPD congress (Däumig, Geyer, Adolf Hoffmann). In 1921 the party overcame the 'liquidators' (Levi) and the 'inverted opportunists' (Thalheimer, Brandler); 1923–1924 saw the final liquidation of Brandler-Thalheimer opportunism, 1925–1926 the defeat of the Trotskyite opposition of Fischer-Maslow-Urbahns-Korsch. In 1928 the 'foul Brandlerite enemies and conciliators' (Frölich, Meyer, Eisler) were removed. The threads of all deviations, Left as well as Right, led directly back to Rosa Luxemburg.

² Kurt Sauerland, *Der dialektische Materialismus: Schöpferischer oder dogmatischer Marxismus?*, Berlin 1932. Sauerland was the editor of *Der Rote Aufbau*, the journal of Willi Münzenberg's organization *Rote Hilfe*. Münzenberg's role in the party was that of an important 'outsider'; he had built up a small personal empire of his own and was in fact the first to develop in practice the use of fellow-travelling organizations for Communist purposes. Always viewed with respect but resentment by the official party leadership, he was finally liquidated under mysterious circumstances in France during his flight south from internment in 1940.

mention specifically', were not going to be passed over in silence.¹

Such an extreme simplification suited the German Communists as little as it had suited the Russians. The first criticism, which called Sauerland's work 'a political as well as a literary scandal', came from a man who had known the German radical leaders well. But he in turn went too far the other way, again reverting to objective conditions as a means of explaining—though not justifying—the divergencies from Leninism.² The pendulum had now swung too far to Left and Right in turn. 'Sauerland's extremism is the direct cause of reformist outbursts like those of Alpari.'³ The Russians had once more to 'define' the correct median for the Germans. Nor was the Russian dictate of a correct centre position an accident, or some objective search for truth. Unity in the German party had suddenly become at least as urgent as the exposure of error. This was the period of 'class against class', when Fascism became a convenient word with which to belabour all class enemies indiscriminately—Social Democrats as much as right-wing nationalists and Nazis. The warning bugle calls of a Nazi take-over in Germany, from the lips of the Communists' intimate enemies like Kurt Rosenfeld of the Socialist Workers' Party (SAP), were contemptuously dismissed with the snub: 'Fascism? But don't we already have the Fascism of Severing and the Socialist government in Prussia?'⁴ There were some in the KPD, like Heinz Neumann, who began to question the official disclaimer that National Socialism presented any special danger. Others, like

¹ Sauerland, p. 130. One of the interesting secondary features of Sauerland's contributions was his elevation of Karl Liebknecht to full intellectual parity with Rosa Luxemburg and Franz Mehring. Liebknechtism (hitherto unheard of) now became 'the foundation of the Left's strategy' (p. 179) which 'destroyed the basis of Marxism in the field of philosophy, economics and sociology' (p. 192). It is perhaps not without importance that in order to make this extreme assault on the contribution of the German Left Sauerland had to play down Rosa Luxemburg's role and elevate as well as distort those of Liebknecht and Mehring.

² J. Alpari, 'Critical Comments' (review of Sauerland), *Inprekorr*, 1932, No. 96, pp. 3081-6; No. 97, pp. 3109-18; No. 98, pp. 3147-53. Alpari was the editor of *Inprekorr*.

³ A. Martynow, 'Lenin, Liebknecht, Luxemburg', *Kommunistische Internationale*, No. 2 (1933), pp. 107-23, see particularly p. 107.

⁴ *Rote Fahne*, 15 January 1932. Incidentally, the author of this article quoted Rosa Luxemburg against Kurt Rosenfeld; in calling for a general strike against any Nazi government 'by order', he proved himself no better than an anarcho-syndicalist (see above, pp. 425, 496-7). But *Rote Fahne* hastened to add that it was the spontaneity theory which made such misuse of Rosa Luxemburg's correct tactics possible.

Sauerland, had carried Stalin's historical critique into the realms of practical abstentionism and political indifference. But officially the last hidden enemies and deviationists had been exposed and evicted in 1931; they were now all outside the party which could at last be pronounced united and pure. In its ideological assessment of itself and its past the KPD now reverted to the 1929 position: the theory of choice between two alternatives. According to Martynov there were two forms of true Leninist criticism of opponents: (1) for revolutionaries who made opportunistic mistakes, which included Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, and the early Kautsky, and (2) for non-revolutionaries who hindered the movement—Kautsky in his second period. Both forms of criticism were correct, but they were not the same thing and they had to be applied to the right opponents. The German Left was full of errors but it was revolutionary. It could not simply be equated with opportunism and centrism. Above all, one must not neglect its political activities on account of 'idealistic theoretical analysis'.¹

The SPD had followed the years of difficult Communist interpretation of Rosa Luxemburg's work with glee and self-satisfaction. By this time the German Socialists were happy to renounce all claim on her as their political ancestor. For a time in the early 1920s, after the publication of her book on the Russian revolution and Luise Kautsky's letters, she had been regarded as a misguided sheep who had strayed from the Socialist fold and who, had she lived, might well have returned to it. After 1928, however, the Communist policy of 'class against class'—total and venomous opposition to Social Democracy—made the possession of joint ancestry uncomfortable. The SPD had become acclimatized to the habits of political power and to corresponding respectability. *Vorwärts* celebrated the Communist battles over Rosa Luxemburg's legacy as a political dividend for itself.² But Social Democracy, too, had its 'Luxemburgist' non-conformists. In the early

¹ A. Martynov in *Kommunistische Internationale*, No. 2 (1933), pp. 107–23. See also M. Sorki, 'Confusion damaging to the party', *Kommunistische Internationale*, No. 2 (1933), pp. 134–51. One of the incidental aspects of all this reinterpretation was the renewed belabouring of Kautsky as a renegade. Sauerland's thesis of undifferentiated opportunism throughout the Second International had made Kautsky into a consistent theorist throughout his life, which in turn made Lenin's support of him until 1914 a flat contradiction of Stalin's version of Leninism. That of course is why the view of Kautsky as a renegade was, and still is, clung to so pertinaciously.

² See annual comments in *Vorwärts* on 15 January, the date of Rosa Luxemburg's and Karl Liebknecht's murders.

1930s a group of left-wing Socialists formed an independent party (SAP—Socialist Workers' Party) which also claimed direct ancestry from Rosa Luxemburg. One of the prominent leaders of this party was Paul Frölich, editor of and expert on Rosa Luxemburg, himself evicted from the KPD for right-wing deviation in 1928.¹ Here was a rival claimant for specific Luxemburgist ancestry.² Whatever the errors of Luxemburgism, when it came to a question of linear descent, Thälmann and the leaders of the KPD wanted to make it clear that in spite of all criticism Rosa Luxemburg belonged to the senior branch of orthodox revolutionary Marxism. Such a claim had been clearly authorized by the Russian 'adjudicators' in the Sauerland affair. Once more and for the last time Rosa Luxemburg herself, her personality, her career, and her martyrdom, were separated from the whole indigestible problem of Luxemburgism. The confusion caused by Sauerland—and of course by Stalin himself—was authoritatively resolved at last. Ruthless confrontation with Luxemburgism would henceforth be combined with the enthusiastic acceptance of Rosa Luxemburg herself. Ernst Thälmann devoted a substantial part of his speech to the full session of the Central Committee of the party in February 1932 to this problem. Even though the legal KPD was to have less than twelve months of existence in Germany, the apostolic tradition of the party was still a matter of first importance.

We have to speak absolutely clearly: in all those questions in which Rosa Luxemburg differed from Lenin she was wrong . . . [moreover] it is impossible to justify Rosa Luxemburg's mistakes by reference to the objective circumstances in Germany before the war. . . .

[But] we have not the slightest intention of lowering the importance of Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Franz Mehring and the other comrades who formed the left wing of pre-war Social Democracy. We have not the slightest intention of denying the importance of these truly revolutionary fighters and leaders, and their fine revolutionary tradition,

¹ Frölich was one of the most tenacious political activists. After his expulsion from the KPD in 1928 he was one of the leaders of the so-called Communist Party Opposition (KPO), which he left in 1932 to join the SAP. This minute group still continued to be active in France from 1934–1939. From 1950–1953 he led a somewhat uneasy and certainly marginal existence in the post-war SPD.

² The first historical claim for Rosa Luxemburg as ancestor of a specifically western, anti-Bolshevik, revolutionary Marxism was probably staked by Arthur Rosenberg, an ex-Communist himself and the most perceptive contemporary historian of the Weimar Republic and of Bolshevism itself (*Geschichte des Bolschewismus von Marx bis zur Gegenwart*, Berlin 1932).

or of leaving them to the Social Democrats and other desecrators. Rosa Luxemburg and the rest belong to us.¹

After this the problem of Luxemburgism officially ceased to be a clear and present danger. It had little relevance to the conditions of hazardous clandestine activity during the Third Reich, or to the emigration and purges in Russia during the late thirties. The problem of deviation was drowned in the wholesale slaughter of the old German and Polish leadership. Only when the war was over, and the KPD crept into power in the wake of Russian arms, did it open its Pandora's box of old problems once more.

The creation of the Socialist Unity Party in Germany at the end of 1946, out of 'progressive' elements of the SPD and the surviving Communists, raised the sensitive questions of deviation and social relationships in a very practical form. Germany was divided in two. The West German SPD, a reformist party in a bourgeois state, confronted the ruling SED in the East with the same venom and the same problems as in the 1920s and early 1930s. Though the division was now geographical, the old phraseology of intra-national class conflict was refurbished as good as new.

Both in Poland and East Germany the memory of Rosa Luxemburg was honoured with all the respect due to distinguished and martyred forebears. Streets and squares were named after her, several schools, and—in Poland—a large electronics factory. But matters did not rest with ritual honours. The struggle against the 'old' Germany continued across the dividing line created by the allied military occupation. In Communist terminology it was the German version of July 1917 over again—the longest July in the history of the world. All that had changed since then was that German imperialism was no longer an autonomous pillar of strength but merely an outpost of the new American imperialism. The analogy of conditions was carried to the extent that America's role in the destruction of the German revolution in 1918 was examined afresh and suddenly found to have been substantial; it was anyhow easier to relate past to present if conditions were postulated as being as nearly as possible identical.²

¹ Speech to full session of the Central Committee of KPD, 19 February 1932, reprinted in *Der revolutionäre Ausweg und die KPD*, Berlin 1932, pp. 71, 94.

² See A. E. Kunina, *Proval amerikanskikh planov zavoevaniya mirovogo gospodstva v 1917-1920 godakh* ('The collapse of American plans for world conquest in the years 1917-1920'), Moscow 1951—promptly translated into German the same year.

In 1951 a selection of Rosa Luxemburg's work was published at long last, with careful annotations underlining her errors.¹ Almost at the same time a critical biography, carrying the seal of the party's approval, was written by a senior member of the establishment.² Here for the first time was a specific and full-length analysis of the Luxemburgist system of errors—still treated of course as a system. The thesis of choices—up or down from a given stage of development—had survived. Luxemburgism had been in small part due to historical circumstances, in greater part to intellectual failure and perversity. Oelssner made a double contrast: Lenin and Luxemburg; Leninism and Luxemburgism. In the process Luxemburgism regained much of its specificity; it was no longer simply a synonym for Trotskyism, Menshevism, etc. More than this, the 'pairing'—though still adumbrated—became a matter of positive analysis and not merely assertion; subjective according to content and not just objective by the coincidence of deviation. But Oelssner followed Thälmann eighteen years earlier in distinguishing between Rosa Luxemburg's life and actions on the one hand and her writings on the other—as though these two led in different directions. The new generation of Socialists had to absorb both Luxemburg and Luxemburgism according to their merits—the one as a shining example, the other as a false doctrine related to but not justified by a particular period of the past; in any case worthy of critical study. The danger of Luxemburgism as a present force hardly seemed to exist.³ The worst that could now be feared was misunderstanding and over-valuation.

The younger generation of Socialist voters knows the name of this outstanding workers' leader, but not her life and works. It is therefore an unavoidable duty to transmit this knowledge to the masses. Of course there can be no question of 'only speaking well of the dead' in accor-

¹ Rosa Luxemburg, *Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften*, Berlin (East) 1951, 2 volumes.

² Fred Oelssner, *Rosa Luxemburg, Eine kritische biographische Skizze*, Berlin (East) 1951. The first edition came out before Kunina's book. In the introduction to the second edition (March 1952) the author wrote that in the meantime the 'superb book of the Soviet historian A. E. Kunina appeared. . . . These new facts make it necessary to incorporate the international connection of the events described.' The third edition of the book appeared in 1956 but it has since become too 'Stalinist' and has lapsed into obscurity. Compare the contemporary review by Paul Frölich, 'How the SED honours Rosa Luxemburg', *Der Kochel-Brief*, Munich, January/February 1953, Vol. IV, Nos. 1-2.

³ The official thesis was that Luxemburgism as a political factor had been effectually eradicated by Thälmann. Hermann Matern, 'The policy of the KPD and SPD during the Weimar Republic', *Forum* (Scientific Supplement), 15 September 1952.

dance with petit-bourgeois habits. Our duty is to present the historical significance of people in their objective reality, to enable the struggling generation of today to learn the correct lessons. . . . Great as Rosa Luxemburg's merits in the German workers' movement were, deeply as we bow down in tribute before her life of struggle, much as we love Rosa on account of her ruthless struggle for the cause of the workers, none the less we must never forget how great were her mistakes which led the German working class into error. Above all we must not lose sight of the fact that this [Luxemburgism] is not a matter of individual errors but of a whole system of wrong conceptions.¹

Much historical material has since been published in East Germany. Though the problem of Luxemburgism itself is no longer one of contemporary deviations, the interpretation of party history is still considered a narrowly accurate guide to ideological correctness. Thus, while no one is likely to be accused of Luxemburgism today, any historical over-valuation of Luxemburgism or spontaneity is likely to be indicted as opportunism or revisionism—both still serious crimes leading to expulsion. In being relegated to history, Luxemburgism has been finally encapsulated within the Communist tradition, a once serious *internal* deviation on which the books have now been closed. Revisionism, however, is not internal; it is an invasion of orthodox Marxist territory by the *foreign* agents of bourgeois philosophy. In Germany, divided and ideologically at war, the danger of such an intellectual fifth column is still felt to be acute; in the German Democratic Republic this leads to an ideological rigidity far stiffer than in other Socialist countries. In Rosa Luxemburg's own words, the extreme opportunism in Western Germany results in a corresponding rigidity among revolutionary Marxists.

Nevertheless, the post-Stalin thaw has had its effects. In Poland particularly the discussion of Rosa Luxemburg's role and views in 1956 simply ignored thirty years of Stalinist prohibitions—though the full freedom of 1956 has not yet been achieved again.² In addition, documentary material and objective analysis has been pouring out from the pens of a devoted group of Polish historians in Warsaw. Even in Russia, Rosa Luxemburg has recently become a proper subject of study. Snippets of her writings on revisionism and the

¹ Oelssner, *Rosa Luxemburg*, pp. 7–8.

² See the debate between Roman Werfel and Julian Hochfeld in *Po Prostu*, 17 February, 3 March, 24 March 1957, reprinted in Adam Ciołkosz (ed.), *Róża Luksemburg a rewolucja rosyjska*, Paris 1961, pp. 233–56. For a critical commentary on the debate, see Introduction, pp. 7–183. The latest official evalu-

mass strike have appeared, and a collection of her comments on literature.¹

In the German Democratic Republic, however, new questions have recently been asked, or very old ones reconsidered. Among these is the whole problem of the SPD before the First World War and its attitude to the war itself. The 1931 excesses of Stalinist misinterpretation have partly been corrected—a function of the demolition of Stalin's own political role. With care and perception it is possible to use chronology in reverse: the state of present official opinion on these questions corresponds to that of the KPD before 1928, before the Stalinist diversion. Though the answers on the whole are still orthodox, the very fact that these questions have been raised at all is in itself significant. Thus Kuczynski, a distinguished economic historian, in his own work on pre-war Social Democracy put forward the thesis that the betrayal of the masses by the leaders was to some extent a myth; the masses (regrettably) tumbled into chauvinistic support for the war largely of their own volition.² For this Kuczynski was severely taken to task; but again the very fact that he published his analysis at all is more reminiscent of the circumstances of 1926, when Radek wrote his version of these events, than of anything published in the twenty years after 1931.³ Behind this particular issue lurks the very *purpose* of

ation of the SDKPiL's historical role is in *Nowe Drogi*, 7(110), July 1963, pp. 25–36. As an ancestor of Communism, the SDKPiL fares far better than the *Spartakusbund*, and the whole discussion is much less stereotyped and narrow. Thus the SDKPiL is criticized for *underrating* the PPS-Left (p. 34), while the *Spartakusbund* if anything is said by German historians not to have dealt with the centrists harshly enough!

¹ R. *Luksemburg o literaturze* (Rosa Luxemburg on literature), edited and introduced by M. Korallova, Moscow 1961.

Recent Russian writing on pre-war German Socialism has very little new or interesting to offer. The subject seems to be reserved for hacks. Rosa Luxemburg should have insisted on the expulsion of Bernstein in 1899—the old revisionist controversy will certainly march on for ever (B. A. Chagin, *Borba marksizma-leninizma protiv filosofskogo revisionizma v kontse XIX—nachale XX vekov*, Leningrad 1959, p. 156). *Spartakus* too is still censured for its un-Bolshevik and anti-Bolshevik attitudes (Z. K. Eggert, *Borba klassov i partii v Germanii v gody pervoi mirovoi voiny avgust 1914-oktyabr 1917*, Moscow 1957, pp. 408 ff.). But there is no life in it any more.

² Jürgen Kuczynski, *Der Ausbruch des ersten Weltkrieges und die deutsche Sozialdemokratie. Chronik und Analyse*. Publications of the Institut für Geschichte, Series 1, General and German history, Vol. 4, Berlin (East) 1957.

³ As late as 1964 the official version was still that any claim of mass enthusiasm for the First World War, and any consequent reduction of the leaders' guilt, was probably inspired by—and only of benefit to—anti-Communist writers who 'worshipped' Social-Democratic reformism. See Walter Wittwer, *Streit um Schicksalsfragen*, Berlin (East) 1964.

writing labour history in the German Democratic Republic. Are German historians to solve problems in a spirit of objective analysis with only formal obeisance to the party 'line', or are 'the historians of the DDR exclusively to carry forward the great task of moving over to the ideological offensive in the permanent struggle with West German imperialism and militarism'?¹ It is not merely, as before, a question of a 'new line' against established orthodoxy, but partly a matter of personal ambition and institutional rivalry as well; that is why the apparent neo-Stalinists are represented as much by young men like Dieter Fricke as by the older generation of established party historians, and why particular institutions and university departments tend to follow a particular line. However exaggerated such a total mobilization of historians in the fight against West Germany might appear, the tense situation of two Germanys prevents and will continue to prevent the establishment of elbow room for historians with fewer political overtones—such as now visibly exists in Poland, in Czechoslovakia, and elsewhere. The motivation of East German ideology is still partly that of a bad conscience. History has obliged with the opportunity for a repeat performance; the 1918 struggle is being waged all over again. Consequently the treatment of labour history is *simultaneously* both historical and contemporary. The bad conscience about previous defeats—even the very loss of Marxist supremacy to the Russians—still keeps the temperature at a relatively high level. Any partial victory in the present struggle dialectically becomes a victory gained in and over the past.

We thus have in Germany as elsewhere the now standard form of anti-Stalinist revision. Sometimes this consists of individual trial balloons which meet or do not meet with the approval

¹ Dieter Fricke in *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 1959, Vol. VII, No. 3, p. 712. 'This deliberate re-creation of the past in terms of the present can also be seen in the way that lapses, betrayals, and deviations from Marxism are always treated as both final and yet recurring. We have seen earlier how long German liberalism was a-dying in the eyes of Rosa Luxemburg (above, pp. 214–15). The same dead-but-living schizophrenia can be documented in the Russian Communist attitude to the SPD. Having 'died' as a Marxist party in 1914 (if not in 1898), repeatedly between 1918 and 1933, and yet again with finality in 1946, it was nevertheless still capable of 'discarding all the elements of Marxism' as late as 1959. See V. G. Vasin, *Godesbergskaya programma SPDG—otkrytoe otrechenie ot marksizma* ('The Godesberg programme of the SPD—An open renunciation of Marxism'), Moscow, 1963. More generally see I. Viktorov, 'The Social Democratic Party of Germany', in *Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya* (1961), No. 8.

of the hierarchy.¹ At the same time, however—and particularly in the last two or three years—the official party historians have themselves been engaged on a collective and authorized revision of their own. The product of the need for an official guide to all these problems of history was the *Outline of the History of the German Working-Class Movement*, first published in 1962 and already twice revised. The importance of this document and its revisions can be seen by the fact that all the revision was submitted for approval to the full meeting of the Central Committee of the SED.²

Here the position of Rosa Luxemburg as the intellectual leader of the German Left is re-established.³ Her system still has its errors; as long as Leninism continues to exist and represent the correct adaptation of Marxism in the era of imperialism, Rosa Luxemburg will always remain subordinate and, since she was a contemporary and not a predecessor of Lenin, in error. But the distinctive contribution of the German Left in its unending struggle against opportunism is being increasingly acknowledged. From this follows the acknowledgement of the German Left as the ancestors of German Communism, to which Leninism supplied an organizational and theoretical corrective, though no longer the original spark of life. There are difficulties here too. The new pre-occupation with Bebel makes the conflicts between Bebel and the German Left at the end of his life difficult to explain satisfactorily.⁴ In part the explanation is the legitimate though un-Marxist one of the great leader's senility; but since the elevation of one neces-

¹ Compare the case of Professor Havemann in 1964 with that of Galileo; the question of 'truth' is subsumed by that of order and stability—and by that of ways and means.

² *Grundriss der Geschichte der Deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, first published in *Einheit*, Vol. 17, special number August 1962, pp. 58–186; first edition in book form 1963, second edition with alterations also 1963.

³ Cf. the relatively superior role allocated to Karl Liebknecht as late as 1959 (*Gründung der KPD*, Protokoll der Wissenschaftlichen Tagung . . . 22/23 Januar 1959, Berlin (East) 1959) with Ulbricht's deliberate warning against excessive down-grading of Rosa Luxemburg (*Einheit*, September 1962, the p. 38).

⁴ This situation has partly led to a favourable revaluation of Bebel and his particular contribution. Here was someone whose statements were impeccably radical (anti-opportunist). At the same time, and unlike the German Left, Bebel had coped admirably with the vital problem of organization—if not in a Leninist sense, at least in a sense that recognized the importance of the problem, and that bears some resemblance to the functional bureaucracy of ruling parties today. Over-emphasis of this merit could of course lead to a confrontation between SPD organization and revolutionary Bolshevik organization—still out of the question; hence the approval of Bebel is personal and diffuse rather than systematic and specific. The way to avoid commitment is to publish not a Marxist work on Bebel and 'Bebelism' but a popular and purely

sarily diminishes the other, an awkward either/or remains. As recently as 1958 a distinguished survivor complained publicly that the Bebel cult was once more in real danger of subsuming the officially admitted role of the German Left. In a recent official publication there had been 'a page and a half for Bernstein, Hilferding and Kautsky but not a line for the German Left. . . . Not one line to show that there was a German Left and not only right-wing Socialism. . . . We must acknowledge the great struggle of the German Left against opportunism, and particularly that of Rosa Luxemburg. . . . It is my heartfelt wish to recall the most wonderful period of my life when as a young man I knew and worked with Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht and Franz Mehring.'¹ As long as these old men survived, Rosa Luxemburg had her personal defenders. Duncker even called for a new edition of her works, particularly *Social Reform or Revolution*.²

Problems remain, alive and unresolved. Future revisions of history can only help to justify Rosa Luxemburg still further, if not perhaps in her specific confrontations with Lenin, at least in her general attitudes. The whole notion of a spontaneity theory on which the concept of Luxemburgism is based is now (1964-5) under agonizing reappraisal and may soon be officially denounced as a slander. If so, Luxemburgism as a *system* of errors will collapse. We shall be back in 1922. Either Rosa Luxemburg will be presented as a Leninist with minor and unimportant deviations, or possibly—though less probably—the old heretical thesis that there were after all specific German conditions different from those of Russia may yet get official sanction. Perhaps it is

personal biography. (See *August Bebel, Eine Biographie*, Berlin (East) 1963. 'This is the first Marxist biography to appear in Germany. It does justice to the activities of the great German labour leader, August Bebel, the founder of the party and leader of the Social Democracy which emerged victorious from the struggle against the anti-Socialist laws. He remained to his death a loyal proletarian revolutionary.'))

The Bebel cult is incidentally also a distinct revision of Stalinist history—though in this case at the expense of Rosa Luxemburg. For whatever the systematic faults of Luxemburgism, Rosa herself 'unmasked the chauvinistic tendencies in the central leadership of the SPD' (Martynow, *Kommunistische Internationale*, No. 2 (1933), p. 116). Bebel is specifically mentioned as one of the culprits in this connection.

¹ Hermann Duncker, speech at conference at Martin Luther University, 9-10 December 1957, reprinted in *Einführungen in den Marxismus*, Vol. I, Berlin (East) 1958, pp. 350-1, 357-8.

² In fact only two recent, rather limited, collections have appeared: *Rosa Luxemburg im Kampfe gegen den Militarismus*, Berlin (East) 1960; *Ich war, Ich bin, Ich werde sein*, Berlin (East) 1958.

useless to speculate further. No one can say how far the problems of the Lenin-Luxemburg controversies—or anyone else's controversies with Lenin—will ever be genuinely re-examined.

But Rosa Luxemburg is not merely the unquiet spirit which possessed German Communists. Unlike 'Trotskyism, there is no formal Luxemburgist discipline in opposition to Communist 'orthodoxy'. No organized sect, however small, bears her name. But this testifies to her importance, not to any lack of it: even without formal acknowledgement many of those who adhere to revolutionary Marxism, yet reject the strait-jacket of a Communist movement that could produce a Stalin as well as the sectarian disputations of the Trotskyites, look to Rosa Luxemburg's work for inspiration. Her influence extends beyond Marxism. No uncommitted student of political thought can afford to ignore a corpus of ideas which combines without equal a complete loyalty to dialectical materialism with absolute insistence on the humanistic and self-liberating aspects of revolutionary democracy. Those who believe that the discipline of change and improvement must be largely self-imposed, that the modern industrial economy of the West is at once the harshest prison for the human spirit and the only key to its liberation; those in short who hold that the revolutionary steps to progress must lead directly from highly developed capitalism to Socialism without the historically retrograde control by a small élite which serves progress in relatively backward societies, will all find no better guide or inspiration than the life and work of Rosa Luxemburg. 'This is no outright denial of Communist achievements. 'The present changes in Russia which have partially dismantled Stalinism may well erode some of the presumptions that gave it birth. Just as Rosa reconnected directly to Marx in 1918, so the Russian leaders or Mao and their successors may one day reconnect to an early or even pre-Leninist conception in which the *process* as well as the *product* of Socialism is functionally related to the emancipation of humanity—with humanity that is is not merely a collective abstraction but the sum of the participating individuals. 'This problem exists everywhere in all societies. Rosa Luxemburg's actual solutions may have been utopian. But if the validity of the European experience and its acceptance as a means to further progress are to be maintained, then her over-all contribution is highly relevant.

APPENDIX I

ROSA LUXEMBURG AS AN ECONOMIST

ROSA LUXEMBURG always said that, in so far as her talent lay in the field of the social sciences, it was in economics—and in mathematical economics at that. Mathematics may have been her *violon d'Ingres*—the thing at which she would rather have excelled than those in which she was in fact outstanding. It is quite a common nostalgia. The only evidence for her mathematical claim or wish are the recalculations of Marx's not very complicated compound reproduction formulae in Volume II of *Capital*. And here her calculations are capable both of fairly obvious refinement as well as fairly obvious contradiction.¹ But what is probably true is that the thin end of the wedge of her interest in the problem of accumulation, which gave rise to her remarkable book *The Accumulation of Capital*, was the mathematical difficulty Marx experienced in the 'proof' of accumulation, and which he left unresolved at his death.

Rosa Luxemburg's main talent as a writer and, above all, teacher of economics—the latter was the more important and enduring function—was her capacity to enliven the subject with vivid, unusual, and convincing illustrations. Her textbook on economics—political economy, to use the Marxist phrase for the specific economics of capitalism—was essentially a conducted tour through the historical stages of economic relations, from primitive Communism via the slave economy to feudalism and capitalism. As her friend and editor pointed out, these were lectures, written for oral delivery.² They were incomplete; Rosa worked on the manuscript from 1907 to 1912, and again in prison from 1916 to 1918. They were intentionally simple; the fact that most of the theoretical problems (value, surplus value, reproduction) are missing may have been due to her inability to complete the manuscript, but more probably to her reluctance to complicate her lectures with material

¹ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. II (Chicago 1907), especially Chapter 21, pp. 598 ff. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, London 1951, pp. 125 ff. For refinement, see Joan Robinson's introduction to this edition, p. 18; for contradiction, see, e.g., Tony Cliff, *Rosa Luxemburg*, London 1959, pp. 81 ff.

² Rosa Luxemburg, *Einführung in die Nationalökonomie*, Berlin 1925, edited by Paul Levi, Introduction, p. v.

partially dealt with in *The Accumulation of Capital*.¹ Whatever her preference for mathematical analysis, therefore, she was essentially an economic historian—naturally in a Marxist sense; her facts were chosen to illustrate a fundamental thesis. The fact that she, and in her time she alone, succeeded in enlivening this potentially grey subject is eloquently attested by her students at the party school, and by the many extramural lectures for which friends and party organizations were for ever pestering her before the war. Nor was clarity and strong colouring merely a mastered technique. One of the strongest points in her indictment of orthodox academic economics was its dryness, its obscurantism, its persistence in making an important and thrilling subject well-nigh incomprehensible—except to other professors.²

It is thus not surprising that Rosa Luxemburg's only piece of original academic research—in the formal sense of the term—was also a piece of economic history. Her doctoral dissertation for the University of Zürich not only gained her the required award of a degree but also achieved the much less usual distinction of instant commercial publication.³ It was widely reviewed in Germany, as well as in the Polish and Russian émigré press. Its originality lay in two distinct factors. Its thesis—a new one at the time—was Poland's economic integration into the Russian empire since the beginning of the century, resulting in the dependence of the Polish economy on the Russian market, and consequently the logical necessity of this continued integration. Though rigorously dependent on economic evidence, this thesis provided a secure base for the political contest against Polish national independence in the future. Those Socialists who argued for self-determination—no Socialist could play down the primacy of economic evidence—were thus left with arguments that might proliferate frothily on the surface of reality but had no roots in its economic laws. Try as they might, none of her critics was able to demolish her case.⁴ And history, too, proved her right, as the situation of the Polish economy between the wars showed all too clearly; chronic under-consumption and an oversized, unbalanced industry that tottered at the slightest whiff of crisis—with a *laissez-mourir*, not even a *laissez-faire*, government in charge.

¹ It is also possible that such notes as she made on this subject—if any—were destroyed when soldiers ransacked her flat and destroyed her papers in January 1919.

² *Nationalökonomie*, pp. 2 ff. Compare the similar accusation against the entire front rank of nineteenth-century economists in *Accumulation*, Section II.

³ *Die industrielle Entwicklung Polens*, Leipzig 1898.

⁴ The most serious attempt at refutation was Res (Feliks Perl), *Kwestia polska w oświeceniu 'Socjaldemokracji' polskiej* (The Polish question as illuminated by Polish 'Social Democracy'), Cracow 1907. See also above, p. 173, note 2. Since the two versions of Polish industrial development—autonomous or integrally Russian—followed political lines, and acceptance of one or the other still follows them today, I must add that my own general preference for the validity of Rosa Luxemburg's thesis is based on what I hold to be the more correct interpretation of economic facts—not on any political alignment.

The other original aspect of her work was her sources. In the West no one had previously bothered with these (and Polish émigrés were far too politically minded for economics). At home it was not a subject that was encouraged at Russian universities. In the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Czartoryski Library in Paris Rosa dug up hitherto unknown material, and the use to which she put it opened up new lines of investigation into Polish and Russian economic history. Historians can and still do use her work with profit today. In addition, her early researches in 1893 and 1894 unearthed enough material not only for her own thesis, but for Julian Marchlewski's as well; his dissertation on the Polish Physiocrats and subsequent work on the Polish economy were largely due to Rosa's suggestion and indication of sources.¹

But all Marxists have to know a lot of economics; had it not been for *Accumulation*, Rosa Luxemburg's work would have remained merely a better and brighter-than-most dab at economic history. *The Accumulation of Capital* is a compound work of incidental genius—incidental because it achieved fame and importance in quite a different way from that which the author intended. It was intended to 'clarify' imperialism—but it did not; no more than the theory of relativity 'explains' light (which Einstein did not of course intend it to). It was intended to solve compound reproduction mathematically, but did not succeed—though Rosa Luxemburg admitted that this was not perhaps as vital as she had at first supposed.² Finally, it was meant to provide a rational (as well as logical) explanation of capitalist expansion in spite of the severely limiting parameters of Marxist economics, and at the same time identify the theoretical point of inevitable collapse—and though she did provide this, her analysis failed to find favour among contemporary or later economists, whether bourgeois or Communist. Instead it raised and partially answered a question about investment that was entirely new then and is still vital today. Instead of a tenable theory of imperialism Rosa Luxemburg offered a theory of growth which at least some economists today hold to be vital and valid. Her political heirs have relegated the work to the museum of primitive curiosities and have misused her economics to condemn her politically.³ It is her ancient enemies, on the other hand—the professional bourgeois economists, dressed up with much sophistication and technique since the days of Roscher, Schmoller, and Sombart—who have rediscovered the prophetic quality in her line of economic inquiry.

The mathematics are of secondary importance, and need not be discussed here.⁴ Nor do we have to pass judgement on how 'Marxist'

¹ The story is Warszawski's. See above, p. 106, note 4.

² *Accumulation*, p. 119.

³ See above, pp. 532–6.

⁴ For a discussion see Tony Cliff, *Rosa Luxemburg*, pp. 75–85. For other criticisms of technique, see N. Bukharin, *Der Imperialismus und die Akkumulation des Kapitals*; also Fritz Sternberg, *Der Imperialismus*, Berlin 1926.

a work Rosa Luxemburg's *Accumulation* really is. I would not presume to judge this *in vacuo*; an analysis by way of reference to later authorities is so politically loaded as to subsume the economic arguments completely. We are therefore left, first, with a confrontation of Rosa Luxemburg's intention against her achievement, and secondly with the incidental illuminations. I shall postulate neutrality between Marxist and non-Marxist methods of economic analysis, except to emphasize that Rosa's problems with Marx's own works were not merely technical, but fundamental.

Accumulation

In Marxist analysis of the capitalist economy, production is the primary function, and predominates over consumption and its derivative, demand. Distribution problems are of a technical nature only, and the proper functioning of distribution is assumed (concepts and assumptions which incidentally have been taken over into Soviet economies which in turn are actually rationalized capitalism but without capitalist criteria). Apart from the temporary dislocation caused by crises of boom and slump—from which Rosa Luxemburg deliberately abstracts—all production starts by being 'consumed', either literally by consumers, or as replacement of fixed capital by producers, or by the re-investment of profits. As long as total production—annual national income, say—is 'consumed' in this way, and the stock of capital remains constant (investment just equals replacement), the economy remains in equilibrium. This is Marx's simple reproduction.

It is only a conceptual basis, however. Production dominates, not consumption; the *point* of capitalist enterprise is the maximization of profit—for reinvestment and further maximization. The stock of capital grows. The central point of Marxist economic analysis is that consumer incomes do not rise proportionately (the iron law of wages); it is the producer who has to absorb the bulk of the increased output as replacement of or addition to his fixed capital. The Marxist model in fact divides the economy into two departments, that of producer's goods and that of consumer goods. The one thus grows faster than the other. Since they are related (consumer goods produced for workers in producer's goods industries, producer's goods produced for the capitalists in consumer goods industries), disequilibrium results. Worse, it is progressive, not circular; it gets worse as accumulation proceeds. Accumulation proportionate to investment is consequently impossible, yet it happens—demonstrably. Accumulation is the capitalist's *raison d'être*, but why does he invest in the first place?

This then was Rosa Luxemburg's problem, as it had been Marx's—one of them. Before his death he had indicated various possible

approaches, but no definite or central solution. Initially the mathematics come in here. But neither for Marx nor Rosa Luxemburg was this a question of mere mathematical elegance. What was needed was a function of demand which would furnish, not the need, but the effective means of 'consuming' the cause of the imbalance, the additional output generated by the compulsive quest for profit.¹

To start with, Rosa Luxemburg examined the various possibilities adumbrated by Marx himself.² The most probable one, however, is referred to only in passing, as part of the problem itself and not of its solution.³ This is the thesis that the investment criterion is not the starting point of economic causality, but is a derived function of production—derived by that anarchic competition that enforces perpetual technical change, improvement, and *expansion* (to reduce unit cost). Without it a capitalist is forced quickly out of business—and joins the haggard army of the proletariat. Thus profits are still the object of capitalist activity, not by any act of will but from sheer necessity. It is either profits or economic death. Orthodox Marxist economists, both Soviet and anti-Soviet, have accepted this causality, and have developed it into a sophisticated rationality that serves to explain the entire process of capitalist growth.⁴

Why did Rosa Luxemburg bypass this solution, which became and has remained the mainstream of Marxist orthodoxy? For her, it never rises above the level of being a minor constituent part of the problem, an also-ran in the cause of competition and anarchy. Nor is it peculiar to the capitalist system, but has existed in all forms of productive relations from first to last.⁵ But if this is so, then it cannot begin to provide a solution to the specific problem of capitalist accumulation. Technological change and economies of scale were merely *additional* complications imposed by real life.

Having searched in Marx, Rosa Luxemburg then looked at the Marxists—or rather at all the important economists from Sismondi and Ricardo to the Russian 'legal' Marxists who were concerned with this problem. In the process of extracting what was relevant they were unceremoniously buffeted about, called to account and then contemptuously dismissed—for none of them provided the answer. It is clear that

¹ This analysis of the problem is admittedly over-simple. For a more detailed and rigorous one, see Joan Robinson's introduction to *Accumulation*, pp. 14–19.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 139–55.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁴ Naturally in terms of production and consequent consumption, not in terms of growing *per capita* consumption or real wages, either relative or absolute. This is, of course, the central difficulty of reconciling such analysis with the absolute historical growth in real wages in developed countries over the last decades—with the rate of growth apparently rising.

⁵ *Accumulation*, pp. 40–41.

Rosa never expected that they would.¹ She was much less than fair to many of their ideas. For she thought she had the answer even before she started on them.

The balancing factor is the existence of pre-capitalist economics—and the pre-capitalist enclaves within capitalist economies, mainly agricultural. It is the ‘capitalization’ of these areas which provides the justified growth drive of capitalists, the expectation of growing profits and continuous investment. The process, and with it the entire capitalist system, can continue just as long as such areas exist. When they have been gobbled up, capitalism will have to rely on its internal resources, accumulation will become self-defeating, capitalism will collapse. Voluntary abstention is impossible by definition; those writers like von Kirchmann who appeared to suggest it are berated most severely by Rosa Luxemburg.

Rosa Luxemburg asserts this solution and describes it—convincingly; she does not prove it in the way she disproves the theories of her opponents.² This does not of course invalidate it. Capitalist consumption goods go out to pay for ‘cheap’ raw materials from colonies. Capital is also exported to exploit ‘cheap’ labour. The process was then and is now familiar enough—the classic indictment of imperialism, before and since political independence (old *political* as opposed to new *economic* imperialism). The question is whether this is a *feature* of capitalism or the mainspring of its continued existence. And this problem remains open. But curiously enough it remains open only in the non-Communist world, among politicians as well as academic economists.³ At least it is

¹ Ibid., pp. 173–329.

² Ibid., pp. 348–454.

³ See J. R. Hicks, *Value and Capital*, 2nd. ed., Oxford 1948, p. 302, quoted in Introduction, p. 28. An interesting variant of the analysis of foreign capitalist penetration of backward societies is to treat the functional coexistence of a primitive economy and a foreign enclave of technologically advanced capitalism (generally in extractive industries like oil or plantations) as *the* definition of underdevelopment. This view shifts the centre of attention from the [economic] colonizer to the colonized; underdevelopment is thus defined in terms of such coexistence and analytically distinguished from western pre-industrial economics in the eighteenth century. *By itself* imperialism does not therefore lead to any capitalistic transformation of colonies; this requires special policies of economic accommodation and adjustment between the primitive and the foreign capitalist sectors in underdeveloped societies—by specific adjustment of the indigenous secondary industrial sectors catering for the consumption demands of the foreign enclaves. See Celso Furtado, *Development and Underdevelopment*, Berkeley (California) 1964, pp. 129–40. This thesis finds unexpected confirmation in modern Soviet analysis. ‘It cannot be denied that the development [of the Venezuelan petroleum industry] has exerted a definite influence in undermining the old, semi-feudal relationships in the country. But this “progressive” role . . . is performed only to the extent that is convenient and necessary for the imperialist companies to intensify the extraction of oil . . . they get along peacefully with the landlord-latifundists, from whom they rent a large amount of land. For this reason, the petroleum sector in the Venezuelan economy . . . has even “immortalized” the decay of the backward economic structure of the

an arguable case. Among orthodox Marxists, however, the thesis is a manifestation not the cause, and the reasons for this demotion are in the last resort more political than economic.¹

country.' A. Shulgovskii, 'Imperialism and the Ideology of National Reformism in Latin America', *Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya*, 1961, No. 8, pp. 48-49.

¹ See above, pp. 531-6. Rosa Luxemburg's analysis of accumulation met severe economic criticism at the time and later. This can be divided into three categories:

(i) *Technical*. It was not difficult to find contradictions in her argument, as well as lacunae. See the review of *Accumulation* by G. Eckstein in *Vorwärts*, 16 February 1913; also F. Sternberg, *Der Imperialismus*, Berlin 1926, especially pp. 100 ff. Bukharin's essay, 'Der Imperialismus und die Akkumulation des Kapitals' in *Unter dem Banner des Marxismus*, Vienna/Berlin 1925/1926, Vol. I, is a systematic attempt to demolish Rosa's thesis, both conceptually and technically.

(ii) *Conceptual*. A number of writers refused to accept the central analysis of the capitalist dilemma, among them primarily Lenin (*Leninskii Sbornik*, Vol. XXII). Bukharin expanded Lenin's brief comments in his articles. Some misunderstood or misrepresented her basic argument. See Otto Bauer in *Neue Zeit*, 1912/1913, Vol. II, pp. 871 ff. It was to answer these 'fundamental' critics that Rosa rewrote her main arguments in simpler language and more popular form in prison during 1915 (*Die Akkumulation des Kapitals oder was die Epigonen aus der Marxschen Theorie gemacht haben. Eine Antikritik*, Leipzig 1921).

For a modern criticism of Rosa Luxemburg's central thesis, see Paul Sweezy, *The Theory of Capitalist Development*, New York 1942, Chapter XI, pp. 202-7. This, however, is based not so much on disagreement as on failure or refusal to follow Rosa's argument, and presents the latter not as fallacious but as nonsense.

(iii) *Personal*. The notion that a middle-aged woman, clever but not uncontroversial, should (yet again) set out to amend and correct Marx gave widespread offence, especially to experts like Kautsky and Plekhanov. The following cynically amused but not really hostile letter captures this feeling very well. Ryazanov was a clever and courageous Marxist scholar, outside the factional alignments within the RSDRP at the time, and a political supporter of Jogiches' 'conciliation' within the Russian party.

'Many thanks for Rosa's book. I have only read the introduction so far. I was stunned and amazed. Such devilish speed, with which she produces a book like this, can only amaze a ponderous man like myself.

'The Reichstag elections finished—Summer 1912. Rosa suddenly remembers that she owes Brutus [Molkenbuhr] a book. Sits down—February 1912—and throws together a popular introduction—she gets stuck in the middle (*Einführung in die Nationalökonomie*) suddenly—March or April 1912—*ni tpru, ni ku* as the Russians say. It turns out that Marx is responsible. The old man died too soon and left a few things unsolved or badly solved. So Rosa has to dash off to her cauldron and brew up some new solutions. *Aus fünf und sechs so sagt die Hex mach sieben und acht so ist's vollbracht*. Then—May 1912—the brew is ready. Gets hold of Brutus again, alters the contract and delivers a completely new manuscript; the epitome of science which has hitherto been hidden from the whole world. And in December 1912 the preface signed and finished! Oh, fairest muse!

'Read the preface of the distinguished Moscs Hess. The comparison is, as Baedeker puts it, "worthwhile". Really, if one can reach such heights of *mania grandiosa litteraria* then a cool shower is the only solution.'

D. Ryazanov (Goldenbakh) to Luise Kautsky, 1913, IISH Archives, D XIX, 217. The letter is an extraordinary hotch-potch of different languages and very typical of Ryazanov's incisive style. The chronology is obviously incorrect. The reference to Brutus Molkenbuhr is due to his post as an editor of *Vorwärts* which had its own publishing house of which Molkenbuhr was a director. This firm was to have published Rosa's economics lectures given in the party school.

Imperialism

The only explicit *political* analysis in *The Accumulation of Capital* is the last chapter, which purports to prove the *economic* necessity of militarism—but fails to do so. By this time, the internal logic and beauty of Rosa's analysis made her overreach herself; it began to run wild.¹ But of course imperialism is the necessary consequence of Rosa's whole concept of capitalist accumulation. If one capitalist economy must capture and cannibalize pre-capitalist society in order to survive, then the other capitalist economies must be kept out of 'captured' areas. The whole apparatus of militarism, the sharpened social tensions that were so typical of it, thus had two causes: the need to wrest colonies from their indigenous rulers, and then to keep and if possible extend them at the expense of other people's colonies. As a matter of logical causality, imperialism follows from the moment the problem of accumulation is identified and 'solved' by Rosa Luxemburg.

As already emphasized, the whole political and historical development of imperialism as a specific internal condition of society is absent from the analysis in *The Accumulation of Capital*—implied but not described. In Rosa Luxemburg's political writings of the period it is the effects of imperialism on class relations that are stressed—again not described; the essence of imperialism, *das Ding an sich*, is absent—the missing step already referred to.² This leaves an apparent vacuum for followers and critics to fill in as seems best to them. Lenin, at the time unaware of her political writings on this subject, assumed that for psychological reasons Rosa wanted to exorcise the problem of imperialism from home and export it to the colonies, thus belittling its importance among the manifold preoccupations of Social Democracy. This notion is nonsense—though a hostile and isolated reading of *The Accumulation of Capital* makes it conceivable. If anything the opposite is true. Though the location of capitalism's centre of gravity moves to pre-capitalist societies or areas, at least from the theoretical moment of internal repletion of imperialist societies, these are never anything but passive objects. They can neither arrest nor alter the process of their own transformation. The stimulus comes wholly from the colonizers,

¹ Chapter xxxii, p. 454 ff.

² See above, p. 532. Were it not for Rosa Luxemburg's contempt for Kant, his technique as much as his admirers, I would be tempted to deduce from her avoidance of all 'essential' discussion of imperialism a rigid adherence to the Kantian methodological postulate that *das Ding an sich* cannot be described—one of its peculiar features. This has nothing to do with occasional Communist criticism, especially in the 1930s, of the pre-war German Left as infected by neo-Kantianism; a 'formal' method of indicting idealism and 'insufficient' dialectic materialism.

the imperialists.¹ And though Rosa Luxemburg shared with Lenin the recognition of a need for *political* action to hasten the end of capitalism through revolution, she was much closer to the Mensheviks and Kautsky in her belief that the economic laws of capitalism should not be short-circuited, much less held up. Hence her emphasis on the inevitability of capitalist agrarian relations after the 1905 revolution (which she considered progressive, while Lenin feared they would make revolution in Russia well-nigh impossible). The same reasoning applied to her consistent opposition to tariffs and duties in Germany; these would impede, not assist, full capitalist development.²

As with the Russian peasants, Rosa Luxemburg had no vision of eventual colonial independence in a capitalist world. Though she recognized the tendency for industrial investment in colonies, she saw this merely as an extension of 'home' capitalism looking for cheap labour and the procurement of raw materials—without any local response other than misery and suffering. Thus she did not look for any revolutionary potential in the exploitation of colonial peoples—however vividly she described that exploitation. She came very close to laying down the axiom that any colony fighting for independence did so because it had inherent imperialist ambitions of its own—an indictment similar to recent Chinese characterizations of Nehru's 'imperialist' India. The honour of the incorporation of the nationalist-colonial struggle into revolutionary Marxism—and the acquisitive peasant struggle—fell to Lenin. But again it must be said: *The Accumulation of Capital* was intended as an economic theorem, not an analytical text of political revolution. This makes a confrontation between *The Accumulation of Capital* and Lenin's work on imperialism three years later—after the outbreak of the war—not so much impossible as pointless.

And if one wants to extrapolate Rosa's arguments into a political context, as her later critics have done, a more meaningful result than theirs can be achieved. First, an objective case can certainly be made for the pre-eminent importance of colonial 'spheres of influence' for thriving capitalist economics. The classical trade pattern of exports of cheap manufactures to colonial dependencies in return for imports of artifi-

¹ Writing in the context of the national question, Rosa Luxemburg produced an ingenious differentiation between two forms of colonialism. One was imperialistic control of colonies developed by émigrés from the mother country. Here the demand for national independence was 'progressive' and historically justified (United States, Australia), especially where the mother country failed to keep up a satisfactory rate of capitalist progress (South America vis-à-vis Spain and Portugal). In the other case, where backward countries were developed through colonization of backward people, any Socialist participation in local bourgeois efforts at self-determination and independence was reactionary and absurd (India, Africa, and—as ever—Poland by implication). 'The question of nationality and autonomy', *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, 1908; *Wybór Pism*, Vol. II, pp. 143–5.

² See 'Miliz und Militarismus', *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 20–22 February 1899.

cially cheap raw materials is accurate, though not of course complete. Physical domination is not necessary; post-independence control is today called 'economic imperialism'.

Secondly, the classic economic theory that the rationalization of foreign trade which follows this pattern (expanded production of desirable staple exports with all the resultant internal economies of scale) enriches the exporting country is now seriously questioned.¹ In spite of such trade and much aid, the poor countries get poorer and the rich richer, at least comparatively—and this divergence is linked, not discrete.² This development (which incidentally is endemic in capitalism, and has only recently been 'discovered') follows from Rosa Luxemburg's *Accumulation* far more naturally than some of the technical criticisms and assumptions made by orthodox Marxist-Leninists like Oelssner, drowning in the minutiae of formal and politically loaded concepts.³

Thirdly, once the notion of colonial exploitation becomes central and is brought up to date, the basic confrontation between rich and poor societies—which is today's real dialectic—subsumes the 'old' form of class conflict within society. In this context we are witnessing a curious resurgence of nationalism in ex-colonies; to coin a suitable Leninist formula: 'Neutralism is nationalism in the age of imperialism.' Instead of conflicts *within* colonial societies against imperialist domination, linked to class conflict at home, there is a line-up of poor countries against rich, with the former assuming the role of the international proletariat. This alignment, moreover, cuts across the 'Leninist-Stalinist' division into capitalist and socialist camps; what matters is wealth or poverty and the relative growth of wealth or poverty. This then is an 'international' or 'class' line-up that cuts across national boundaries or rather makes these boundaries into mere markers of autonomy rather than absolute isolation—as Rosa Luxemburg actually advocated. This too follows from her emphasis on colonizers and colonies as basic protagonists in a developing capitalist world. *Accumulation* may be an abstract but is by no means a barren work.

Though no reference is made to Rosa Luxemburg's work, modern Soviet writing on imperialism has perforce had to adjust in part to this redefinition of relevance. Imperialism is no longer the highest stage of capitalism, but a specific condition of distortion which cuts

¹ See Gunnar Myrdal, *Economic Theory and Underdeveloped Regions*, London 1957.

² The same is true, for partly similar and partly different reasons, of disparate regions in the same country—Rosa's pre-capitalist enclaves. See A. O. Hirschman, *The Strategy of Economic Development*, New Haven (Conn.) 1959, pp. 125–32, 187–96. See also p. 833, note 3, above.

³ See the critique of Rosa Luxemburg's economics in Fred Oelssner, *Rosa Luxemburg*, pp. 164 ff.

across the 'normal' articulation of class relationships. 'Inasmuch as imperialism impeded the development of factory manufacturing, very few of the ruined peasants and artisans became modern workers connected with big, mechanized production . . . they were forced to linger on through the intermediate stages of proletarianization and to become not so much capitalist workers as semi-proletarians—semi-paupers . . . an army of hired labour . . . [with] a specific colonial character.' Or 'the European bourgeoisie by no means went into overseas countries in order to implant there the prevailing capitalist production relationships.'¹ 'Normal' capitalism is represented by the domestic 'national bourgeoisie' which thus finds itself in conflict with foreign imperialism. 'The economic interests of the national bourgeoisie are inimical to the interests of imperialism. . . . Everywhere the bourgeoisie tries to attain independent capitalist development, just what imperialism hampers. This is an apparent paradox . . . but imperialism cannot function without colonial or semi-colonial exploitation . . . and will try to keep the exploited countries in a state of rural backwardness; i.e. to preserve that very state of underdevelopment which all nationalist forces, including the bourgeoisie, are trying to remedy. Hence the struggle between them will be sharpened. . . .'²

This is no longer either Lenin or Luxemburg. It is Leninist in so far as it relates to current strategy of focusing on American economic imperialism as the main enemy, and thus accepts the very un-Luxemburg notion of (temporarily) better and worse capitalisms. But it is Luxemburgist in so far as it retransfers attention to the 'third world' of underdeveloped or colonial countries, and locates the final struggle of Socialism and capitalism in that arena, thus once more connecting the future of capitalism with the colonial rather than the domestic scene. Soviet writers are making this concession painfully and slowly—under the pressure of Chinese competition.

Investment and Capitalist Expansion

The confinement of Marxist economics has already burst apart in the previous section; we shall now leave it behind altogether in an attempt to identify the mechanism of Rosa Luxemburg's model.³ If production and profits rather than consumption and income are the prime motives

¹ L. A. Gordon and L. A. Fridman, 'Peculiarities in the Composition and Structure of the Working Class in the Economically Underdeveloped Countries of Asia and Africa', and R. Avakov and G. Mirskii, 'Class Structure in the Underdeveloped Countries', in T. P. Thornton (ed.), *The Third World in Soviet Perspective*, Princeton 1964, pp. 158, 278.

² Avakov and Mirskii, loc. cit., p. 300 (translated from the original in *Mirovaya Ekonomika*, 1962, No. 4, p. 79).

³ This section follows closely the argument of Joan Robinson in her Introduction to *The Accumulation of Capital*.

of economic action—this is central to Marxism—then the difficulties of compound reproduction necessarily lead to the question: ‘Why do capitalists continue to do something which is incapable of successful achievement?’ We have already seen *what* they do (exploit colonies and other pre-capitalist segments of the economy); the problem now is *why*. More specifically, whence do they anticipate a demand which leads them to increase production—in short, to invest?

It is here that orthodox Marxist economics fails us—as it failed Rosa Luxemburg, otherwise she would not have written her book. Marx himself was aware of the problem, though he (and subsequently all orthodox Marxists) dealt with it by assuming that investment was a function of, and limited by, the needs of technology and size which would enable a producer to remain viable, to stay in the game.¹ This minimal viability is not growth. But historically growth has taken place in capitalist economics over the last sixty years—growth, not merely concentration. And, though Rosa Luxemburg nowhere suggests even for a moment that genuine *growth* of capitalist economics (in our sense of that word) is possible or important to analyse, her analysis is in fact close to some modern growth models. It is only necessary to abstract from her two limitations—the lack of an adequate banking system to channel one man’s savings to another man’s physical investment, and the rather more fundamental assumption that effective demand cannot come from a rise in workers’ real wages. Once this is done, the capitalists’ search for investment and the whole analysis of cumulative growth of investible savings (surplus) in conditions of technical progress and of a rising rate of capital exploitation, provide the right basis for a modern growth model. Rosa Luxemburg asks—unintentionally—the right question (we can easily alter ‘why does he invest’ to ‘how can he be induced to invest’). She also provides some elements of an answer, by looking for a new and additional source of demand and defining its theoretical quantity. It is better than merely *postulating* investment, however illogical, and then measuring it empirically without explaining it. Instead of starting this problem at the end, Rosa Luxemburg begins at the beginning.²

Beyond all doubt, *The Accumulation of Capital* is a work of uneven, flickering genius, ill-confined within the strict limits of the author’s self-imposed task. Its explicit quality is considerable, but the real impact comes from the incidentals. Given freer rein than in the immediate political polemics which occupied most of her attention, Rosa Luxemburg’s mind plumbed hitherto dark or barely explored depths.

¹ See above, p. 832.

² For a detailed analysis of Rosa Luxemburg’s model, see Joan Robinson’s Introduction, pp. 20–22, 24–26.

The questions asked are more interesting than the solutions offered. But in economics, as in all social sciences, this is the bigger hurdle.

One aspect that is frequently overlooked in discussing Marxist economics—and confronting it with the various economic techniques evolved since classical equilibrium theory began to be demolished—is the very fundamental difference in the ground covered. All too often we assume that we are merely dealing with a different set of techniques, that we shall get answers to what are essentially similar problems. This is not so. For the last 150 years economics has narrowed, like a pyramid, towards increasing specialization—a concentration in depth. Marxist economics was syphoned out of the scientific mainstream of economics at a time when specialization had not passed beyond emphasis—a focus of interest on a particular aspect of the social sciences, but not an abstraction from them as irrelevant or ‘different’. It retained this quality of emphasis within totality; all Marxist analysis does. Marxism *means* scientific totality. The Marxist word for over-intensive specializing is ‘vulgarization’, and bourgeois economics are vulgar economics. Interlocked as they are, the techniques of Marxism have not plumbed any new depths in their particular spheres for many years—however much they may push forward the validity of the whole system.

Rosa Luxemburg subscribed whole-heartedly to the interlocking totality of Marxism; all or nothing. Indeed, she went further in this than most contemporaries. She emphasized that the science of Political Economy—the name itself is a concession to totality—would become extinct when capitalism, its subject of study, disappeared.¹ Probably the same fate would befall all the other tools of Marxist social analysis, originating from and confined as they were to the historical class dialectic they claimed to illuminate.² Socialist revolution would wipe away the tools for studying reality when it destroyed that reality itself.

It is this context of the *function* of science that lights up *The Accumulation of Capital* with a luridly non-conformist fire. Intentional or not, the work achieves and (more important still) *demand*s a validity for its analysis that has nothing to do with the author’s usual acceptance of severe limitations of purpose. In spite of the handicap of loaded and often ill-defined concepts—blunt tools for a precision job—Rosa

¹ *Einführung in die Nationalökonomie*, pp. ix, 77–78.

² This notion of the finite nature of Marxism as a social science—in its beginning as well as its end—was later held to be one of Rosa’s minor scientific ‘errors’. See Oelssner, *Luxemburg*, p. 168. It will be recalled (cf. pp. 410–11) that Rosa Luxemburg despised the self-importance of social science in asserting that it was valid *per se*, i.e. without intimate connection with the political struggle. This contempt applied even to the most ‘Marxist’ interpretation of scientific analysis. Hence much of the anger against Kautsky—quite different anger from Lenin’s attacks on Kautsky’s ‘politics’.

Luxemburg surrenders herself freely to the search for basic, objective causalities. For the moment revolution and politics hardly matter. Not that this was deliberate. The point is that, given stimulus and the right circumstances, she was capable of thinking in this extended, scientific manner. Marx certainly was. Lenin, for instance, was not. That is why Marx and Rosa Luxemburg (though not of course to the same extent) have provided scientific techniques quite separate from and valid outside their political doctrines, while Lenin and Kautsky and Plekhanov have not. It has nothing to do with ability, but with the depth of mind and analysis.

And this may be ultimately why *The Accumulation of Capital* has been Rosa Luxemburg's *livre maudit*. It is unique among her own writings, in scope even more than in quality. Marxists have dealt with it either by making it subsume all her other writings ('the fount of all her errors') or by treating it as a fascinating deviation—into a blind alley. Among non-Marxists it takes its place in the procession of contributions to scientific analysis. To enable it to do so they have stripped it of its relevance to totality, emphasizing depth rather than breadth. In both cases, however, the book's unquiet spirit continues to haunt a world still inhabited by the obstinate problems with which it deals. That alone is the best measure of its importance.

APPENDIX 2

THE NATIONAL QUESTION

ROSA LUXEMBURG did not invent the notion that Socialism and national self-determination might be conflicting ideas. The difficulty of finding the right emphasis and relationship between them in practical politics already bedevilled Polish Socialists in the early 1880s (Chapter II). In the Polish context it is as old as Socialism itself. It even goes all the way back to Marx and Engels. Though Marx hailed the re-establishment of Poland as progressive and worthy of the First International's support, his motives were not simply based on some concept of abstract right or justice. Karl Marx, with his long-range vision of history, worked out a correspondingly long-range revolutionary strategy—aimed largely at defeating Russia, then the geo-political heartland of European reaction. In general Marx's and Engels's conception of the national-geographical rearrangement of Europe was based on four criteria: the development of progress, the creation of large-scale economic units, the weighting of approval and disapproval in accordance with revolutionary possibilities, and their specific enmity to Russia.¹ Their attitude to Poland—with all due allowance for the persistent intrusion of this particular issue—fits into their general framework and in fact illustrates it.

In order to move the German revolution forward it was necessary to separate Germany from Russia. The creation of a democratic Poland was the first pre-condition for the creation of a democratic Germany. The fact that this formulation contradicted the absorptionist policies of the Prussian government with regard to non-German minorities suited Marx all the better.² The fact that Marx stressed that Germany's honour was at stake in the need to re-create Poland may be taken as much as a propagandistic weapon as evidence of any genuine attachment to such unmaterialistic motivations. Once in exile in London, the stress on right and honour largely disappeared. The anti-Russian accent grew stronger. The desirable political constellation of East Europe became the celebrated anti-Russian *cordon sanitaire* of containment.³ Reflecting on the new post-revolutionary situation in Europe,

¹ See Wehler, *Sozialdemokratie*, p. 15.

² See *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, 12 July, 12 August, 20 August 1848.

³ K. Bittel (ed.), *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, new edition, Berlin (East) 1955, No. 2, February 1850, pp. 116 ff. See also F. Engels in *Sozialdemokrat*, Zürich, 13 March 1884.

Engels wrote to Marx in May 1851: 'The more I reflect about history the clearer it appears to me that the Poles are a *nation foutue*, useful as a means only until Russia herself is drawn into the agrarian revolution. From that moment on Poland has absolutely no more *raison d'être*.'¹

This subordination of any autonomous interest to the wider strategical necessity of defeating or at least containing Russia was partly eroded by the widespread support for Polish national aspirations among many of Marx's associates, particularly in England. In the course of the rising of 1863 Marx again came out more strongly in favour of an historical reward for so much revolutionary effort.² But it is noticeable that even during this resurgence of interest in Polish self-determination there is no attempt to broaden support for a reconstituted Poland into any general doctrine of self-determination. Nor did Marx's various attempts to commit the First International to a specific Polish policy meet with universal enthusiasm in that organization.³ 'Marx and Engels were interested in the "20 million heroes between Europe and Asia" not as a nation but as a revolutionary and strategical potential.'⁴ Engels especially was concerned to emphasize the functional role of Poland as a vehicle for revolution; a role limited in time to the dawn of revolutionary incandescence in Russia itself. When in the late 1870s the Narodniks first gave signs of a revolutionary potential there, the importance of Poland rapidly declined in his conception.¹

But at the same time the very decline of Poland's functional role caused Engels to examine the specific question of Polish nationality somewhat more generously. As a separate Polish Socialist movement began to emerge in the 1880s Engels was exercised by the tactical problem of giving it as wide an appeal as possible. He developed a more precise thesis about the relationship between revolutionary progress and national states. 'The national unit was the 'normal political constitution of the European bourgeoisie' in which it could best develop. 'No great

¹ Letter dated 23 May 1851. See also W. Conze's Introduction to W. Conze and D. Hertz-Eichenrode (eds.), *Karl Marx, Manuskripte über die polnische Frage (1863-1864)*, s'Gravenhage (Holland) 1961, pp. 25 ff. (hereafter cited as 'Conze').

² See letter from Marx to Engels, 2 December 1856, and letters of 13, 17, 19, 21 February 1863. A resolution on the subject is in Leon Wasilewski, 'Karl Marx und der Aufstand von 1863', *Polen*, Vol. I, No. 27, Vienna 1915, reprinted in Conze, pp. 91-96.

³ See N. Rjasanoff, 'Karl Marx and F. Engels on the Polish question', *Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und der Arbeiterbewegung*, 1916, No. 6, pp. 192 ff., 210 ff. See particularly Marx's arguments at the first conference of the International, *ibid.*, pp. 194 ff.

⁴ Wehler, *Sozialdemokratie*, p. 21. The phrase quoted here comes from Paul W. Blackstock and B. F. Hoselitz (eds.), *The Russian Menace to Europe, by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels*, Glencoe (Illinois) 1952, p. 108.

⁵ Helmut Krause, *Marx und Engels und das zeitgenössische Russland*, Giessen 1959, pp. 37, 78 ff.; Conze, pp. 23 ff.

people can seriously discuss its internal problems as long as national independence is absent.' In order to avoid any discrepancy between Socialist policy and the obvious desire for national unity and independence, it was necessary for Polish Socialists to 'place the liberation of their country at the head of their programme. An international proletarian movement . . . can only grow out of the existence of independent nations.'¹

Thus both Marx and Engels established some sort of a tradition of proletarian support for national self-determination—at least of major peoples—in general and for Polish self-determination in particular. This tradition was taken over and developed by the leaders of Social Democracy in Germany, Austria, and elsewhere. Wilhelm Liebknecht especially became the major protagonist of this thesis both in its general and Polish aspects. But in the course of time the motivations changed. The revolutionary strategy, according to which Poland was a cog in the anti-Russian policy of containment and destruction, became emasculated. With the emergence of a Socialist movement in Poland and following Engels's narrower preoccupation with the resurrection of Poland as desirable *per se*, the question of right and justice altered the wider strategy. Wilhelm Liebknecht—and to some extent his colleague Bebel—based the ideological legitimacy of his leadership of the growing German Social-Democratic movement on specific negation of the expansionist policies of the Prussian state and German empire. The occupation of substantial Polish areas was a flagrant example; it was thus natural that support for Polish self-determination became an integral part of the 'mortal enmity' which was ritually (and annually) hurled at existing society and its political superstructure.² Liebknecht himself also subscribed fully to Marx's early views on Poland as a necessary bastion against Russia. For German Social Democracy, particularly after the end of the anti-Socialist laws, the problem was not merely part of the permanent confrontation with the government. In the 1890s the Poles in Germany were being organized by their own new Polish Socialist party; the relationship between it and the SPD became a practical problem to which the intellectual commitment to Polish independence had to be accommodated (Chapter IV). The relationship between traditional commitment to a concept and its application to sensitive but intractable questions of organization at home provided a fruitful source of trouble in the future.

¹ See letter from Engels to Kautsky, 7 February 1882, in Friedrich Engels, *Briefwechsel mit K. Kautsky*, 2nd ed., Vienna 1955, p. 50. This was to be exactly Kautsky's attitude for the rest of his life.

² For Liebknecht's position, see his article 'The process of education', *Neue Deutsche Rundschau*, 1898, No. 9, pp. 396–406; see also his speech in the *Reichstag* (Sixth legislative period, first session, Volume I, p. 422, 17 December 1874).

At the end of 1892 the foundation of the PPS completed the emergence of organized Polish Socialism in all three areas of occupation. Each of the three parties in Austrian, German, and Russian Poland was committed to fight for the revival of a Polish state. The fact that three separate parties had to be founded was no more than a temporary concession to the factual division of Poland. The three separate parties did their utmost to collaborate closely and founded an organization in London to co-ordinate their efforts.

When Rosa Luxemburg and a small group of friends broke out of the PPS of Russian Poland in 1893, it was the national question which soon emerged as the main bone of contention between them. No doubt it had played a major part in causing the split but there were other issues as well, more personal and less suitable for public polemic. The national question was as much a means of differentiation as its cause; the reason for digging a moat and also the tool with which it was dug deep and insurmountable. Ends and means snowballed until the national question had become the accepted touchstone of their differences.

It was not until 1895 that the first full theoretical justification for the SDKP position on the Polish question was published.¹ Between 1895 and 1897, in a series of articles, Rosa Luxemburg elaborated the theoretical foundations of her anti-nationalist position, and extended it beyond the context of Poland. It was not yet a full-blown condemnation of national self-determination as an historically dated—and therefore reactionary—concept, but an extension of the Polish experience, and above all of the method of analysis, to other areas. We have already discussed her case in some detail (Chapter III). It was based on two main assumptions. First, that national and Socialist aspirations were incompatible and that a commitment to national self-determination by Socialist parties must subordinate those parties to bourgeois nationalism instead of opposing one to the other. A programme of national self-determination thus became the first of Rosa Luxemburg's many indices of an opportunism which tied Socialism to the chariot of the class enemy—a concept that was to be elaborated and refined during the revisionist debate. To this extent Rosa Luxemburg invented the concept of modern Socialist opportunism, its characterization and its identification as a bourgeois (i.e. hostile) influence within the Socialist movement. Secondly, Rosa Luxemburg attacked the premises of national self-determination in the particular context of the Russian question. Far from being the bulwark of reaction, to be destroyed or contained by independent states carved out of the Tsar's empire by nationalist revolution, Russia was itself moving into the era of social revolution—not yet the possible epicentre which it was to become after

¹ M. Rózga, *Niepodległa Polska a sprawa robotnicza*, Paris 1895.

1905 but already a link in the chain of growing European capitalism in which bourgeois and finally proletarian revolution could ripen. Russian Poland as well as other non-Russian areas in the Tsarist empire now depended for their release, not on nationalist separation from Russia, but on the proletarian revolution within Russia itself. National separation was in fact a retrograde step. Revolution in Russian Poland would come more quickly if Polish industrial development could flourish in its all-Russian context; by cutting off Polish industry from its Russian markets Poland's industrial development—and hence the development of the class struggle—could only be retarded.¹

The furore raised by this argumentation was due not so much to the argument itself but to the fact that it was a self-conscious amendment and revision of Marx and Engels—at least of the current conception of their views. According to her critics, Rosa Luxemburg grossly over-emphasized the revolutionary potential of Russia. The revolutionary flicker of the later seventies and early eighties had largely died out; in any case it had hardly been an organized mass effort of the type likely to endear itself to men like Wilhelm Liebknecht or Victor Adler. The PPS tried hard to contradict Rosa Luxemburg's economic argumentation. They asserted most tellingly that her policy played straight into the hands of the hated Russian autocracy; no one but the Russian police could benefit from it. The stigma of alliance between SDKP and Colonel Markgrawski of the Warsaw Gendarmerie—whether coincidental or more than that—was exploited to the utmost in the rumour-prone circles of Polish and Russian emigration. To the Germans Rosa Luxemburg's analysis seemed in addition to everything else a betrayal of their moral obligation towards the underprivileged Poles in the Reich.

On a deeper level the argument turned on the general question of self-determination. Rosa Luxemburg claimed that it was not Social Democracy's duty to found minute new capitalist states that could never be viable. Contemptuously she cited the example of the North German coast; if every group possessing its distinct dialect could now claim the right to its own state, Europe would lapse into truly feudal anarchy.² The days when national self-determination was indeed progressive had long since passed. But it had had its historical importance; correct application of Marxist techniques brought up to date must surely lead Socialists to call for national self-determination in hopeless multinational units like Turkey which had proved incapable of any economic

¹ The economic argument was developed in Rosa Luxemburg's doctoral dissertation, *Die industrielle Entwicklung Polens*, Leipzig 1898.

² If she had been more receptive to English history and social circumstances, she might have picked on what is in fact the classic illustration of her thesis—the failure of Wales and Scotland to develop nationalist mass movements against the dominant bourgeois tendency for economic integration with England since the industrial revolution.

development and progress, instead of helping to shore up these archaic monsters against Russia.¹ However much Rosa Luxemburg stressed her own orthodoxy in applying Marx's techniques to a changed situation, Liebknecht, Kautsky, and Plekhanov all dismissed her amendments as inadmissible if not downright sacrilegious. Rosa Luxemburg had turned Marxist strategy exactly upside down. Marx had called for an independent Poland and a strong Turkey in order to weaken Russia, while this argumentative hen in Zürich ridiculed the possibility and value of Polish independence and called for the break-up of the Turkish empire instead. The fact that much of Marx's thinking had been strategic, and abstracted from the development of a revolutionary situation in Russia itself, was ignored. The independence of Poland had suddenly become a Marxist object unto itself, like a meteor falling into the deliberations of the astronomers.

Rosa Luxemburg could not fully evaluate the dynamic process of Marx's and Engels's thought since she lacked most of the material available to us today. She *felt* herself to be the innate continuator of Marx's method, which did not in the least depend on retaining the concrete historical phenomena of any particular period. The issue thus confronted a dynamic conception against a static one; Marxism as a process of historical analysis versus a corpus of sacrosanct *obiter dicta*.

In the heat of the argument, Rosa Luxemburg no doubt adopted an extreme and uncompromising position. Though publicly committed to autonomy for Poland, she began by confessing in private that even this was a concession; she would have preferred also to do without autonomy.² Some of her colleagues, like Marchlewski, though they shared her basic position did not follow her all the way—especially not in her insatiable appetite for public polemics on the subject.³ But in general Rosa Luxemburg provided both stuffing and framework for the view that Social Democrats must take the geography of Europe much as they find it, that self-determination is a tactical and intellectual concession to the *bourgeoisie*, and that Polish Social Democracy must find the satisfaction of its proletarian aims within the framework of a Russian revolution. To this position she adhered strenuously until her death. It provided the mainstay of twenty years of polemic against the PPS, the most important criticism of the Bolsheviks after the October revolution, and a steady prop for the extreme internationalism with which

¹ For Rosa Luxemburg's articles on the Turkish question and contemporary replies, see Chapter III, p. 100; also bibliography, p. 879, Nos. 156–8.

² 'I have even managed to frown a little on autonomy [in the proclamation].' Jogiches letters, 11 April 1894, *Z Pola Walki*, Moscow 1930, Nos. 9/10, p. 127. There are various references to the 'concession to autonomy' in this period.

³ For a note of Marchlewski's writings on this question, see J. Kaczankowska, *Bibliografia prac Juliana Marchlewskiego*, Łódź 1954. See also above, Chapter III, p. 98.

she confronted the patriotic capitulations during the First World War. 'In the era of rampaging Imperialism there can be no more national wars. [The assertion of] national interests can serve only as a means of deception, of betraying the working masses of the people to their deadly enemy, Imperialism.'¹

In 1908 Rosa Luxemburg's views on the national question in general, refined by many years of political campaigning in the German, Russian, and Polish parties, were treated to a systematic exposition for the first time.² It was a self-conscious exercise in deduction, arguing from an established theory to the many scattered instances and facts. She put forward her thesis essentially as the product of the present historical epoch; any other view was wrong because it was out of date. For in this one sector the general advance of social relations and Marxist analysis of them in the course of the past fifty years had left a curious pocket of pre-scientific, utopian idealism. 'Social Democracy, which has based its entire policy on the scientific method of historical materialism and the class war, cannot make exceptions in the question of nationality.'³ Now that the gap had been discovered, it had to be made good at once. The whole basis of Rosa Luxemburg's thesis on the national question was that, far from raising the dialectic to new and possibly insecure levels, she merely brought scientific Socialism (as Marxism was usually called) up to the level it had attained everywhere else. Words like 'right', 'ethics', 'duties', and 'obligations' were clear evidence of outdated modes of thought. The most telling analogy was with the right to work:

In the 1840s the formulation of a 'right to work' was the dearly beloved postulate of French Socialism, providing an immediate and total solution of all social questions. After the briefest attempt to put it into practice during the 1848 revolution, however, this 'right' ended in a complete fiasco. . . .⁴

The entire notion of abstract rights was contemptuously characterized as being like Chernyshevsky's 'right of every man to eat from golden platters'—a notion to which only anarchists subscribed. The identity of Socialists who propagated the right of nations to self-determination, with anarchists, who specialized in the achievement of so many other abstractions, was constantly asserted.⁵ This dashing method of 'pairing' the unlikeliest opponents—in this case bourgeois nationalists and anarchists—puts Rosa Luxemburg right in the mainstream of classical

¹ *Die Krise der Sozialdemokratie*, appendix, fifth thesis; quoted from Rosa Luxemburg's *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 395.

² 'The question of nationality and autonomy', *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, August 1908, No. 6, reprinted in *Wybór Pism*, Vol. II, pp. 114–66. As far as I know it has never been translated into any other language.

³ *Wybór Pism*, Vol. II, p. 114.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

Marxist polemic. She was herself to be a distinguished victim of the method a few years after her death (Chapter XVIII).

One of the most interesting aspects of Rosa Luxemburg's argument was the hint that the very concept of 'nation' was temporary. Instead of being an absolute and permanent standard of measurement she suggested that it might be no more than the particular form in which bourgeois society encapsulated its structural arrangement—and that it would pass away with the end of the capitalist phase of history. This moment was coming closer, and it behoved Marxists to grasp the future and not cling to the past.

Speaking of the right of nations to self-determination we dispense with the idea of a nation as a whole. It becomes merely a social and political unit [for purposes of measurement]. But it was just this concept of nations as one of the categories of bourgeois ideology that Marxist theory attacked most fiercely, pointing out that under slogans like 'national self-determination'—or 'freedom of the citizen', 'equality before the law'—there lurks all the time a twisted and limited meaning. In a society based on classes, the nation as a uniform social-political whole simply does not exist. Instead there exist within each nation classes with antagonistic interests and 'rights'. There is literally no social arena—from the strongest material relationship to the most subtle moral one—in which the possessing classes and a self-conscious proletariat could take one and the same position and figure as one undifferentiated national whole.¹

The historical limitation to the concept of nationality and nation was only hinted at. Orthodox Marxism, Kautsky's as well as Lenin's, preferred to *equate* the national interest with that of the proletariat rather than, like Rosa Luxemburg, *subsuming* the one by the other. In any case events proved Rosa Luxemburg's prognosis incorrect—at least in its application to the immediate future; the outbreak of war showed clearly that when the crunch came class antagonisms were swept aside by national solidarity. Perhaps this is why Lenin preferred to equate rather than subsume, and why in 1914 Rosa Luxemburg felt that so much of her entire philosophy had shattered into a thousand fragments.

The claim that national self-determination was an historically superseded Utopia seemed specious, but Rosa Luxemburg proceeded to clothe it with historical examples. Though unaware of the extent of Marx's and Engels's own strategic approach to the problem of Polish nationality (most of the private correspondence between them had not then been published), she was perceptive enough to recognize that Marx was far too good a practitioner of his own methods to fall into any sentimental commitment to abstract or natural rights. Rosa Luxemburg

¹ Ibid., pp. 147–8.

emphasized that particular predictions of strength and weakness for any of the national movements in the middle of the nineteenth century had proved extremely fallible and that the validity of Marx's own analysis did not in the least depend on his—as it turned out—erroneous support for the hopeless Turkish empire or his derogatory prognosis for Czech nationalism.¹ By now Rosa Luxemburg was careful not to rely too much on the Polish example (no one in the Second International would have accepted any general analysis based on Poland). But she did illustrate the progress from utopian nationalism to scientific internationalism from her own Polish experience.

The mystic sentimental Socialism which ran wild in Germany in the 1830s, represented by Karl Grün and Moses Hess, emerged in a suitably messy version after forty years in the ideas of Limanowski—the *Lud polski* at the beginning and the *pobudka* at the end of the 80s of the last century; a striving for all that is fine and beautiful. Mr. Limanowski, the later leader of the PPS, united Polish Socialism on the basis that Socialism is undoubtedly a beautiful idea and patriotism a no less beautiful idea; hence 'why should not two such beautiful ideas unite together?'²

All along Rosa Luxemburg confronted idealism and beauty with the pessimism of historical necessity. Certainly the revolution would finally liberate the innate potential of human nature; but right now her task was not to stress the moral aspect of Marxist revolution against its bourgeois detractors and their 'law and order', but on the contrary to emphasize the often harsh necessities of historical laws. Cheap propagandistic appeals to potential but temporary allies of the working class could only prove fatal. In any case it was strictly against the tradition of scientific Socialism.

Marx and Engels in reality paid no tribute at all to party or class egoism and certainly did not sacrifice the needs of Western European democracy to [the concept of] nation, as might have appeared at first glance. It is true that it sounds far more big-hearted and attractive for the exuberant imagination of young intellectuals when Socialists announce a general and universal amnesty for all presently subjected nations. But such an attempt to bestow on all nations, countries, groups and on all of human creation the right to freedom, equality and happiness with a single stroke of the pen typically characterizes only the adolescence of the Socialist movement—and even more the boastful phraseology of anarchism.

¹ Ibid., pp. 123–8. It should be noted that this was written almost at the end of the period when Rosa thought that German history was the precursor to the history of her neighbours.

² Ibid., pp. 150–1.

The Socialism of the modern working class—scientific Socialism—does not go in for merely generous-sounding solutions of social and national conflicts. . . . Social Democracy does not distinguish itself through the magnanimity of its programmes and is in this respect constantly outstripped by Socialist parties which are not tied by any scientific doctrine. These always have their pockets full of attractive gifts for everyone. Thus for example in Russia the Socialist Revolutionaries leave Social Democracy far behind in their solution for agriculture, seeing that they have at their disposal a recipe for the benefit of the peasants—the instant partial introduction of Socialism into the countryside without any [of our] dull attendance on the growth of the right conditions for the elimination of industrial capital through revolution. In comparison with such parties Social Democracy is and always will be a poor party, just as Marx was poor in comparison with the generous and all-promising Bakunin. . . .¹

This was perhaps the only occasion when Rosa Luxemburg underpinned the neglect of the peasants by the SDKPiL and the later *Spartakusbund* with full theoretical justification. Yet this position follows logically from her entire analysis of the national question. Just as nationalism was an unsuitable bed-fellow for Socialist aspirations, so peasant discontent could only divert the energy of working-class Socialism into petit-bourgeois channels. In Rosa Luxemburg's view the primary role of the proletariat in the Russian revolution of 1905–1906—a conception shared fully by the Bolsheviks—necessarily led her to refuse alliances with peasants and nationalists just as firmly as with the bourgeois liberals. It was a logical enough conclusion, but for Lenin its very logic made it abstract and dogmatic. He was to oppose Rosa Luxemburg's concept with logic of a different kind: autonomous role of the proletariat, yes—but alliances with all elements who historically had to move forward (in a revolutionary sense) before they moved back; no alliance on the other hand with liberals who had already reached the fullest extent of their revolutionary push and who, whatever they *said* they were doing, were in fact already moving back.

Rosa Luxemburg's argument was at its weakest when she tried specifically to apply it to Russia. The last section of her article is a curiously garbled *reductio ad absurdum* of the deep and personal impact which this question had made on the thinking of all those concerned with the revolutionary future of Russia. Each paragraph begins with 'suppose that . . .'²—evidence that abstractions are about to be substituted for realities.² It is perhaps tactically significant (and no more) that Rosa Luxemburg quoted and criticized a Menshevik formulation of the national question rather than a Bolshevik one, even though on this there

¹ Ibid., p. 134.

² Ibid., pp. 156 ff.

was for once little difference between them. And it certainly did not save her from a generous discharge of Lenin's wrath; unerringly he picked out the weakest point of her argument—though not until six years later, when it suited him for other reasons to splash a little mud on the Berlin Poles.

No doubt we have here the most extensive and extreme version of the denial of the right of national self-determination. The argument is sufficiently general and consistent to count as a doctrine—and as a doctrine it was to be attacked. Nevertheless it was not a philosophic essay *à la* Kautsky or Plekhanov but a theoretical superstructure to an urgent, continuing struggle in Russia, Germany, and Austria. Her thesis could never be divorced from its practical Polish application, however much she claimed universal validity for it. The extension into a doctrine was the consequence of an intellectual need to be respectable, to assert the universal rather than knit a pragmatic whole from the political needs of the moment—another difference in emphasis between Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin (but not between Luxemburgism and Leninism). Even worse would have been practical action without any attempt at theoretical justification—opportunism of the most classic kind.

In practical terms Rosa Luxemburg's opposition to the PPS and its policy of self-determination made her the most efficient ally of the SPD's policy of organizational integration for minorities in Germany (Chapter V). She was equally committed to integration into the all-Russian party—at least in theory; but here the state of the Russian party itself and a reluctance to dissolve the SDKPiL as a going concern prevented any application of this policy. Such failure to match words with deeds provided suitable ammunition to her PPS opponents, and much of Rosa Luxemburg's writing had to be devoted to an elaborate attempt to justify the SDKPiL's continued independence as a party. But though her tactics fitted into the general orientation well enough, the precise relationship between party policy and national policy was never explored. As usual, Rosa was silent as soon as it came to the logic of organization. She might oppose the policy of self-determination, and berate those parties advocating it, but she obstinately defended her own party's resistance (and by implication that of all other parties) to being submerged into supra-national wholes. Thus she attacked the Austrian party and its leaders for advocating national self-determination in a socio-political context, while the Bolsheviks attacked them for the opposite reason—giving the national right of self-determination concrete organizational expression in party terms. The Austrians clearly succeeded in pleasing nobody. But more important is the fact that both the SDKPiL's and the Bolsheviks' positions contained serious and self-destructive contradictions. The Bolshevik dichotomy party/society was to lead them into some very awkward adjustments after 1917, with

Stalin almost destroying the old party in order to break the excessive traditional distinction between them. But at least Lenin recognized the need to justify the separation and hammered away at the dialectical unity between national self-determination in its social context and absolute organizational subordination to the centre in a party context. Rosa Luxemburg saw neither problem nor contradiction, and merely combined party independence with its denial for aspiring nations. The notion that party organization could be functionally related to the theoretical or practical solution of social problems, could even set a precedent for post-revolutionary society, was entirely unreal for her. To anyone who believed that the most significant meaning of the revolutionary process was the equation, the fusion, of party and society, the organizational subordination or independence of one Socialist party from another could not be a matter of any importance—and therefore did not need to fit into any theory of revolution.

Rosa Luxemburg made little attempt to distinguish between the positions of those who disagreed with her. As Lenin at one time dumped his various opponents into a few collective dustbins simply marked liquidators and opportunists, so Rosa Luxemburg created the over-simplified category of nationalists or social patriots. Just as the later Communists steadily refused to see any significant difference between Centrism and Reformism after 1914, so Rosa Luxemburg refused to distinguish in the Polish movement between the open nationalism of the right-wing PPS and the policy of the PPS-Left; between those who in the wider context promoted national self-determination to an absolute priority and those, like Lenin and Kautsky, who gave it conditional and limited support.¹ In her argument with Lenin, particularly, a number of entirely different questions became entangled. These can roughly be divided into two categories. First the question of self-determination as an element of revolutionary policy, secondly the question of party relationships in a multi-national situation.

Until 1914 Kautsky acted as the chief interpreter of Marxism in the national question as in almost all others. In most of his substantial writing on the national question Lenin based himself on Kautsky first and foremost—and Rosa Luxemburg, too, considered him the weightiest of her opponents. Her attempts to confuse their views with those of the PPS were often deliberate mystification. In fact Kautsky and Lenin both differentiated sharply between overt nationalism and the Socialist policy of self-determination which, though it admitted the

¹ Rosa Luxemburg's role as a pioneer of polemical methodology is marginally interesting. She did not invent Marxist 'pairing' (Marx himself did that) but she was an expert practitioner years before Lenin. Opportunism in the Second International was partly her discovery—certainly she conceptualized it, and she 'invented' social patriotism.

validity of national aspirations, subordinated these formally and at all times to the demands of the class struggle. In 1903 Lenin and Martov, preparing a platform for the second congress, both stated clearly that their acceptance of the right of self-determination implied not one whit less attachment to, and concentration on, the Socialist revolution. For Lenin, particularly, the national question had a twofold importance. It was an untapped source of revolutionary potential to weaken and destroy the Tsarist autocracy. He did not in the least accept Rosa Luxemburg's abstracted caricature of his policy as a utopian guarantee of national self-determination for ethnic groups who, for geographical and other reasons, obviously could never build a separate state and had never had one in the past (Chapter VII). But at the same time Lenin certainly went further in his national policy than any mere canalization of revolutionary energy in this direction—as with the peasants. He had a real feeling for the iniquity of great Russian chauvinism which went beyond tactical considerations. The evidence suggests that on this subject Lenin was anchored to a personal view of right and wrong that did not just switch on and off as required.¹ By insisting on the inclusion of the right of self-determination in Paragraph 7 of the Russian party programme—where it remained for fifteen years until it was incorporated into the constitution of the Soviet Union—Lenin was following his deep convictions as well as the obvious tactical requirements of a Russian revolution. It was this point more than any other that had separated him from the Narodniks in the 1890s and was to bring him into continual conflict with the Socialist Revolutionaries in the new century.

But there was a sharp difference between Lenin's views on the national question as a programme for revolution and the relationship of different parties within the RSDRP. On this Lenin made no concession whatever. It was the *Bund's* insistence on party autonomy more than any claim for Jewish national separateness which inspired *Iskra's* manoeuvres to force the *Bund* to withdraw from the second congress. Though prepared to accommodate the Poles temporarily, Lenin also refused to enter into any federal party commitment with them. In 1906 at Stockholm a compromise was reached, which left Poles and Letts intact as separate member parties of the RSDRP, but Lenin never found this

¹ Even at the very end of his life Lenin was prepared to enter into a conflict with his closest followers on this question. At the end of 1922 he was ready to conduct a one-man campaign against the collective nationality policy of the party, had his second stroke not incapacitated him. See his notes in *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXXVII, pp. 553–9, first published in the Soviet Union in 1956. His final indictment of Stalin's character was partly based on the latter's handling of the Georgian Bolsheviks. See I. Deutscher, *Stalin, A Political Biography*, London 1949, pp. 241 ff. For a short but accurate summary of Lenin's attitude to and policy on the national question, see Alfred G. Meyer, *Leninism*, 2nd ed., New York 1962, pp. 145–55, particularly pp. 152 ff. for his earlier arguments against chauvinistic tendencies in the leadership of his own party.

situation comfortable; he was only too pleased to exorcise these sometimes useful but unreliable allies from *de jure* participation after 1912. There was thus a significant difference between self-determination as a propagandistic weapon of revolution and its application as a form of party structure; in party matters Lenin was and continued to be rigidly unitarian and centralistic.

How were the two opposing views to be combined after the revolution, once the revolutionary potential of self-determination had played its required part? Lenin did not throw overboard the promised right of self-determination; indeed he insisted on it in 1917 and 1918 against the murmurings of many of his colleagues.

The right of self-determination [if necessary secession] is an *exception* to our general policy of centralism. This exception is absolutely necessary in view of great Russian arch-reactionary nationalism. The slightest renunciation of this exception is equivalent to opportunism—it is a simple-minded capitulation into the hands of great Russian arch-reactionary chauvinism.¹

But this did not give the formerly oppressed border nations the right to choose any loose form of association with the Soviet Union. Either they exercised the right of self-determination and seceded, or they stayed in the Soviet Union; no intermediate form of partial association—the best of both worlds—was possible. Where the Communist parties of these countries were concerned, there could be no concession to the federal principle whatever; democratic centralism was the only possible party relationship. If they came to power and chose to integrate with Russia—the logical step which Lenin freely expected them to take—then the relationship of party to society would solve itself. Bolshevik Russia's 'generosity' could only help the fortunes of its local allies.

The difference between Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin in practical matters was thus not nearly as great as the polemics over fundamentals indicated. Lenin insisted much less on the universal validity of his thesis than Rosa Luxemburg on hers. All he wanted was to be left alone to apply his own views in his own party; though he believed in the universal right of national self-determination, he did not campaign for its adoption by every party.

No Russian Marxist ever thought of blaming the Polish Social Democrats for being opposed to the secession of Poland. These Social Democrats err only when, like Rosa Luxemburg, they try to deny the necessity of including the recognition of the right of self-determination in the programme of the *Russian* Marxists.²

¹ Lenin, letter to S. G. Shaumyan, *Sochineniya*, 3rd ed., Vol. XVII, p. 90.

² Lenin, 'On the right of nations to self-determination', *Sochineniya*, Vol. XX, p. 400.

Three years later, between the first and second Russian revolutions, the permissive freedom for other parties to display whatever views on self-determination might seem most suitable to them was now sharpened into a dialectical alternative.

They [the SDKPiL] have a perfect right to oppose Polish separation, but they fail to understand that in order to propagate internationalism we need not all repeat each others' exact words. In Russia we *must* stress the right of separation for subject peoples while in Poland we *must* stress the right of such nations to unity.¹

The 'may' had become a 'must'; the pronoun 'we' applied both to Russia and Poland. By this time a powerful group of Poles had joined the Bolsheviks for better or for worse, and it seemed natural to speak of 'we' in both Russian and Polish contexts. Different tactics might still apply to different national areas but one and the same policy clearly emanated from the single Bolshevik centre. Of course the Poles did not approve of Lenin's more sympathetic formulation either—nor would Rosa Luxemburg, imprisoned in Wronke, have done so; loyal Bolsheviks like Dzierżyński, Marchlewski, and Hanecki continued to propagate the old unadulterated SDKPiL thesis within the Russian party.² Only the patent failure of the invasion of Poland finally put paid to this view in the Russian as well as the Polish parties. Dzierżyński, perhaps the bitterest opponent of all to self-determination for Poland, did not publicly recant until almost the end of his life.³

All this puts Lenin's onslaught on Rosa Luxemburg over the national question in 1914 into a particular perspective. The harshness of his attack on her compared with the tone of his simultaneous polemics with Radek and other *rosłamowcy* had little to do with the national question itself. Lenin was hitting not so much at Rosa Luxemburg but through her at second-rank opponents in his Russian orbit—a fact that he admitted quite deliberately in his article.⁴ Besides, Rosa Luxemburg's

¹ Lenin's speech on the national question at the 7th all-Russian conference of RSDRP (Bolsheviks) on 29 April (12 May) 1917 in reply to Dzierżyński; see *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXIV, p. 265. My italics.

² The same problem was chewed over again in much the same form at the eighth party congress in March 1919, when Lenin uttered one of his fiercest denunciations of latent chauvinism in party circles; *Protokoly VIII s'ezda RKP(B)*, Moscow 1933, p. 107. In the particular Polish context Lenin and Marchlewski argued the same toss all over again, with Marchlewski still claiming that the Poles were going to succeed against the policy of self-determination where the Russians had failed. Lenin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. XXIX, pp. 153-4.

³ Feliks Dzierżyński only talked of 'the mistake about self-determination' as late as 3 October 1925, 'Do robotników Dolbysza', in *Pisma Wybrane*, Warsaw 1952, p. 416.

⁴ Lenin, 'On the right of nations to self-determination', *Sochineniya*, Vol. XX, p. 365. See also 'Critical remarks on the national question', *ibid.*, pp. 1-34.

offending text had been written in 1908 and had certainly been read by Lenin long before 1914; it was the high point of their co-operation and Lenin was writing for *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny* and pressing Rosa Luxemburg to write for *Proletarii* (Chapter XIII). Lenin himself admitted that Rosa Luxemburg's criticism of the Russian party programme on the national question had no tactical significance at all.

When the Poles entered [our] party in 1906 they *never* . . . brought a single motion to alter paragraph 9 [at the time paragraph 7] of the Russian programme!! This is a fact. And this fact proves clearly, contrary to all assertions and assurances, that Rosa Luxemburg's friends considered the debate in the programme commission of the second congress as resolved by the resolution of that congress, that they silently admitted their mistake and made it good when in 1906 they entered the party after having left the party congress in 1903, without making a single attempt to reopen the question of revising paragraph 9 in *the proper party manner*.

Rosa Luxemburg's article . . . appeared in 1908—naturally it does not occur to anyone to deny party writers the right to criticize the programme—but even *after* her article *no single* official body of the Polish Marxists reopened the question of revising paragraph 9.¹

As Lenin recognized, 'Rosa Luxemburg consistently loses herself in general comments about self-determination . . . without ever posing the clear and precise question that is at issue—mere juridical definitions or the experiences of the national movements of the whole world.'² The harsh manner of Lenin's attack is no more than a significant instance of his 'pairing' technique: Rosa Luxemburg as a means of demolishing other opponents, the national question as a stick with which to beat Jogiches and the hostile Polish Central Committee. Rosa Luxemburg was not popular in Bolshevik circles at the beginning of 1914.

Thus the Russian national question was organically divided into tactical considerations, which could be adjusted to the varying circumstances of different countries, and questions of strategy which would always be centrally controlled by a united, cohesive party. The dialectical connection between these two aspects was obvious as long as it was a question of preparing the revolution. But as soon as it had succeeded, the complementarities became paradoxes, and the theoretical paradox soon grew the sharp teeth of political incompatibility. Lenin obstinately retained his formulation and his assumptions in the face of all practical difficulties and opposition from his colleagues. But without these assumptions his thesis, suitably interpreted, now provided a means

¹ *Sochineniya*, Vol. XX, pp. 416–17.

² *Ibid.*, p. 366.

of dealing with the national question quite differently from the way he had intended. In writing on the national question under Lenin's guidance and direction before the war, Stalin had attacked the federal party of the Austrians:

In this way a united class movement has been broken up into separate national streams. . . . This only helps to aggravate and confuse the problem by creating conditions which actually favour the destruction of the unity of the working-class movement, which foster national division among the workers and intensify friction between them.¹

This emphasis on party cohesion if necessary at the expense of national separation was to be significant. By 1918 Stalin, now the established party expert on the question of nationalities, had redefined Lenin's thesis even more ominously—and almost like a caricature of Rosa Luxemburg.

All this leads to the necessity of interpreting the principle of self-determination not as a right for the bourgeoisie but [exclusively] for the working masses of the nation concerned. The principle of self-determination must be an instrument in the struggle for Socialism and must be subordinated to the principles of Socialism.²

Self-determination had now lost its specific meaning. So many of Stalin's linguistic efforts emptied useful and fairly precise words into a series of flat slogans which all had the same generalized lack of content (Chapter XVIII, pp. 803, 815). Henceforward it would not be difficult to label a demand for secession as bourgeois and contrast it with the progressive demand for unity with Russia coming from the (assumed) working masses—and call both the latter as well as the former self-determination. In this way a minority could be held to speak for the masses and Russia could confidently refuse the desire for secession—or even too much autonomy—by any border nation on the grounds that such a demand could only be bourgeois and therefore not the will of the masses.

¹ Stalin, 'Marxism and the national question', *Sochineniya*, Vol. II, pp. 331–2.

² Stalin, 'Report on the national question (1918)', *Sochineniya*, Vol. IV, pp. 31–32. Rosa Luxemburg had frequently stated that if national self-determination were made completely subordinate to Socialism, if only such self-determination were admissible as really furthering Socialism—then self-determination was self-liquidating because it had no meaning at all. The argument seemed sterile precisely because no one held such an abstract view of self-determination.

Whereas Stalin reinterpreted Leninism while claiming devotion to it, others tried more honestly to reformulate Lenin's official thesis, and therefore clashed with him publicly. See *Protokoly VIII s'ezda RKP(B)*, pp. 88 ff., 92 ff.

And this is what happened in practice.¹ But of course it is not what Rosa Luxemburg wanted. The abandonment of the national right of self-determination had to come autonomously from Poles and Letts, not be dictated by Russia. The Bolshevik encouragement of self-determination had produced a serious weakening of the revolutionary heartland in 1918 which Rosa Luxemburg repeatedly lamented at the time (Chapter XV). In *The Russian Revolution*, she foresaw that just this self-imposed weakness might eventually lead to Bolshevik harshness and rigidity in order to overcome the problem they had themselves helped to create. Already the terror, the suppression of all other papers and parties, were the derived results of Lenin's fatal policy. She preferred an open campaign of argument against the outdated right of self-determination to Stalin's over-subtle but repressive reinterpretation of this right in the throes of necessity. The ultimate effects of both Stalin's and Rosa Luxemburg's policy might have been similar—cultural and local autonomy for different nationalities but administrative and political inclusion in the Soviet Union with central control—but certainly Rosa Luxemburg would never have accepted the methods by which this was ultimately achieved. It was in her acute, almost visionary, characterization of the methodological consequences of Bolshevik nationality policy that Rosa Luxemburg rose to greater intellectual heights—not in her persistent denials of the strength and revolutionary potential of nationalism. Perhaps it was historically insoluble, like the peasant question; probably Lenin's policy could only lead to Stalin's practical application, and Rosa Luxemburg's campaign for a revolutionary Socialism without nationalism was doomed to the realm of theory.

Rosa Luxemburg's extreme and assertive internationalism has puzzled many commentators. Communist history sees it as an aberration—one of many; an aberration, however, that can only be understood in relation to 'correct' Leninism. The fact that it was not singled out for more precise attack in the early 1920s speaks as much for the importance of so many of her ex-colleagues in the Russian party as for any sympathy with her views as such. Non-Communist (or ex-Communist) writers like Paul Frölich have tried to connect Rosa Luxemburg's anti-nationalism with her social origin as a member of an underprivileged minority. Occasionally attempts have been made to discover a specifically Jewish aspect in her philosophy.

¹ The best treatment of Soviet nationality policy in practice is in Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1954; E. H. Carr, *A History of Soviet Russia*, London 1951, Vol. I, part 3. For a comprehensive treatment of the problem up to the present, see Walter Kolarz, *Communism and Colonialism*, London 1964.

This is not a simple question. First there is the denial of a specific Polish right to self-determination—not the same as a denial of Polish nationality. She always recognized this distinct national identity (Chapter VI). Though Rosa Luxemburg herself probably gave more weight to Polish autonomy for tactical reasons than she initially wanted, the assertion of her own Polish background was a constant means of differentiation from the Germans whom she so disliked. This assertion was always Polish rather than Jewish. Though fond of using pithy Yiddish shorthand, she had no time for self-conscious Jewishness, either as a pattern of behaviour or as a basis for personal identity. One of the first things to annoy her *chez* Kautsky was the Jewish atmosphere of pointless stories and too much good food (Chapter IX). In 1917 when many of her friends were looking for a rationalization of their despair she rapped Mathilde Wurm sharply over the emotional knuckles:

Why do you come with your special Jewish sorrows? I feel just as sorry for the wretched Indian victims in Putamayo, the negroes in Africa. . . . The 'lofty silence of the eternal' in which so many cries have echoed away unheard resounds so strongly within me that I cannot find a special corner in my heart for the ghetto. I feel at home in the entire world wherever there are clouds and birds and human tears.¹

So we must distinguish between national consciousness and patriotism. One was permissibly personal, a qualitative selection of characteristics which Rosa liked or disliked in others—and, one presumes, liked and disliked in herself. She was given to unrestrained generalizations in this: person *x* was typically German, quality *y* typically Russian. Scandinavians were hell; the English too, on the whole—and such dissimulators into the bargain. Lenin's intransigence was 'Tartar-Mongolian savagery'. And so on. But this never interfered with politics, either overtly or subconsciously; none of her German biographers seems even to have been aware that she disliked the men and *mores* of a society for which she laid down her life. What turns national into patriotic consciousness is conceptualization of personal feelings into policy, connecting discrete personal sensations into a coherent system of beliefs and attitudes. The distinction may seem artificial because it is unfamiliar. For most people a strong and critical sense of attributes turns automatically into a system of patriotic consciousness. But not in the case of Rosa Luxemburg. The notion of a national fatherland, even of a special cultural home, was entirely alien.

Was Rosa Luxemburg then the first world citizen able to conceptualize an internationality with the same profound and personal meaning

¹ *Briefe an Freunde*, pp. 48–49, dated 16 February 1917.

that nationality has for ordinary mortals? This has been the usual answer. I believe it to be false. Such internationalism, where it does exist, is usually a negative not a positive quality, a revolt against national disappointment rather than an embrace of a wider, more diffuse unity. Most rebels of this sort seek a fervent new nationalism, some a millenarian (or other) religion, a few become citizens of the world—but always in negation. It is easier for Marxists—new hatreds and new loyalties. Communists objectify their personal relations with a tight collective. The emotions that usually find fulfilment in patriotism become stunted, and in the resultant desert others proliferate instead. But many of the patriotic characteristics and attitudes remain. Lenin combined a precise and specific hatred of Russian chauvinism with full acceptance and manifestation of Russian culture and attitudes; was he an internationalist? Rosa Luxemburg's 'patriotic' emotions remained precise and concentrated—but they did not happen to be rooted in the *Gestalt* of geographical boundaries or ethnic similarities.¹ She, more than any other Marxist, succeeded in transposing her loyalties from *nation* to *class*—intact.

The public prosecutor went to town in his closing remarks on the subject of the German citizen, the patriot, whose function it is to guard the honour and decency of the German Reich against me, a creature without a home. As regards the question of being an expatriate, I wouldn't swop with the public prosecutor on any account. I have a dearer, greater home than any Prussian prosecutor. . . . What other fatherland is there than the great mass of working men and women? What other fatherland is there than the improvement of life, the improvement of morality, the improvement of the intellectual strength of the great masses which constitute a people?²

Rosa Luxemburg transferred all the energy and satisfactions of patriotic consciousness to class consciousness—to the working class. This was neither an effort of the intellect nor a ritual of ideological purification, but a genuine objectification of class as a focus for personal loyalties.³ Loyalties must necessarily be limited in every person; unless the human personality is totally reconstructed there can be no reserve

¹ For an analysis of the concept and reality of 'nation' as limited to the fading bourgeois era, see 'The question of nationality and autonomy', *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*; above pp. 848–9.

² Rosa Luxemburg's speech at Freiburg in *Volksmacht*, Freiburg, No. 57, 9 March 1914, reprinted in *Rosa Luxemburg . . . gegen . . . Militarismus*, p. 97.

³ The fact that such a transfer is possible seems to me to invalidate the this-far-but-no-further neo-Marxist sociology of Ralf Dahrendorf and his school. Class—still the basic tool of his social analysis—is there defined as the social unit exercising the function of authority, or having authority exercised over it. This is fine. How does one develop quasi-patriotic loyalty to an objective social function, or lack of one?

fund of loyalties to new concepts or structures. All that is possible is transference; taking from one and giving to another—a form of substitution. Either some loyalties wither at the expense of others, or they are transferred intact to a different set of relations. This is what Rosa Luxemburg achieved. Not only she, but the whole group of ‘her’ Poles—some Jewish, some distinctly not—with whom she was associated for so long. We see it in Marchlewski’s periodic immersions in a working-class life so ill-suited to his patrician personality. We see it in Dzierżyński’s persistent refusal to accept the Bolshevik policy of national self-determination in spite of his fervent embrace of all other Bolshevik doctrines. We see it finally in Radck’s impish desire to *épater les bourgeois* in the Germany which he hated and to which he always longed to return—with all its self-conscious stress on national virtue. In their various ways they were all immediately sensitive to manifestations of patriotism, in institutions as much as in individuals. Their campaign against nationalism was as much against the latent, intangible, purely personal patriotism of their contemporaries as against any manifest policies of parties.

Is it possible to be a Marxist without achieving not only a substitution of class consciousness for patriotic consciousness, but an immersion in class *instead* of nation? Have any of the leading Marxists in Russia or China achieved it today? Or is the whole substantial return to the national unit as fact and concept the most retrograde step of all? Rosa Luxemburg stands at the apex of the attempt to make operational the Marxist concept of class as the primary social referent, and to break once and for all the old alternative stranglehold of nation. In this respect her contribution is second to none.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A comprehensive bibliography of contemporary and subsequent writing on all the questions discussed in this book would be a major research task for an entire team. My present efforts will therefore be selective. The bibliography is divided into three sections covering, first, all Rosa Luxemburg's own writings as far as they are known; secondly, the most important biographical material on Rosa Luxemburg; finally, a section setting out other works referred to in the text. Works consulted but not referred to are excluded from this last section.

The following abbreviations of the main journals are used; the others are repeated in full.

<i>Cz.Sz.</i>	— <i>Czerwony Sztandar</i>
<i>LV</i>	— <i>Leipziger Volkszeitung</i>
<i>NZ</i>	— <i>Neue Zeit</i>
<i>PSD</i>	— <i>Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny</i>
<i>SAZ</i>	— <i>Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung</i>
<i>SDK</i>	— <i>Sozialdemokratische Korrespondenz</i>
<i>Spr.Rob.</i>	— <i>Sprawa Robotnicza</i>

Reports of SPD annual congresses in this bibliography are referred to as, for example, *Protokoll . . . 1910*.

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SECTION I

WRITINGS BY ROSA LUXEMBURG

PART A—LETTERS

(i) *Published letters* (in chronological order of publication)

1. *Briefe aus dem Gefängnis*, Berlin 1920.

To Sophie [Sonia] Liebknecht, wife of Karl Liebknecht, from 1914 to 1918.

2. 'Ein neuer unveröffentlichter Brief Rosa Luxemburgs aus dem Gefängnis', *Jugend-Internationale*, 1921, Vol. I, No. 5.

To Mathilde Wurm, dated 7 February 1918.

3. *Briefe an Karl und Luise Kautsky (1896-1918)*, Berlin 1923. English translation, *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, New York 1923 (translated by Louis P. Lochner).

4. 'Aus den Briefen Rosa Luxemburgs an Franz Mehring, [edited by] F. Schwabel', *Internationale*, 1923, Vol. II, No. 3, pp. 67-72.

Selections from the letters of Rosa Luxemburg to Franz Mehring.

5. 'Brief aus der Zelle', *Tagebuch*, 26 April 1924, No. 17, p. 556.

6. 'Unveröffentlichte Briefe', *Tagebuch*, 4, 11, 18 October 1924, No. 40, p. 1410, No. 41, pp. 1447-9, No. 42, pp. 1484-6.

To unknown addressees and Hans Diefenbach.

7. R.L. 'Ein unveröffentlichter Brief. Aus dem Berliner Weibergefängnis Barnimstrasse', *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 28 December 1924, No. 355, p. 5.

To unknown addressee, dated 9 April 1915.

8. 'Unveröffentlichte Briefe von Karl Liebknecht und Rosa Luxemburg', *Unter dem Banner des Marxismus*, 1925, No. 2, pp. 416-25.

Letters between Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht during 1915, regarding the Junius theses.

9. 'Ein unveröffentlichter Brief Rosa Luxemburgs aus dem Berliner Frauengefängnis Barnimstrasse', *Aktion*, 15 January 1925.

10. 'Pismo tov. Rosy Luksemburg tov. Leninu', *Pravda*, 15 January 1925.

To Lenin, dated 20 December 1918.

11. Postcard to Karl Liebknecht at Luckau [penitentiary], *Rote Fahne*, 15 January 1926, No. 12, Supplement No. 2, p. 1.

Facsimile dated 8 August 1918.

12. 'Unbekannter Brief Rosa Luxemburgs. Als Rosa aus dem Gefängnis kam . . .', *Rote Fahne*, 18 July 1926, No. 165, Supplement p. 1.

13. *Niedersächsische Arbeiterzeitung*, 7 August 1926. Reprinted in

Germanskoe Rabochee Dvizhenie v novoe vremya, Moscow 1962, pp. 402-4 (to 'an unknown addressee').

To Karl Moor in Switzerland, dated 12 October 1914.

14. *Internationale*, 1 March 1927, No. 5, pp. 154-5, quoted in Ernst Meyer, 'Zur Loslösung der Linksradiكالen vom Zentrum in der Vorkriegszeit'.

15. 'Letters to Potresov, Axelrod and Dan, 1904-1905', *Sotsial-Demokraticheskoe dvizhenie v Rossii, Materialy*, Moscow/Leningrad 1928.

16. Franz Mehring, *Zur Literaturgeschichte von Calderon bis Heine*. Berlin 1928, p. 10.

To Franz Mehring, dated 27 February 1916.

17. *Illustrierte Geschichte der deutschen Revolution*, Berlin 1929, p. 62.

To Clara Zetkin, dated early 1907.

18. *Z Pola Walki*, 1929, Nos. 7/8, pp. 184-90.

To Warszawski, dated August 1903.

19. *Rote Fahne*, 15 January 1929, No. 12, Supplement 2, p. 1.

To Leo Jogiches, dated 8 December 1915, regarding Zimmerwald conference.

20. *Volksstimme* (Chemnitz), 15 January 1929.

To Mathilde Wurm, dated 18 July 1906 and 16 February 1917.

21. *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya*, July 1929, No. 7, pp. 160-1.

Extract from letter to Clara Zetkin dated 3 July 1913.

22. 'Listy Rózy Luksemburg do Leona Jogiches (J. Tyszki) 1893r.-1896r.', *Z Pola Walki*, 1930, Nos. 9/10, pp. 108-62 (Jogiches letters).

To Leo Jogiches, dated 1893-1896.

23. 'Listy Rózy Luksemburg. Rok 1905', *Z Pola Walki*, 1931, Nos. 11/12, pp. 178-267.

To Leo Jogiches, P. Akselrod, and A. Warszawski, dated 1905 (Jogiches letters).

24. *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya*, 1931, Nos. 2-3, pp. 119-34.

To Leo Jogiches, dated March-August 1910.

25. 'Aus Briefen Rosa Luxemburgs', *Internationale*, June 1931, No. 6, pp. 277-9.

To unknown addressees, dated 18 October 1910 and September 1911.

26. *Protokoly Soveshchaniya rasshirennoi redaktsii 'Proletariya' Iyul' 1909g.*, Moscow 1934, pp. 260-1, 263.

Extracts from letters to Leo Jogiches dated August 1909.

27. Roland-Holst van der Schalk, *Rosa Luxemburg. Haar leven en werken*, Rotterdam 1935, pp. 294-316.

To Henriette Roland-Holst, dated 27 October and 17 December 1904, 2 October 1905, 30 January 1907, August 1911.

28. Rosa Luxemburg, *Briefe an Freunde*, Hamburg 1950. (Nach dem von Luise Kautsky fertig gestellten Manuskript, herausgegeben von Benedikt Kautsky.)

To various correspondents.

29. 'Einige Briefe Rosa Luxemburgs und andere Dokumente', *Bulletin of the International Institute of Social History*, Amsterdam 1952, Vol. VIII, No. 1, pp. 9-39.

30. 'Aus einem Brief Rosa Luxemburgs vom 17 November 1914 an Konstantin Zetkin zur Vorbereitung der Reichstagssitzung vom 2 Dezember 1914', *Dokumente und Materialien zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, Berlin (East) 1958, Vol. I, p. 56.

31. 'Nieznane listy do Roberta i Matyldy Seidlów z lat 1895-1908', *Z Pola Walki*, 1959, No. 1(5), pp. 63-90 (Seidel letters).

To Robert and Mathilde Seidel, dated 1895-1898.

32. 'Korespondencja Róży Luksemburg i Juliana Marchlewskiego z działaczem czeskiej socjaldemokracji Antoninem Nemcem', *Z Pola Walki*, 1959, No. 3(7), pp. 130-9.

To Julian Marchlewski regarding the problem of Czech Social Democracy at the Copenhagen International congress.

33. *R. Luksemburg o literaturze* (Sostavlenc, perevodi, vstupitelnaya statya i primechaniya M. Korallowa), Moscow 1961.

Collection of various letters including letters to Konstantin Zetkin, dated March 1907 to May 1912; to Clara Zetkin, dated October 1915 to April 1918.

34. 'Listy do Leona Jogiches (J. Tyszkiewicz)', *Z Pola Walki*, 1961, No. 3 (15); 1962, No. 1(17); 1962, No. 2(18); 1962, No. 4(20); 1963, Nos. 1/2(21-22); 1963, No. 3(23); 1963, No. 4(24); 1964, Nos. 1(25), 3(27), 4(28); 1965, No. 1(29) (Jogiches letters).

To Leo Jogiches, dated from May 1898 to Autumn 1899. (*Z Pola Walki* is continuing the publication of all the available letters of Rosa Luxemburg to Leo Jogiches. Between the completion of this manuscript and publication several further numbers of *Z Pola Walki* with more letters will have appeared. Reference to these letters in the text is made as follows: where printed, the relevant issue and page number of *Z Pola Walki* is given, otherwise the reference is to the unpublished originals in IML(M), see below, p. 867.)

35. W. Blumenberg, 'Einige Briefe Rosa Luxemburgs', *International Review of Social History*, Amsterdam 1963, Vol. VIII, Part 1, pp. 97-108.

36. Ralph H. Lutz, 'Rosa Luxemburg's unpublished prison letters 1916-1918', *Journal of Central European Affairs*, October 1963, Vol. XXIII, No. 3, p. 305.

37. Max Hochdorf, *Rosa Luxemburg*, Berlin n.d., appendix.
Facsimile of letter to J. Dietz dated 28 July 1916, from the Barnimstrasse prison.

(ii) *Unpublished letters*

Rosa Luxemburg was a very indifferent keeper of letters and records—as haphazard as Leo Jogiches was punctilious. Her own papers were ransacked by soldiers immediately after her final arrest on 15 January 1919. For several years the KPD, particularly Paul Frölich, made considerable efforts to reassemble letters and other documents—on Lenin's personal instructions. At this time much acrid correspondence and public denunciations took place between the KPD and some of Rosa's non-Communist friends over possession of letters, nearly leading to litigation about publication rights (those affected included Mathilde Jakob, the Kautskys, Paul Levi and others). It was at this time also that the last of Rosa Luxemburg's *personalia* in the possession of her family in Warsaw were acquired. When Paul Frölich left the KPD, he retained part of the material he had assembled, but the cases containing it were lost when he hurriedly emigrated to France after 1933. A further effort was made after the Second World War, both by official institutes and by private individuals. Considering the repeated depletions, the quantity of surviving material, published and unpublished, is remarkable.

The biggest archival collection of Rosa Luxemburg's letters is in the Institut Marksizma-Leninizma, Moscow (IML(M)), Fund 209 (Rosa Luxemburg). This collection contains over a thousand items. Other letters from and to Rosa Luxemburg are to be found in other related funds like Franz Mehring (Fund 201). Most of the original recipients of these letters later became Communists.

Further archival collections are in the Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus, East Berlin (IML (B)), and Archiwum Zakładu Historii Partii, Warsaw (ZIIP). Individual items from these collections have been printed (see above in the published collections).

A substantial collection of 125 letters from Rosa Luxemburg to Mathilde Jacob and others covering the period 1916–1918 is in the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace at Stanford University, California.

The bulk of the collection of the letters at the International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, has now been published (see above, Nos. 29 and 35). There are still a few unpublished letters in various collections of papers at Amsterdam, e.g. the Guesde Archives.

A collection of letters is in the Archive of the SPD, Bonn—mostly addressed to contemporaries who remained in the SPD after the war. The letters to Alfred Henke and Wilhelm Dittmann form the most interesting part of this collection.

There are also collections of letters in private hands, most of which have been published but a few letters still remain, including a private collection of letters of Jewish Socialists in Israel.

PART B—SPEECHES

These are based on the reports in newspapers and official published proceedings. Included in this section are resolutions put forward verbally—those submitted merely in writing appear in the section on articles—and such letters as refer to the speeches in question, i.e. corrections, interpretations, etc.

1893

38. *Internationaler Sozialistischer Arbeiterkongress in der Tonhalle, Zürich, vom 6 bis 12 August 1893, Protokoll. Hrsg. vom Organisationskomitee*, Zürich 1894, p. 15.

SDKP mandates at Zürich International Congress, 8 August 1893.
(See Nos. 123 and 657.)

1898

39. *Volkswacht*, Breslau, 6 June 1898, No. 129, p. 3.

Election speech at Breslau, 5 June 1898.

40. *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des Parteitages der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands. Abgehalten zu Stuttgart vom 3 bis 8 Oktober 1898*, Berlin 1898, pp. 99–100, 117–18.

At SPD congress in Stuttgart on 3 and 4 October 1898.

1899

41. 'Der jetzige Kurs und die Socialdemokratie' (The present course of Social Democracy), *Vorwärts*, 14 February 1899, No. 38, Supplement 2, p. 2.

At Charlottenburg on 9 February 1899.

42. 'Über die Aufgaben des Parteitages' (The tasks of the party congress), *LV*, 30 August 1899, No. 200.

Report of speech on 29 August 1899 in Leipzig.

43. *Vorwärts*, 7 September 1899, No. 209, Supplement 1, p. 2.

In 3rd electoral district about the party congress on 5 September 1899.

44. 'Eine Richtigstellung' (A correction), *LV*, 9 September 1899, No. 209.

Letter to *Vorwärts* relating to speech No. 43.

45. *Protokoll . . . 1899*, pp. 171–5, 219, 222, 265–7, 290–1.

Speeches and comments during SPD congress at Hanover from 11 to 14 October 1899.

1900

46. *Gazeta Robotnicza*, 13 January 1900, No. 2, pp. 2-3.
In Upper Silesia on 31 December 1899.
47. *Gazeta Robotnicza*, 28 April 1900, No. 17, p. 3 and 5 May 1900, No. 18, p. 3.
At the fifth Prussian PPS congress on 15 and 16 April 1900.
48. *Gazeta Robotnicza*, 11 August 1900, No. 32, p. 3.
At Trzcianka on 29 July 1900.
49. *Protokoll . . . 1900*, pp. 116-17, 124, 126-7, 130, 165, 193, 194-5, 199-200.
Speeches and comments during SPD congress at Munich from 17 to 19 September 1900.
50. *Cinquième Congrès Socialiste Internationale tenu à Paris du 23 au 27 Septembre 1900*. Compte rendu analytique officiel, Paris 1901. Soc. Nouvelle de Librairie et d'Édition, pp. 31-32, 94, 105; unofficial, pp. 43-46, 181-5, 187.
Speeches at fifth International congress at Paris.

1901

51. 'Agitation und Organisation', *Volksmacht*, Breslau, 12 June 1901, No. 134, p. 2.
At the second Poznań provincial SPD congress on 9 June 1901 at Bydgoszcz.
52. 'Weltpolitik und die Arbeiterklasse' (World policy and the working classes), *Vorwärts*, 20 June 1901, No. 141, p. 4.
Meeting in the 1st electoral district in Berlin on 18 June 1901.
53. *Gazeta Robotnicza*, 22 June 1901, No. 25, p. 2.
Resolution at second SPD congress of the Poznań province at Bydgoszcz on 9 June 1901.
54. 'Bürgerliche Sozialreform und Sozialdemokratie' (Bourgeois social reform and Social Democracy), *Volksmacht*, Breslau, 25 June 1901, No. 145, pp. 1-2.
At Breslau on 24 June 1901.
55. *Protokoll . . . 1901*, pp. 108-9, 127-8.
Speeches and comments during SPD congress at Lübeck from 22 to 23 September 1901.
56. 'Interview przedstawiciela Redakcji "Kuriera Poznańskiego" z panią Różą Luksemburg. Rozmowę przeprowadził R. T.' (Interview with Rosa Luxemburg regarding Polish/German party relations), *Kurier Poznański*, 28 September 1901, No. 442, pp. 1-2.

1902

57. 'Sozialreform und Sozialdemokratie' (Social reform and Social Democracy), *Vorwärts*, 2 March 1902, No. 52, p. 4.
In 1st electoral district on 26 February 1902.

58. 'Sprawa polska w Ks. Poznańskim' (The Polish question at the Poznań congress), *Kurier Poznański*, 7-9 March 1902, Nos. 110 and 114.

At Poznań on 5 and 7 March regarding agitation among the Poles.

59. 'Die Arbeiterklasse und ihre bürgerlichen Freunde' (The working class and their middle-class friends), *LV*, 21 April 1902, No. 88, Supplement 1.

At a party rally of 12th and 13th Saxon electoral districts on 17 April 1902.

60. *Protokoll . . . 1902*, pp. 87, 149-51, 154-5, 161.

Resolution 91 and speech on Polish question at SPD congress at Munich on 16 September 1902.

1903

61. *PSD*, April 1903, No. 4, pp. 145-6.

Resolution at third congress of SPD in the province of Poznań on 8 and 9 March 1903.

62. *LV*, 11 June 1903, No. 131.

At electoral rally in 17th electoral district in Saxony: on 6 June at Glauchau, on 7 June at Mülsen, on 8 June at Meerane.

63. 'Zayavlenie predstavitelei SDKPiL' (SDKPiL statement of intentions), *Vtoroi ocherednoi s'ezd RSDRP*, Geneva 1903, pp. 388-90.

Declaration of SDKPiL delegates at second RSDRP congress on 6 August 1903 written by Rosa Luxemburg but submitted by Warszawski.

64. *Protokoll . . . 1903*, pp. 277-9.

Regarding Polish question at the SPD congress at Dresden on 16 September 1903.

1904

65. *La Réunion du Bureau Socialiste Internationale*, Brussels 1904, pp. 5, 10-11.

Resolutions and speeches regarding the SDKPiL and Russian revolutionaries in Germany at the International Socialist Bureau on 7 February 1904.

66. *Sixième Congrès Socialiste International tenu à Amsterdam du 14 au 20 août 1904. Compte rendu analytique* Brussels 1904, pp. 148, 173-4 (German edition, pp. 49, 64).

Speeches and declarations at sixth congress of the International in Amsterdam on 17, 18, 19 August 1904.

67. *Cz.Sz.*, December 1904, No. 22, p. 12.

On 26 July and 25 October 1904 at Zwickau.

1905

68. *Le Bureau Socialiste International*, Brussels 1905, pp. 10, 14-15.

Mandate and representation question at the International Socialist Bureau on 15 January 1905.

69. 'Freiheitskämpfe der Vergangenheit und Gegenwart' (Freedom struggles of the past and present), *LV*, 25 March 1905, No. 70, Supplement 5, pp. 1-2.

At party rally on 24 March 1905 in 12th electoral district of Leipzig.

70. *Protokoll* . . . 1905, pp. 256-7, 269-71, 320-1.

Speeches and comments during SPD congress at Jena on 21 and 22 September 1905.

71. 'Der politische Massenstreik' (The political mass strike), *LV*, 8 November 1905, No. 259.

Lecture in Leipzig on 7 November 1905.

72. 'Der politische Massenstreik' (The political mass strike), *Vorwärts*, 8 December 1905, No. 287, Supplement 2, p. 1.

At a party meeting in Berlin on 6 December 1905.

1906

73. *Protokoll* . . . 1906, pp. 260-2, 315-16.

Speeches and comments during SPD congress at Mannheim on 26 and 28 September 1906.

74. 'Rosa Luxemburg über die russische Revolution' (Rosa Luxemburg on the revolution in Russia), *LV*, 29 September 1906, No. 226, Supplement 4; *Vorwärts*, 29 September, No. 227; and *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, 8 December 1906, No. 235.

At Mannheim on 25 September.

75. 'Genossin Dr. Rosa Luxemburg wegen Aufreizung zu Gewalttätigkeiten auf der Anklagebank' (Comrade Luxemburg accused of inciting to violence), *LV*, 13 December 1906, No. 288, Supplement 3, p. 1; also *SAZ*, 13 December, No. 288, Supplement 1, p. 1; and *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, 15 December, No. 193.

Before provincial court at Weimar on 12 December 1906.

1907

76. 'Die Lehren der letzten Reichstagswahl' (The lessons of the latest Reichstag elections), *Vorwärts*, 9 March 1907, No. 58, Supplement 2, p. 1.

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77. *Vorwärts*, 16 April 1907, No. 88, Supplement 1, p. 2.

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98. *LV*, 30 October 1912, No. 253, Supplement 3, p. 1.

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99. *LV*, 13 June 1913, No. 134, Supplement 3, p. 1.

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104. *Protokoll . . . 1913*, pp. 194-5, 197-8, 288-93, 485-7.

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112. *Vorwärts*, 30 June 1914, No. 175, Supplement 3, p. 1; *Hamburger Echo*, 1 July 1914, No. 150, Supplement 2, p. 1; *Vorwärts*, 4 July 1914, No. 179, Supplement 3, p. 1; *LV*, 4 July 1914, No. 151, Supplement 3, p. 1; *Hamburger Echo*, 5 July 1914, No. 154.

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115. *KPD Bericht*, pp. 10-11, 17-18, 18-42. (See below, p. 933, No. 274.) Speeches and discussion at founding congress of KPD on 30 and 31 December 1918.

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PART C—ARTICLES

A few unpublished manuscripts by Rosa Luxemburg remain in most of the archives quoted above, especially Warsaw.

The following bibliography of Rosa Luxemburg's published works is chronological according to date of publication, not writing. A brief summary of content is attached to those items where the title is no guide. This section is based on the excellent Polish research published under the title of 'Bibliografia pierwodruków Róży Luksemburg', *Z Pola Walki*, 1962, No. 3(19), pp. 161-226, by Jadwiga Kaczanowska under the supervision of Feliks Tych. I have cited Rosa Luxemburg's pseudonym where applicable; anonymous publications are referred to as such, and articles without any specific mention appeared under Rosa Luxemburg's full name.

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119. Anon.: 'Ruch robotniczy za granicą' (The workers' movement abroad), *Spr.Rob.*, July 1893, No. 1, pp. 3-6.

120. R. K.: 'Wyzysk kapitalistyczny i ochronne prawodawstwo robotnicze' (Capitalist exploitation and the legal measures to protect the workers), *Spr.Rob.*, August-December 1893, No. 2 pp. 2-4, Nos. 5/6 pp. 2-6; January-August 1894, No. 7 pp. 3-6, No. 9 pp. 1-2, Nos. 11/12 pp. 2-3, Nos. 13/14 pp. 2-3. (Nos. 2, 9, 11/12 anon.)

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 127. X: 'Przegląd krajowy' (A review of home affairs), *Spr.Rob.*, January 1894, No. 7, pp. 10–11.
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 133. Anon.: 'Nowy etap' (The new stage), *Spr.Rob.*, March 1894, No. 9, p. 1.
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- 185.** ♂: 'Tätigkeit der französischen Sozialisten in den Generalräten'

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413. Anon.: 'Kannegiessereien' (Watering³ can), *Vorwärts*, 2 November 1905, No. 257, p. 2.
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419. Anon.: 'Ein konservativer General als "Revolutionär"' (A conservative general in the guise of a 'revolutionary'), *Vorwärts*, 9 November 1905, No. 263, p. 1.
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424. Anon.: 'Der Belagerungszustand in Polen' (The state of siege in Poland), *Vorwärts*, 17 November 1905, No. 270, p. 1.

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449. 'Mitteilung' (A notice), *Vorwärts*, 22 January 1907, No. 18, Supplement 1, p. 2.
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450. 'Die Maifeier' (May Day celebrations), *Gleichheit*, 1 May 1907, No. 9, p. 71.

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453. 'Likwidacja' (Liquidation), *PSD*, March-April 1908, No. 1 pp. 46-62, No. 2 pp. 112-31.
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"Konstytucjonalizm w fabryce" i opiekunowie robotników; Dmowski o sprawie szkolnej; Ugodowcy i narodowcy' (From home: feelings; the catholic unions and the realists; 'constitutionalism in the mills' and the protectors of workers; Dmowski about the school question; the 'conciliators' and the nationalists), *PSD*, June 1908, No. 4, pp. 348-51.

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PART D—PAMPHLETS AND BOOKS

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655. Pamphlet.

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1900

663. Pamphlet.

W obronę narodowości (In defence of nationality), Poznań 1900.

1901

664. Pamphlet.

Anon.: [Begins] *Bracia robotnicy! Towarzysze!* (Brother workers! Comrades!) [Place unknown] 1901.

An appeal to the Polish and Russian workers to unite in the struggle against Tsarism.

1903

665. Pamphlet.

Anon.: [Ed. with introduction] Szymon Dikstein, *Kto z czego żyje? Z przedmową i uzupełnieniami wydawców oraz portretem autora* (How to make ends meet? Foreword with comments by the editors and portrait of the author), Zürich 1903.

666. Pamphlet.

Anon.: *Quousque tandem* (For how much longer), Zürich 1903.

Reprint of No. 315.

1904

667. Pamphlet.

Anon.: *Bericht an den Internationalen Sozialistischen Arbeiter- und Gewerkschaftskongress zu Amsterdam über die polnische sozialdemokratische Bewegung in Russisch-Polen und Litauen 1900-1904. Erstattet von den Delegierten der Sozialdemokratie Russisch-Polens und Litauens zum Kongress in Amsterdam* (Report to the International Socialist Workers and trade-union congress at Amsterdam about the Polish Social-Democratic movement in Russian Poland and Lithuania from 1900-1904. Submitted by the delegates of the Social Democracy of Russian Poland and Lithuania at the Amsterdam congress). [Place unknown] 1904.

668. Pamphlet.

Lassalle und die Revolution (Lassalle and the revolution), Berlin, March 1904.

Collection of articles on the 1848 revolution in Germany, published as a memorial volume.

1905

669. Pamphlet.

Józef Chmura: *Kościół a socjalizm* (The Church and Socialism), Cracow 1905.

670. Pamphlet.

Kwestia polska a ruch socjalistyczny. Zbiór artykułów o kwestii polskiej R. Luksemburg, K. Kautskiego, F. Mehringa, Parvusa i innych z przedmową R. Luksemburg i uwagami wydawców oraz dodatkiem (The Polish question and the Socialist movement. Selection of articles on the Polish question by various authors including introduction by Rosa Luxemburg and her previous articles under Nos. 149, 153, 154, 155, 159, 160, 302, 319, 656). Cracow 1905.

671. Pamphlet.

K. Kautsky, R. Luxemburg: *Polozhenie rabocheho klassa v glavneishikh gosudarstvakh evropy, sev. amer. soed. shtat. i avstralii* (Intro-

duction to the history of the working class and the state in Europe, North America, United States and Australia), St. Petersburg 1905.

672. Pamphlet.

Anon.: *Święto robotnicze 1 Maja* (Labour celebration of the 1st of May), Warsaw 1905.

673. Pamphlet.

Wybuch rewolucyjny w caracie (Revolutionary outbreaks in the Tsarist empire), Cracow 1905.

Selection and translation, with introduction, of German articles Nos. 367, 368, 370, 371, 373, 374, 375.

674. Pamphlet.

Anon.: *Do inteligencji polskiej. [Odezwa Zarządu Głównego Socjaldemokracji Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy]* (To the Polish intelligentsia. [Declaration of the Central Committee of the SDKPiL]), Warsaw, 4 May 1905.

Also published as an article in *Cz.Sz.*, May 1905, No. 26, p. 10.

675. Pamphlet.

Anon.: *Z doby rewolucyjnej. Co dalej?* (From the days of revolution. What next?), Cracow 1905.

Enlarged reissue of No. 378.

1906

676. Pamphlet.

Czego chcemy? Komentarz do programu Socjaldemokracji Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy (What do we want? Comments on the programme of the SDKPiL), Warsaw 1906.

677. Pamphlet.

Anon.: *Dni czerwcowe w roku 1848. Kartka z historii walki robotników o chleb i wolność* (The June days of 1848. A page from the history of the workers' struggle for bread and freedom), Warsaw 1906.

678. Pamphlet.

Józef Chmura: *Kościół a socjalizm* (The Church and Socialism), Warsaw 1906.

Expanded reissue of No. 669.

679. Pamphlet.

Anon.: *Der Maifeiertag des Proletariats 1906* (The May Day of the proletariat in 1906), Łódź 1906.

680. Pamphlet.

Anon.: [Foreword and epilogue] *Marcin Kasprzak. Z życia i walki polskiego rewolucjonisty* (From the life and struggles of a Polish revolutionary), Warsaw 1906.

681. Pamphlet.

Massenstreik, Partei und Gewerkschaften (Mass strike, party and trade unions), Hamburg 1906.

682. Pamphlet.

Anon.: *Program federacji, czyli PPS w błędnym kole* (The federal programme, or the PPS in a vicious circle), Warsaw 1906.

683. Pamphlet.

Anon.: *Rzecz o konstytuancie i o rządzie tymczasowym* (Regarding the Constituent Assembly and the temporary government), Warsaw 1906.

684. Pamphlet.

Anon.: *Święto 1 Maja* (Celebration of the 1st of May), Warsaw 1906.

Expanded reissue of No. 654.

685. Pamphlet.

Z doby rewolucyjnej. Co dalej? (From the days of the revolution. What next?), Warsaw 1906.

Expanded reissue of No. 378.

1908

686. Book.

Sozialreform oder Revolution? Zweite durchgesehene und ergänzte Auflage (Social reform or revolution? Second corrected and supplemented edition), Leipzig 1908.

See No. 662.

1913

687. Book.

Die Akkumulation des Kapitals. Ein Beitrag zur ökonomischen Erklärung des Imperialismus (The Accumulation of Capital. A contribution to the economic explanation of imperialism), Berlin 1913.

1914

688. Pamphlet.

Militarismus, Krieg und Arbeiterklasse. Rosa Luxemburg vor der Frankfurter Strafkammer. Ausführlicher Bericht über die Verhandlung am 20 Februar 1914 (Militarism, war and the working class. Rosa Luxemburg before the Frankfurt court. Complete report of the proceedings of 20 February 1914), Frankfurt 1914.

See also No. 106.

1916

689. Book.

Junius: *Die Krise der Sozialdemokratie. Anhang: Leitsätze über die Aufgaben der internationalen Sozialdemokratie* (The crisis of Social Democracy. Appendix: Headings of the tasks of international Social Democracy), Zürich 1916.

690. Pamphlet.

Anon.: *Entweder-Oder . . . Die Politik der sozialdemokratischen*

Minderheit (Either-Or . . . The policy of the Social-Democratic minority). [Place unknown] 1916.

Illegal *Spartakus* pamphlet.

691. Pamphlet.

Anon.: *Die Lehre des 24 März* (The lessons of the 24th of March). [Place unknown] 1916.

Illegal *Spartakus* pamphlet.

692. Pamphlet.

Anon.: *Hundepolitik* (A policy for dogs). [Place unknown] 1916.

Illegal *Spartakus* pamphlet.

693. Pamphlet.

Anon.: *Was ist mit Liebknecht* (What about Liebknecht). [Place unknown] 1916.

Illegal *Spartakus* pamphlet.

694. Pamphlet.

Anon.: *Wofür kämpfte Liebknecht und weshalb wurde er zu Zuchthaus verurteilt?* (For what did Liebknecht fight and why was he sentenced to prison?) [Place unknown] 1916.

Illegal *Spartakus* pamphlet.

1918

695. Book.

Chapter 12—'The second and third volume [of Capital]' in F. Mehring: *Karl Marx. Geschichte seines Lebens* (Karl Marx. The history of his life), Leipzig 1918, pp. 378-87.

1920

696. Book.

[Translation and introduction] W. G. Korolenko: *Die Geschichte meines Zeitgenossen. Aus dem russischen übersetzt und mit einer Einleitung versehen von . . . 2 Aufl. Bd. 1-2.* (The history of my Contemporary. Second edition, Volumes 1-2), Berlin 1919-20.

1921

697. Book.

Die Akkumulation des Kapitals oder was die Epigonen aus der Marxschen Theorie gemacht haben. Eine Antikritik (The Accumulation of Capital or what the 'authorities' have done with Marxist theory. An anti-critique), Leipzig 1921.

1922

698. Book.

Die russische Revolution. Eine kritische Würdigung. Aus dem Nachlass herausgegeben und eingeleitet von Paul Levi (The Russian revolution. A

critical appreciation. Edited and introduced by Paul Levi from Rosa Luxemburg's papers), Berlin 1922.

See No. 652 for alternative drafts of certain parts of this manuscript.

1925

699. Book.

Einführung in die Nationalökonomie. Hrsg. von Paul Levi (Introduction to political economy. Edited by Paul Levi), Berlin 1925.

PART E—MAIN COLLECTIONS OF WRITINGS

(i) *Published in German*

700. *R. Luxemburg: Gesammelte Werke*. Published by Clara Zetkin and Adolf Warski (Warszawski), edited by Paul Frölich (referred to in text as *Collected Works*). This complete edition of Rosa Luxemburg's works was to comprise the following volumes:

- | | | |
|--------|------|--|
| Volume | I | Polen (Poland) |
| „ | II | Die russische Revolution (The Russian revolution) |
| „ | III | Gegen den Reformismus (Against Reformism) |
| „ | IV | Gewerkschaftskampf und Massenstreik (Trade union struggle and mass strike) |
| „ | V | Der Imperialismus (Imperialism) |
| „ | VI | Die Akkumulation des Kapitals (The Accumulation of Capital) |
| „ | VII | Krieg und Revolution (War and Revolution) |
| „ | VIII | Nationalökonomie (Lectures on political economy) |
| „ | IX | Briefe, Gedenkartikel, historische Aufsätze (Letters, memorial articles and historical essays) |

Only the following three volumes appeared:

- | | | |
|--------|-----|---|
| Volume | VI | <i>Die Akkumulation des Kapitals</i> , Berlin 1923. |
| „ | III | <i>Gegen den Reformismus</i> , Berlin 1925. |
| „ | IV | <i>Gewerkschaftskampf und Massenstreik</i> , Berlin 1928. |

701. *R. Luxemburg: Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften*, Volumes I and II, Berlin 1951 (referred to in text as *Selected Works*). These include her lectures on economics, the mass-strike pamphlet, and the Junius pamphlet, plus other minor articles and works selected at random. Volume I also includes a selection of polemics against Rosa Luxemburg by Lenin and Stalin, though some of the works they polemicize against are not reprinted in the volume (e.g. the question of nationality and autonomy—No. 463).

702. *Rosa Luxemburg im Kampf gegen den deutschen Militarismus*, Berlin (East) 1960. Selection of articles and speeches of 1913/1914 in connection with Rosa Luxemburg's two trials for sedition.

703. *Ich war, ich bin, ich werde sein*, Berlin 1958. Selection of articles from *Rote Fahne* from November 1918 to January 1919.

704. Paul Frölich (ed.): *Redner der Revolution*, Vol. XI: *Rosa Luxemburg*, Berlin 1928. Short selection of speeches.

705. *Die Russische Revolution* (most recent edition), Frankfurt 1963. Introduced and edited by Ossip K. Flechtheim.

(ii) *Published in Polish*

706. *Wybór pism* (two volumes), Warsaw 1959. Edited by Bronisław Krauze. Selection of articles, mainly Polish, some German; partly overlapping with the German Selected Works edition.

(iii) *Published in Russian*

707. *Roza Lyuksemburg o literature*, Moscow 1961. Edited and introduced by M. Korallova. Selection of articles and letters mostly on literary subjects.

(iv) *Published in English*

708. *Leninism or Marxism? The Russian Revolution*, Ann Arbor (Michigan) 1961. Edited by Bertram D. Wolfe. This is a major anti-Leninist work.

The most fertile current source for English translations of Rosa Luxemburg's work is Ceylon, where there is an active Trotskyite party fairly close to the centre of politics.

There have been frequent reprints and translations of individual pamphlets and articles into many other languages.

SECTION II

ROSA LUXEMBURG: BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIAL

Only the major biographical works are included. Short memorial articles or editors' prefaces to collections of writings are referred to in the general bibliography if cited. This list is in alphabetical order.

709. CLIFF, Tony—*Rosa Luxemburg*, London 1959.

A short theoretical assessment, concentrating especially on economic theory.

710. DÖBLIN, Alfred—*Karl und Rosa. Eine Geschichte zwischen Himmel und Hölle*, Munich 1950.

A not insensitive but gaudy dramatization of Rosa Luxemburg's prison years in fictional form. Though it establishes her as a powerful, dramatic figure in German history, the story departs substantially from the truth and grossly over-emphasizes her love-life.

711. FOUCHÈRE, Berthe—*La vie héroïque de Rosa Luxemburg*, Paris 1946. Introduction by Bracke.

A Marxist biography branching out from Frölich's but with a woman's touch. Contains no original material or information.

712. FRÖLICH, Paul—*Rosa Luxemburg Gedenke und Tat*, Paris 1939; second edition Hamburg 1949; first English edition, *Rosa Luxemburg, her life and work*, London 1940.

This is the standard Marxist biography. Frölich himself (born 7 August 1884) was an early member of the left-wing SPD opposition during the First World War and then of the KPD. His early politics (as those of his wife Rosi Wolffstein) were somewhat oppositional to Rosa Luxemburg's leadership; Paul Frölich was then associated with the Bremen Left. As one of the main intellectuals of the German party he was charged with the task of editing Rosa Luxemburg's collected works. His interest in this subject survived his own expulsion from the party in 1928 as a 'right winger' and Paul Frölich then devoted much of his intellectual activity to the study of Rosa Luxemburg's work and life.

His biography is therefore the most comprehensive available, although it deals with problems exclusively in a Leninist (anti-Stalinist) context and attempts to prove the thesis that Rosa Luxemburg's and Lenin's polemics were secondary and unimportant.

Frölich himself survived the war and returned to Germany where he joined the left wing of the SPD. He died on 16 March 1953.

713. FRÖLICH, Paul—Introduction to Volumes III, IV, and VI of *Rosa Luxemburg, Collected Works* (see No. 700).

Useful material written at a time when Frölich was still a member of the KPD. Naturally limited to the problems in hand, it provides a useful guide for Rosa Luxemburg's attitudes to these problems.

714. HOCHDORF, Max—*Rosa Luxemburg*, Berlin [no date]. A popular journalist's biography, but not wholly inaccurate or sensationalist. Hochdorf himself had been a leader-writer on *Vorwärts* 1918–19.

715. KAUTSKY, Luise—*Rosa Luxemburg, Ein Gedenkbuch*, Berlin 1929.

Luise Kautsky was Rosa Luxemburg's personal (rather than political) friend for nearly twenty years. This memorial deals almost entirely with Rosa Luxemburg's personal and private life and was intended as a deliberate 'counter' to the political struggle over her heritage.

716. OELSSNER, Fred—*Rosa Luxemburg, Eine kritische biographische Skizze*, Berlin 1951.

A very limited rehabilitation by a prominent intellectual in East Germany at the height of the post-war Stalin régime. Half the book deals with the biography of Rosa Luxemburg, the other half is the standard analysis of Luxemburgism during the relevant period.

717. ROLAND-HOLST, Henriette—*Rosa Luxemburg: ihr Leben und Wirken*, Zürich 1937 (first published in Dutch, see No. 27).

A biography by the one-time close friend who later worked with Lenin from the Zimmerwald period to the early 1920s and then left the party and Marxism altogether. The biography is acute in personal insights but impressionistic and somewhat romantic in political matters. It contains original material.

SECTION III

GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

This bibliography of works other than by Rosa Luxemburg is highly selective. Only the most important cited works are given. Contemporary articles in the main journals of the time (*Neue Zeit*, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung*, *Przegląd Socjaldemokratyczny*, etc.) are not cited again. Neither is unpublished archival material nor correspondence.

Works are cited as in the text, by main title only, and subsidiary titles are not given. The purpose is to provide identification. Where collections are referred to in the text under the name of the editor (e.g. O. B. Szmidt) they are listed under his name, otherwise under the first word of the main subject matter (e.g. *Gruppa Osvobozhdenic Truda*; *Pisma Akselroda i Martova*; *Allgemeiner Kongress der Arbeiter und Soldatenräte* . . .; Bericht über den *Gründungsparteitag* der KPD . . .). Titles of articles are given in English only.

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2. ADLER, Victor—*Briefwechsel mit August Bebel und Karl Kautsky* . . . (edited by Friedrich Adler), Vienna 1954.
3. AKIMOV, V.—‘The RSDRP’s first congress’, *Minuvshie Gody*, 1908, No. 2.
4. ALPARI, J.—‘Critical Comments (review of Sauerland)’, *Inprekorr*, 1932, No. 96, pp. 3081–6.
5. AMODIO, Luciano—‘The Lenin-Luxemburg Confrontation on Party Organization’, *Quaderni Piacentini*, Vol. IV, No. 21, Jan.–Feb. 1965, pp. 3–20.
6. ANGEL, Pierre—*Eduard Bernstein et l’évolution du Socialisme allemand*, Paris 1961.
7. Anonymous—*Julian Marchlewski*, Warsaw 1951.
8. BADAEV, A.—*Bolsheviki v gosudarstvennoi dume. Vospominaniya*, Moscow 1954.
9. BALABANOFF, Angelica—*My Life as a Rebel*, London 1938.
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