

Luxemburg versus Lenin - Paul Mattick



A comparison of Leninist vanguardism with Luxemburg's more subtle conceptions of working class organisation.

Luxemburg versus Lenin

(Paul Mattick - 1935)

Rosa Luxemburg as well as Lenin developed from the Social Democracy, in which both played important roles. Their work influenced not only the Russian, Polish and German labour movement, but was of worldwide significance. Both symbolised the movement opposed to the revisionism and reformism of the Second International. Their names are inseparably entwined with the re-organisation of the labour movement during and after the World War, and both were Marxists to whom theory was at the same time actual practice. Energetic human beings, they were - to use a favourite expression of Rosa Luxemburg's - 'candles that burned at both ends'.

Though Luxemburg and Lenin had set themselves the same task the revolutionary revival of the labour movement sunk in the swamps of reformism, and the overthrow of capitalist society on a world-wide scale - still in their striving toward this goal their ways diverged; and although they always retained respect for each other, they nevertheless remained at odds on decisive questions of revolutionary tactics and on many questions of revolutionary principle. It may be stated here in advance that on many essential points the conceptions of Luxemburg differ from those of Lenin as day from night, or - the same thing - as the problems of the bourgeois revolution from those of the proletariat. All attempts of inconsistent Leninists, from political considerations, to reconcile Lenin with Luxemburg now that both are dead and to erase the opposition between them, in order to derive advantage from both of them, is merely a silly falsification of history which serves no one but the falsifiers and them only temporarily.

The thing that united Luxemburg and Lenin was their common struggle against the reformism of pre-war time and the chauvinism of the Social Democracy during the war. But this struggle was at the same time accompanied by the dispute between the two regarding the road which leads to revolution; and since tactic is inseparable from principle, by a dispute regarding the content and form of the new labour movement. Even though it is well known that both were mortal enemies of revisionism, and for this reason their names are often mentioned in the same breath, on the other hand it is extremely difficult today to form a real picture of the differences between them. To be sure, the Third International has, in the course of the last decade, in connection with its inner political crises, frequently used and abused the name of Rosa Luxemburg, especially in its campaigns against what it refers to as 'counter-revolutionary Luxemburgism', but neither has Luxemburg's work become better known thereby, nor have the differences which she had with Lenin been clarified. In general, it is regarded as better to let the past lie

buried; and just as the German Social Democracy once refused - "for lack of money"[1] - to publish the works of Luxemburg, so also has the promise (through Clara Zetkin) of the Third International[2] to publish those works been broken. Still, wherever competition arises against the Third International, Rosa Luxemburg comes into favour. Even the Social Democracy is often tasteless enough to speak lovingly and sorrowfully of the 'erring revolutionary' who is mourned rather as a victim of her "impetuous nature"[3] than of the bestial brutality of the mercenaries of party-comrade Noske. And even where, after the experience with both Internationals, people profess to be concerned not only with building a new and really revolutionary movement but also at the same time want to profit by the lessons of the past, the concern with Luxemburg and Lenin goes no farther than the reduction of their oppositions to the dispute over the national question and even here almost exclusively to the tactical problems with reference to Polish independence. In this enterprise, pains are taken to make this opposition as mild as possible, to isolate it, and to close with the assertion, contradicting all the facts, that Lenin emerged victorious from this conflict.

The dispute between Luxemburg and Lenin on the national question cannot be dissociated from the other problems on which the two were at odds. This question is bound up in the closest manner with all others affecting the world revolution and is but a single illustration of the fundamental difference between Luxemburg and Lenin, or of the difference between jacobinical and the truly proletarian idea of the world revolution. If, like Max Shachtman[4], one holds Luxemburg's conception to be confirmed as against the nationalistic adventures of the Stalin period of the Third International, it must also be regarded as justified in opposition to Lenin. However much the policy of the Third International may have changed since Lenin's death, on the national question it has remained truly Leninist. A Leninist must of necessity take a position opposed to Luxemburg; he is not only her theoretical opponent, but her mortal enemy. The Luxemburg position involves the destruction of Leninist Bolshevism, and therefore no one who appeals for authority to Lenin can at the same time lay claim to Rosa Luxemburg.

Opposition to Reformism The development of world capitalism, the imperialistic expansion, the advancing monopolisation of economy and the super-profits with which it was bound up, made possible the transitory formation of an aristocracy within the labour movement, the enactment of social legislation and a general improvement of the workers' standard of living, and all this in turn led to the spread of revisionism and to the development of reformism in the labour movement. Revolutionary Marxism was rejected as opposed to the facts of capitalist development, and in its place the theory of the slow growth of socialism by way of democracy was accepted. With the growth of the legal labour movement, thus rendered possible, the allegiance of great numbers of the petty-bourgeoisie was secured, who soon took over the intellectual leadership of the movement and shared with the upstart workers in the material advantages of the salaried positions which it offered. Around the turn of the century, reformism had triumphed all along the line. The resistance to this development on the part of the so-called 'orthodox' Marxists, headed by Kautsky, was never more than a matter of phrases and even that was soon given up. Among the better known theoreticians of that time, Luxemburg and Lenin are to be mentioned particularly as carrying their struggle ruthlessly through to the end, not only against established reformism but soon also against the 'orthodox' in the interest of a truly Marxist labour movement.

Of all the attacks on revisionism, one may venture to say that those of Rosa Luxemburg were the most powerful. In her polemic directed against Bernstein[5] she pointed out once more, in opposition to the nonsense of pure legalism, that "the exploitation of the working class as an economic process cannot be abolished or softened through" legislation in the framework of bourgeois society." [6] Social reform, she insisted, "does not constitute an invasion into capitalist exploitation, but a regulating, an ordering of this exploitation in the interest of capitalist society itself." [6] Capital, says Rosa Luxemburg, is not heading for socialism, but collapse, and it is this collapse to which the workers must be adjusted - not to reform, but to revolution. This is not to say, however, that we have to renounce the questions of the present; revolutionary Marxism, too, fights to improve the workers' situation within capitalist society. But, in

contrast to revisionism, it is interested far more in how the fight is conducted than in the immediate objectives. To Marxism the matter of moment in the trade-union and political struggle is the development of the subjective factors of the working class revolution, the promotion of revolutionary class consciousness. The blunt setting of reform over against revolution is a false statement of the question; these oppositions must be given their proper place in the whole of the social process. We must avoid losing sight of the final goal, the proletarian revolution, through the struggle for everyday demands. [6] In a similar manner, revisionism was attacked somewhat later by Lenin. To him also, reforms were only a by-product of the struggle directed to the conquest of political power. Both were at one in their struggle against the emasculation of the Marxist movement and took their stand on the platform of the revolutionary struggle for power. They came out for the first time in opposition to each other when Russian conditions before, during and after the revolution of 1905 made the revolutionary struggle for power a vital issue which had to be met in a concrete manner. Thus the conflict which flared up between Luxemburg and Lenin turned first on tactical problems, matters of organisation and the national question.

On the National Question Lenin, strongly influenced by Kautsky, believed like him that movements for national independence were to be regarded as progressive because "the national State assures the best conditions for the development of capitalism." In his polemic against Rosa Luxemburg he asserts that the demand for the right of self-determination of nations is revolutionary for the reason that "this demand is a democratic one which is not at all different from the other democratic demands." Yes, "in the spirit of bourgeois nationalism of each oppressed nation," he asserts, "there is contained a democratic protest against oppression, and we support this protest unreservedly." [7]

Lenin's attitude on the right of self-determination was, as may be seen from other of his works, like his attitude toward democracy, [8] and one must know this attitude toward democracy in order to understand his attitude toward the national question and the right of self-determination of nations. In his theses on "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Self-Determination of Nations" he states: "It would be utterly false to think that the fight for democracy diverts the proletariat from the socialist revolution. To the contrary: just as victorious socialism which does not bring about complete democracy is impossible, so also the proletariat which fails to conduct an all-sided, consistent and revolutionary struggle for democracy cannot prepare itself for victory over the bourgeoisie." Thus it becomes clear that to Lenin nationalist movements and wars were nothing other than movements and wars for democracy, in which the proletariat is obliged to participate, since to him the struggle for democracy was of course the necessary precondition of the struggle for socialism. "If the struggle for democracy is possible, war for democracy is also possible." [9] And to him, for that matter, "the words 'defence of the fatherland' in a truly national war, are by no means a form of deception" [9], and in such a case Lenin favours defence. "In so far as the bourgeois of the oppressed nation is fighting against the oppressor," he writes, "so far are we in all cases, more decisively than any others, in favour of it, because we are the undaunted and consistent enemies of all oppression." [10]

To this position Lenin remained true to the end, and Leninism has been true to it down to this day - so long as it did not endanger Bolshevik rule itself. Only one slight change was undertaken. While to Lenin prior to the Russian Revolution national wars and movements for liberation were a part of the general democratic movement, after the revolution they became a part of the proletarian world-revolutionary process.

Lenin's position, as here summarised, appeared to Rosa Luxemburg as thoroughly false. In her Junius Pamphlet which came out during the War, she states her own standpoint briefly as follows: "So long as capitalist States endure, particularly so long as imperialist world-politics determines and gives form to the inner and outer life of the States, the national right of self-determination has not the least thing in common with their practice either in war or in peace. ... In the present-day imperialistic milieu there can be no national wars of defence, and any socialist policy which fails to take account of this definite

historical level and which in the midst of the world vortex lets itself be governed merely by the isolated viewpoints of a single country is doomed in advance."

To this opinion Rosa Luxemburg held fast to the very end, unable to make the least concession in this respect to Lenin; and after the Russian Revolution when the policy of the national right of self-determination became practice she asks why is it that the Bolsheviks held so stubbornly and with such unwavering consistency to the slogan of the right of self-determination, since after all such a policy "stands in the most glaring contradiction to their outspoken centralism in other respects as well as to the conduct they have displayed with respect to the other democratic principles. ... The contradiction yawning here is the more puzzling for in the case of the democratic forms of political life we have to do with most valuable, indeed indispensable foundations of socialist policy, while the famous 'right of self-determination of nations' is nothing but empty petty-bourgeois phraseology and humbug." [11]

Rosa Luxemburg accounts for this false national policy of Lenin's as a "variety of opportunism" calculated to "bind the many foreign nationalities present in the Russian Empire to the cause of the revolution"; like the opportunism with respect to the peasants, "whose land hunger was satisfied by the liberty to seize the estates of the nobility and who in this way were to be kept loyal to the revolution." [11]

"The calculation turned out, alas, to be quite unjustified. Contrary to what the Bolsheviks expected, one after another the (liberated) 'nations' took advantage of the freshly granted freedom to take a position of deadly enmity to the Russian Revolution, combining against it with German Imperialism, under whose protection they carried the banner of counter-revolution to Russia itself ... of course it is not the 'nations' by whom that reactionary policy is carried on, but only the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois classes ... who have converted the national right of self-determination into an instrument of their counterrevolutionary class policy. But ... it is precisely here that we have the utopian and petty-bourgeois character of this nationalistic phrase, that in the raw reality of class society ... it simply becomes converted into a means of bourgeois class rule." [12]

This injection by the Bolsheviks of the question of national strivings and separatist tendencies into the midst of the revolutionary struggle was regarded by Rosa Luxemburg as having "thrown the greatest confusion into the ranks of socialism." She goes on to state: "The Bolsheviks have supplied the ideology which has masked the campaign of counter-revolution; they have strengthened the position of the bourgeoisie and weakened that of the proletariat ... With the phrase about the self-determination of nations the Bolsheviks furnished water for the mills of counter-revolution and thus furnished an ideology not only for the strangling of the Russian Revolution itself, but for the planned counter-revolutionary liquidation of the entire World War." [12]

Why did Lenin insist so stubbornly - we may enquire with Rosa Luxemburg once more - on the slogan of the self-determination of nations and that of the liberation of oppressed peoples? There is no doubt that this slogan stands in contradiction to the demand for the world revolution, and Lenin as well as Luxemburg was interested in the outbreak of the world revolution, since, like all Marxists of that time, he did not believe that Russia could hold out in the revolutionary struggle if thrown upon her own resources. He agreed with Engels that "if a Russian revolution gives rise at the same time to a European proletarian revolution, the present joint-ownership (Gemeineigentum) in Russia may serve as the starting point of a communist development." Hence it was not only clear to Lenin that the Bolsheviks in Russia had to seize the power, but also that the Russian revolution must be made a European and hence a world revolution if it was to lead to socialism. On the basis of the objective situation resulting from the World War, Lenin was no more able than Luxemburg to conceive that Russia could hold out against the capitalist powers if the revolution failed to spread into Western Europe. To Rosa Luxemburg it was very improbable that "the Russians will be able to hold out in this witches' sabbath" [13] - a view which was based not merely on her experience with and her mistrust of people like Lenin and Trotsky who mouthed their silly phrases about

the right of self-determination of nations, their policy of making concessions to the peasants, etc.; nor was it because of the imperialistic attacks against the Russian Revolution, nor did it flow from a standpoint propagated by the Social Democracy, which proved statistically that the backward economic development of Russia neither justified the revolution nor allowed for socialism. She believed this primarily because, as she wrote while in jail, "the Social Democracy in the highly developed West is made up of wretched cowards and will look calmly on while the Russians bleed." [13] She was in favour of the Bolshevik revolution, however much she criticised the Bolsheviks from the viewpoint of the needs of the world revolution, and she sought constantly to trace their economic retreats back to the failure on the part of the proletariat of Western Europe to aid them. "Yes," she writes, "naturally I am not much pleased with the Bolsheviks even now in their peace fanaticism [Brest-Litovsk - P.M.] . But after all ... they are not to blame. They are in a jam, have only the choice between two evils and choose the lesser. Others are responsible for the fact that the Russian Revolution turns out to the devil's advantage." [13] And again she writes: "The German government-socialists may shout that the rule of the Bolsheviks is a caricature of the dictatorship of the proletariat. If it was or is, then only for the reason that it is a product of the conduct of the German proletariat, conduct which was a caricature of socialist class struggle." [14]

Rosa Luxemburg died too early to see that the Bolshevik policy, even though it ceased to further the world-revolutionary movement, was yet capable of assuring the rule of the Bolsheviks in the framework of state capitalism. As Liebknecht, in harmony with Rosa Luxemburg, wrote from jail: "If the German revolution fails to take place, there remain for the Russian revolution the alternatives: to go down fighting or to present a mere wretched appearance of life." [15]

The Bolsheviks chose the latter. "There are communists in Russia," wrote Eugen Varga when he was still a Marxist, "who have grown tired of waiting so long for the European revolution and who want to adjust themselves definitely to Russian isolation. With a Russia which would regard the social revolution of the other countries as a matter with which it had no concern ... the capitalist countries would at any rate be able to live as peaceful neighbours ... Such a bottling up of revolutionary Russia ... would slow down the pace of the world revolution." [16]

The national policy of Lenin has not proved fatal to Bolshevik rule. It is true that large areas have remained separate from Russia and become reactionary States, but the power of the Bolshevik state is firmer than ever. Apparently the Leninist line has been confirmed, and apparently Rosa Luxemburg's warnings have turned out to be unjustified. But this belief is true only in so far as it relates to the powerful position of the Bolshevik state apparatus; it is by no means valid, however, from the standpoint of the world revolution, the standpoint at stake in the dispute between Luxemburg and Lenin. Bolshevik Russia still exists, to be sure; but not as what it was at the beginning, not as the starting point of the world revolution, but as a bulwark against it. The Russia which was hailed by Rosa Luxemburg, and every revolutionist along with her, has lost its original promise; what remains is a Russia about which Rosa Luxemburg as early as 1918 expressed the following fear: "Like a terrifying spectre there approaches ... an alliance of the Bolsheviks with Germany. A Bolshevik alliance with German imperialism would be the most frightful moral blow for international socialism ... With the grotesque 'mating' between Lenin and Hindenburg the moral source of light in the East would be extinguished ... Socialist revolution ... under the patronage of German imperialism.... that would be the most monstrous thing that we could still experience. And furthermore, it would be ... pure utopia ... Any political downfall of the Bolsheviks in noble struggle against the superior force and unkindness of the historical situation would be preferable to this moral downfall." [17]

Though the long friendship of Leninist Russia with Hindenburg Germany has for the moment grown cool and the Bolshevik dictatorship today prefers to rest on French bayonets in particular and the League of Nations in general, it nevertheless practises openly today the thing for which it has always stood in principle and to which Bukharin at the Fourth World Congress of the Comintern gave clear expression in

the following manner: "There is no difference of principle between a loan and a military alliance ... We are already big enough to conclude a military alliance with another bourgeoisie, in order by means of this bourgeois State to crush another bourgeoisie. This form of national defence, of the military alliance with bourgeois States, makes it the duty of the comrades of one country to help this bloc to victory."

In the grotesque mating between Lenin and Hindenburg, between capitalist interests and those of the Bolshevik rulers, is illustrated, for that matter, the decline of the world-revolutionary wave, a decline which has still not reached the bottom. The labour movement flocking around the name of Lenin is a football of capitalistic politics, absolutely incapable of any revolutionary action. Lenin's tactic - the utilisation of nationalist movements for world revolutionary purposes - has in historical perspective proved mistaken. The warnings of Rosa Luxemburg were more justified than she could ever have cared to believe.

The 'liberated' nations form a fascist ring around Russia. 'Liberated' Turkey shoots down the communists with arms supplied to her by Russia. China, supported in its national struggle for freedom by Russia and the Third International, throttles its labour movement in a manner reminiscent of the Paris Commune. Thousands and thousands of workers' corpses are testimony of the correctness of Rosa Luxemburg's view that the phrase about the right of self-determination of nations is nothing but "petty-bourgeois humbug." The extent to which the "struggle for national liberation is a struggle for democracy" is surely revealed by the nationalistic adventures of the Third International in Germany, adventures which contributed their share to the preconditions for the victory of fascism. Ten years of competition with Hitler for the title to real nationalism turned the workers themselves into fascists. And Litvinov celebrated in the League of Nations the victory of the Leninist idea of the self-determination of peoples on the occasion of the Saar plebiscite. Truly, in view of this development, one must indeed wonder at people like Max Shachtman who still today are capable of saying: "Despite the sharp criticism levelled by Rosa at the Bolsheviks for their national policy after the revolution, the latter was nevertheless confirmed by the results." [18]

It must further be noted in this connection that Lenin's attitude on the national question was by no means a definitely consistent one, but always subordinated to the needs of the Bolsheviks. Moreover, it was thoroughly contradictory. Lenin writes: "Revolutionary actions in wartime against the government of one's own country indicate surely not only the desire for its defeat, but also the actual promotion of such a defeat." [19] On pursuing this thought we come to the following absurd contradiction. Since the warring countries are not equally affected by defeatism and at the same time by the proletarian revolution, this tactic facilitates the victory of that country which is least affected thereby and also the oppression of the vanquished country. During an imperialist war the proletariat must, according to Lenin, be for the defeat of its own country. If that defeat has come about, the workers must then turn around and support their bourgeoisie in its struggle for national liberation. And if then the 'oppressed nation' with the aid of the proletariat has again taken its place in the family of nations, the workers must once more cast aside national defence. A false interpretation of the Leninist thought? Just a moment: let us take a look at the actual practice. In 1914-18 Lenin and the Bolsheviks in their position on Germany were opposed to national defence. In 1919-23 they were for the national defence and for the national liberation of Germany. Today when, thanks to the aid of the proletariat, Germany has again become an imperialist power, they are once more opposed to national defence. And tomorrow - what they are for or against tomorrow depends on the constellations of power for the next world war, which will see Russia as the ally of this or that group. The defeatist tactic represented by Lenin during the late war stands in complete contradiction to the right of self-determination of nations and to national wars of liberation. It is a mere moving about in a circle; the proletariat plays the part of compensatory justice between the capitalist rivals. Rosa Luxemburg took pains to point out that this has nothing to do with Marxist class struggle.

Lenin was a practical politician. It was essentially only as a tactician that he distinguished himself from the theoreticians of the Second International. What they sought to attain along democratic ways, he

attempted to win by revolutionary means. Not with speeches in parliament, but with force on the real field of the class struggle, he wanted to realise socialism for the workers. By means of his party, he wanted to make the revolution for the masses, in that the party won the masses to itself. The power had to come into the hands of the Bolsheviks, in order that the exploited of Russia might be liberated. The power had to be in the hands of the Bolsheviks in order that world capitalism might be overcome by revolution. The appropriation of political power through the party was the beginning and end of the Leninist policy - a policy which has often been acclaimed as clever and flexible, but in reality was purely opportunistic.

At the outbreak of the revolution, the Russian bourgeoisie was not in a position itself to take over and hold power, since it was not in a position to solve the agrarian problem. This was left to the Bolsheviks. "The democratic-bourgeois revolution has been carried through to the end by us as by no one else," Lenin declared on the fourth anniversary of the October revolution, and this revolution was carried through with the aid of the peasantry. The Bolsheviks had power, and they constantly balanced the opposition between peasants and workers in such manner that power could be kept. In order to retain this power the familiar zig-zag policy was conducted both on a Russian and on an international scale; it was this policy which made the history of the Third International a history of its crises and of its downfall.

The very first concession to the peasants enabled Rosa Luxemburg to foresee in rough outline the necessary development of Bolshevik Russia, unless the reactive force of this 'transgression' were suppressed by the world revolution. "The proclamation for immediate seizure and distribution of land by the peasants," she wrote, "had necessarily to work in the very opposite direction to that intended. It is not only not a socialist measure, but it bars the way to such." [20] Rosa Luxemburg was not aware (being in jail at the time) that the peasants had divided up the land even before the Bolsheviks had authorised it, and that the latter merely legalised what was already practically in effect. The spontaneity of the peasant masses was quicker than the word of the 'bearers of revolutionary consciousness' as the Bolsheviks regarded themselves.

The Bolsheviks wanted, however, to carry the bourgeois revolution consistently to its end, and for this purpose there was required also the conversion of the peasants into country wage-workers: the capitalisation of agriculture. This process is still in full swing, and is celebrated throughout the world as collectivisation; it is by no means completed, nor can it be without giving rise to new revolutionary conflicts. Apparently, however, the Leninists can maintain that Luxemburg was wrong in assuming that without the world revolution Bolshevism had to capitulate on the peasant question. Still, such a contention involves proving also that Bolshevism has actually led to socialism. What exists in Russia, however, is not socialism but state capitalism. Even though it may be called socialism, it still remains state capitalism exploiting wage-labour, and hence the Luxemburg fear, however much modified, has after all been confirmed.

The peasant movements during the first years of the Russian Revolution forced the Bolsheviks, in order to remain in power, to accept a course which necessarily hindered the world revolution and which in Russia itself permitted nothing more than a state capitalism which later on must be revolutionarily overthrown by the proletariat if it wants to arrive at socialism. At this point, however, we are interested merely in the fact that with the aid of the peasant movement the Bolsheviks were able to come to power, and, furthermore, that they believed it sufficient to be in possession of the political and economic command posts in order, with a correct policy, to arrive at socialism. The course that was forced upon the Bolsheviks by reason of backward conditions - the most thorough-going centralisation of all authority and the concessions to the peasants - appeared to them as their own shrewd and successful policy, which they sought to employ also on the international field.

The laws of motion of the Russian Revolution had been foreseen by Lenin with remarkable clarity long before its outbreak, and his whole theory and practice was cut to fit these Russian conditions. This is the explanation of his super-centralism, his definite conception of the role of the party, his acceptance of Hilferding's ideas of socialisation, and also his position on the national question. Even though Rosa Luxemburg, from her familiarity with Russian conditions, was very well able to understand the Leninist policy and to analyse the basis for it as no other Marxist could do, and though she was able, so long as the Bolsheviks actually appeared as a world-revolutionary force, to take all this as unavoidable into the bargain, she nevertheless came out with full force against the design to form from this special Russian situation a recipe for the solution of the revolutionary tasks of the workers throughout the world. "The danger begins," she says of the Leninist policy, "when the Bolsheviks make a virtue out of necessity and seek to establish this tactic, forced upon them by these fatal conditions, as something applicable for all time to come and to recommend it to the international proletariat as the model of socialist tactic to be universally imitated." [21]

Since the alliance between peasants and workers had conformed to Lenin's expectations in putting the power into the hands of the Bolsheviks, he conceived the course of the world revolution as a similar process, even though on a larger scale. The oppressed peoples were mainly agrarian nations, and in its peasant policy the Communist International as a matter of fact sought to combine agrarian and proletarian interests on a world scale in order to place them in opposition to capital, after the Russian manner, and to defeat it throughout the world. The national liberation movements in the colonies and those of the national minorities in the capitalist countries, were supported by the Bolsheviks, because in this way imperialist intervention of the capitalist countries in Russia was weakened.

However, the world revolution refused to be treated as an enlarged copy of the Russian. The adventures of the Communist International in its endeavours to make of itself a worker and peasant international are recognised as blunders; instead of furthering, they disintegrated the revolutionary movement against capitalism. All that could be attained in this way was the consolidation of Bolshevik state power in Russia through the winning of a long historical breathing spell which led to the development of a Russian and international situation such as confronts us still today.

While Lenin's position on the national question was on the one hand determined by the social-democratic standpoint of pre-war time, which he had not completely overcome, and on the other appeared to him as a means of setting up and consolidating Bolshevik mastery in Russia and its eventual extension on a world-wide scale, for Rosa Luxemburg it had no other meaning than that of a false policy which would be dearly paid for.

In contradistinction to Lenin, for whom, quite in keeping with his general position, organisation and the conquest of power for the party was the necessary presupposition for the victory of socialism, Rosa Luxemburg's glance was directed to the class needs of the proletariat. Furthermore, while Lenin's theory and practice were tied up mainly with the backward conditions of Russia, Rosa Luxemburg constantly took as her starting point the more highly developed capitalist countries and hence was incapable of seeing in the 'historical mission' of the working class a party-and-leadership problem. She laid more weight upon the spontaneous mass movements and the self-initiative of the workers than upon the growth of the organisation and the quality of the leaders. Thus she differed fundamentally from Lenin in her appraisal of the factor of spontaneity in history and hence also as regards the role of organisation in the class struggle. Before entering into these differences, however, we should like to contrast briefly the views of Luxemburg and Lenin on the Marxian theory of accumulation, since this question is very closely bound up with all the others.

The Collapse of Capitalism In her campaign against the revisionists, Rosa Luxemburg had already emphasised that the labour movement must be prepared to face the question of revolution, not that of

reform, since capitalism is inevitably heading toward collapse. In opposition to revisionism, which strove to impute to capitalism an endless duration, she maintained that "with the assumption that capitalist accumulation has no economic limit, socialism loses its granite foundation of objective historical necessity. We then take flight into the mist of pre-Marxist systems and schools which sought to deduce socialism from the mere injustice and badness of the present-day world and from the mere revolutionary determination of the working class." [22]

Her principal literary work, conceived as part of her struggle against reformism, was designed to demonstrate an objective limit to capitalist development, and was at the same time a critique of the Marxian theory of accumulation. [23]

In her opinion, Marx had merely raised the question of accumulation of the total capital, but left it unanswered. His Capital appeared to her 'incomplete', a 'torso'; it contained 'gaps' which were to be filled in. Marx had "represented the process of capital accumulation in a society consisting merely of capitalists and workers"; in his system he "passed over foreign trade" so that it is "just as necessary as at the same time it is impossible, in his system to realise surplus value outside the two existing social classes." In Marx, the accumulation of capital "has become involved in a vicious circle"; his work contains "glaring contradictions", which she set about to overcome.

She herself based the necessity of capitalist collapse on "the dialectical contradiction that capitalist accumulation requires for its movement to be surrounded by non-capitalist areas ... and can continue only so long as it is provided with such a milieu." [24]

She looked for the difficulties of accumulation in the sphere of circulation, in the question of turnover and that of the realisation of surplus value, while to Marx these difficulties are already present in the sphere of production, since to him accumulation is a question of capital expansion (Kapitalverwertung). The production of surplus value, not its realisation, is to him the real problem. It appeared to Rosa Luxemburg, however, that a part of the surplus value could not be disposed of in a capitalism such as that represented by Marx; its conversion into new capital was possible only by way of foreign trade with non-capitalist countries. Here is the way she put the matter: "The process of accumulation tends everywhere to set in the place of natural economy simple commodity economy, in the place of simple commodity economy the capitalist economy, to bring capitalist production as the one and exclusive mode of production to absolute dominance in all countries and branches of industry. Once the final result is attained though this remains merely a theoretical construction - accumulation becomes an impossibility. The realisation and capitalisation of surplus value is transformed into an insoluble task ... The impossibility of accumulation means, capitalistically, the impossibility of further unfolding of the productive forces and thus the objective historical necessity of the decline of capitalism." [25]

These reflections of Rosa Luxemburg's were not new; all that was original about them was the foundation she gave them. She attempted to demonstrate their correctness by reference to Marx's scheme of reproduction in the second volume of Capital. According to Marx, capital must accumulate. A definite relation must exist between the different branches of production, in order that the capitalists may find on the market the means of production, the workers and the means of consumption for reproduction. This relation, which is not controlled by human beings, asserts itself blindly by way of the market. Marx reduced it to two comprehensive departments: the production of means of production, and the production of means of consumption. The exchange between the two departments he illustrated by arbitrarily chosen figures. On the basis of this Marxian schema, accumulation proceeds apparently without disturbances. The exchange between the two departments goes on smoothly. "If we take the schema literally," says Rosa Luxemburg, "it would appear as if capitalist production exclusively realised its total surplus value and employed the capitalised surplus value for its own needs. If capitalist production, however, is itself exclusively the purchaser of its surplus product, no limit to accumulation is

discoverable ... Under the Marxian presuppositions, the schema permits of no other interpretation than limitless production for the sake of production." [26]

But that, says Rosa Luxemburg, can after all not be the 'purpose' of accumulation. Such a production as that suggested by the schema is "from the capitalist standpoint quite senseless." "The Marxian diagram of accumulation gives no answer to the question: for whom the expanded production really takes place ... To be sure, in the course of accumulation, the workers' consumption mounts, as does that of the capitalists; still, the personal consumption of the capitalists comes under the heading of simple reproduction, and for whom do the capitalists produce when they do not consume the entire surplus value, but voluntarily practise abstinence, i.e. accumulate? ... Still less can the purpose of uninterrupted capital accumulation be the maintenance of an ever greater army of workers, since the consumption of the workers is capitalistically a consequence of accumulation, but never its purpose and its presupposition ... If the Marxian schema of expanded reproduction were to conform to reality, it would indicate the end of capitalist production." [27]

But the frictionless exchange relation between the two great departments of production, their equilibrium, is in the Marxian schema simply impossible, according to Rosa Luxemburg. "The assumption of a rising organic composition of capital would show that the maintenance of the necessary quantitative proportion is precluded; that is, the impossibility of long-continued accumulation is demonstrable schematically in purely quantitative terms. An exchange between the two departments is impossible, there remains an unsaleable surplus in the department of consumption goods, an over-production of surplus value which can be realised only in non-capitalist countries." [28] With this theory Rosa Luxemburg explained also the imperialistic necessities of the capitalist countries.

This theory of Rosa Luxemburg's stands in direct contradiction to Lenin's view of the matter, as may be seen from all his works dealing with economics. In complete accord with Marx, he looked for the contradictions which pointed to the historical limitations of capitalism, not like Rosa Luxemburg in the sphere of circulation, but in that of production. Lenin took his stand uncritically and unreservedly on the Marxian economic theories, because he regarded them as incapable of being supplemented. In his own theoretical works he confined himself to employing the Marxian doctrines in investigating the development of capitalism in general and of Russian capitalism in particular. There is a special, though still untranslated, work of Lenin's against Rosa Luxemburg's theory of accumulation, but it merely repeats the viewpoint which he has set down in all his other works on the subject and which we have merely to become acquainted with here in order completely to grasp the full force of the contradiction between the two conceptions.

In his writings against the Narodniki, Lenin had already anticipated many of his arguments against Rosa Luxemburg's conception. The Narodniki asserted that the domestic capitalist market was insufficient for the expansion of capitalist economy and moreover that it continually diminished with the accompanying impoverishment of the masses. Like Rosa Luxemburg later, they also could not grant that the capitalist surplus value could be realised without foreign markets. According to Lenin, however, the question of the realisation of surplus value has nothing to do with this problem; "the lugging in of foreign trade does not solve the problem, but merely shifts it." [29]

To him the necessity of the foreign market for a capitalist country is "not at all explained by the laws of the realisation of the social product (and of surplus value in particular), but by the fact that capitalism arises only as the result of a highly developed commodity circulation which goes beyond the boundaries of the State." [30] The disposal of the product on the foreign market explains nothing, "but itself demands an explanation, that is, the finding of its equivalent ... When one speaks of the 'difficulties' of realisation," says Lenin, "one must also realise that these 'difficulties' are not only possible but also unavoidable, and in fact with regard to all parts of the capitalist product and not to the surplus value alone. The difficulties

of this sort, which originate in the unproportional distribution of the different branches of production, arise constantly not only in connection with the realisation of surplus value, but also in connection with the realisation of the variable and constant capital; not only in connection with the realisation of the product in the form of consumption goods, but also in the form of means of production." [31]

"As we know," writes Lenin in his *Characterisation of Economic Romanticism*, 1899, "the law of capitalist production consists in the fact that the constant capital increases faster than the variable; that is, an ever greater part of the newly formed capital flows to that department of social production which turns out means of production. Consequently, this department must unconditionally grow more rapidly than the one which turns out means of consumption. Consequently, the means of consumption come to occupy a less and less prominent part in the total mass of capitalist production. And that is in full harmony with the historical mission of capitalism and its specific social structure: the former consists, that is, in the development of the productive forces of society; the latter precludes the utilisation thereof by the mass of the population."

Nothing is to Lenin "more senseless than to deduce from this contradiction between production and consumption that Marx had contested the possibilities of realising surplus value in capitalist society, or had explained crises as resulting from insufficient consumption ... The different branches of industry which serve each other as a 'market' do not develop uniformly, they overtake each other and the more developed industry seeks foreign markets. This circumstance does not by any means indicate that it is impossible for the capitalist nation to realise surplus value ... It merely points to the unproportionality in the development of the various industries. With a different distribution of the national capital, the same quantity of products could be realised within the country." [32]

So far as Lenin was concerned, Marx with his scheme of reproduction had "completely cleared up the process of the realisation of the product in general and of surplus value in particular, and revealed that there was no justification whatever for lugging the foreign market into the question." [33] Capitalism's susceptibility to crisis and its expansionist tendencies are explained for Lenin by the lack of uniformity in the development of the various branches of industry. It is from the monopolist character of capitalism that he derives the constant colonial expansion and the imperialistic partition of the world. By means of capital export and the control over sources of raw materials, the bourgeoisie of the leading capitalist countries derives enormous extra profits. The imperialist expansion, in his view, does not serve so much for the realisation of surplus value as for increasing the mass of profits. [34]

There is no doubt that Lenin's conception is much closer to the Marxian than is Rosa Luxemburg's. It is true that the latter was quite correct in recognising in the Marxian theory of accumulation the law of collapse of capitalism; she overlooked, however, the Marxian basis for this view and produced her own theory of realisation, which Lenin correctly rejected as unmarxist and false. It is interesting to note in this connection, however, that in the bibliography appended to his biography of Marx, Lenin referred to the "analysis of the (Luxemburgian) false interpretation of the Marxist theory by Otto Bauer." [35]

Now Bauer's critique [36] of Rosa Luxemburg's theory of accumulation had rightly been denoted by the latter in her *Anti-Critique*, as a "disgrace for the official Marxism"; for Bauer repeated in his attacks nothing but the revisionist conception that capitalism is without objective limits. To his mind, "capitalism is conceivable even without expansion" ... It is "not on the mechanical impossibility of realising surplus value" that capitalism will go down, he says, but "on the indignation to which it drives the masses of the people ... It will receive its death blow from the constantly growing working class, schooled, united and organised through the mechanism of capitalist production itself." [37]

By means of a modified schema of reproduction which avoided many of the defects deplored by Rosa Luxemburg in that of Marx, Bauer endeavoured to furnish proof that even on the assumption of a rising

organic composition of capital, a frictionless exchange between the two departments in the schema of capitalist reproduction was still possible. Rosa Luxemburg demonstrated to him, however, that even in his modified schema an unsaleable surplus remains over in the department of consumption, and that in order to be realised it compels to the conquest of new markets. To this, Bauer had nothing more to say. And nevertheless Lenin referred to him as the "analyst of Rosa Luxemburg's false theory."

Not only did Bauer's argument leave Rosa Luxemburg unscathed; there is also the fact that the conclusions which he drew from his schema, indicating unlimited accumulation (independently of the question of the exchange relation between the two departments), could be demonstrated with reference to this same schema as wholly unfounded. Henryk Grossman proved that if Bauer's schema were expanded to cover a longer period of time, the result was not Bauer's frictionless expansion of capitalism, but the collapse of capital expansion. The struggle against Rosa Luxemburg's theory of collapse had led merely to a new one.[38]

The dispute between Luxemburg and Bauer, which found Lenin's sympathies on the side of the latter, was a dispute over nothing, and again it is not without interest to note that the senselessness of the whole discussion was not observed by Lenin. This discussion turned on the impossibility or possibility of a frictionless exchange relation between the two departments of the Marxian reproduction schema, on which depended the full realisation of surplus value. In the Marxian system, the schema was thought of merely as an aid to theoretical analysis and was not conceived as having any objective basis in reality. Henryk Grossman, in his convincing reconstruction of the plan of Marx's Capital[39] as well as in other works, has revealed the real meaning of the reproduction schema, and thus set the discussion with reference to Marx's theory of accumulation on a new and more fruitful basis. The entire criticism directed at Marx by Luxemburg on the basis of this schema was posited on the assumption that the reproduction schema had an objective basis.

But, says Grossman, "the schema, in itself, lays no claim to presenting a picture of concrete capitalist reality. It is only a link in the Marxian process of approximation, one which forms with other simplifying assumptions, on which the schema is grounded, and with the later modifications by which the matter is made progressively a more concrete inseparable whole. Thus any one of these three parts without the two others becomes completely meaningless for the recognition of the truth, and can have no further significance than a preliminary stage of knowledge, the first step in the process of approaching concrete." [40] reality (AnnÃherungsverfahren).

The Marxian schema deals with the exchange values, but in reality the commodities are not exchanged at their values but at production prices. "In a reproduction schema built on values, different rates of profit must arise in each department of the schema. There is in reality, however, a tendency for the different rates of profit to be equalised to average rates, a circumstance which is already embraced in the concept of production prices. So that if one wants to take the schema as a basis for criticising or granting the possibility of realising surplus value, it would first have to be transformed into a price schema." [41]

Even if Rosa Luxemburg had been successful in demonstrating that in the Marxian schema the full turnover of the commodities is impossible, that with each year an increasing superfluity of means of consumption must arise, what would she have proved? "Merely the circumstance that the 'indisposable remainder' in the consumption department arises within the schema of value, that is, on the presupposition that the commodities are exchanged at their values." [42] But this presupposition does not exist in reality. The schema of value on which Luxemburg's analysis is based has different rates of profit in the various branches of production, and these rates are not equated to average rates, since the schema takes no account of competition. What do Luxemburg's conclusions amount to then as regards reality, when they are derived from a schema having no objective validity?

"Since competition gives rise to the transformation of values into production prices and thereby the redistribution of the surplus value among the branches of industry (in the schema), whereby there necessarily occurs also a change in the previous proportionality relation of the spheres of the schema, it is quite possible and even probable that a 'consumption balance' in the value schema subsequently vanishes in the production-price schema and, inversely, an original equilibrium of the value schema is subsequently transformed in the production-price schema into a disproportionality." [43]

The theoretical confusion of Rosa Luxemburg is best illustrated in the fact that on the one hand she sees in the average rate of profit the governing factor which "actually treats each individual capital only as part of the total social capital," accords it profit as a part of the surplus value to which it is entitled in accordance with its magnitude without "regard to the quantity which it has actually won," [44] and that she nevertheless examines the question as to whether a complete exchange is possible; and that on the basis of a schema which knows no average rate of profit. If one takes into account this average rate of profit, Rosa Luxemburg's disproportionality argument loses all value, since one department sells above and the other under value and on the basis of the production price the undisposable part of the surplus value may vanish.

Marx's law of accumulation is identical with that of the fall of the rate of profit. The fall of the rate of profit can be compensated by the growth of the mass of profit for only a limited time, due to the continuous compulsion to accumulation. It is not from an excess of surplus value incapable of being realised that capitalism goes under according to Marx, but from lack of surplus value. Rosa Luxemburg completely overlooked the consequences of the fall of the rate of profit; and for this reason, she also had to raise the question, meaningless from the Marxian standpoint, as to the 'purpose' of accumulation.

"It is said," she writes, "that capitalism will go under because of the fall of the rate of profit ... This comfort is unfortunately quite dissipated by a single sentence from Marx, namely, the statement that for large capitals the fall of the rate of profit is counterbalanced by mass of profit. The decline of capitalism from the fall of the rate of profit is therefore still a good way off, somewhat like the time required for the sun's extinction." [45] She failed to see that while Marx had, to be sure, set forth such a fact, he had also at the same time suggested its limit, and that the fall of the rate of profit results in the fall of the mass of profit; in fact, that the former gives expression to what is at first the relative, and then the absolute fall of the actual mass of profit, in relation to capital's needs for accumulation.

It is true that Lenin had found it inconceivable that "the rate of profit has a tendency to sink," [46] and he referred to the fact that "Marx had analysed this tendency and a number of circumstances by which it was concealed or which operated to counteract it." [47] But the full importance of this law in the Marxian system he too failed to grasp clearly; a fact which explains, on the one hand, his acceptance of Bauer's rejoinder to Rosa Luxemburg, and on the other the restriction of his own explanation of crisis to the disproportional development of the various spheres of production. And, for that matter, it may explain also his contradictory conceptions, by which at one time he believed in an unavoidable end of capitalism, and at another time emphasised that there were absolutely no situations from which capitalism could not find a way out. There is not to be found in his works any convincing economic argument for the end of capitalism, and yet at the same time he has the firmest conviction that the system is unavoidably heading toward its fall. This may be explained by the fact that while he did not believe with Bauer and the Social Democracy in the possibility of the reformist transformation of capitalism to socialism, he nevertheless assumed with them that the overthrow of capitalism was exclusively a question of the development of the revolutionary consciousness of the working class or, more precisely stated, a question of organisation and its leadership.

Spontaneity and the Role of Organisation We have previously seen that Rosa Luxemburg correctly emphasised that for Marx the law of accumulation was at the same time the law of collapse of capitalism.

Her reasoning was false; the conclusions nevertheless were correct. Though in her explanation of the law of collapse she diverged completely from Marx, she yet recognised the existence of that law. Lenin's arguments against the Luxemburgian conception were sound, and, so far as they went, completely in harmony with Marx; nevertheless, he evaded the question as to whether capitalism is faced with an objective limit. His own doctrine of crisis is inadequate and inconsistent. His theory, while more correct, did not lead to truly revolutionary conclusions. Rosa Luxemburg's argument, even though false, still remained revolutionary. For the question is one of emphasising and demonstrating capitalism's tendency to collapse.

Lenin, who still stood much nearer than Rosa Luxemburg to the Social Democracy, saw the collapse of capitalism more as a conscious political act than as an economic necessity. He failed to see that the question of whether the economic or the political factor predominates with reference to the proletarian revolution is not one of abstract theory but of the concrete situation of the moment. The two factors are in reality inseparable in other than a purely conceptual sense. Lenin had accepted much of Hilferding's speculations regarding capitalist development, which according to the latter tended toward a so-called 'general cartel'. [48] That is to say, it was not only that, as at first, he had to set out from the bourgeois character of the coming Russian revolution and thus consciously adapted himself to its bourgeois manifestations and necessities, but he was also later burdened with the Hilferdingian attitude in relation to the more highly developed capitalist countries, and thus arrived at his over-estimation of the 'political side' of the proletarian revolution.

According to Lenin, it was also false to assume (and this held for the international scene) that we are living in the age of the pure proletarian revolution; in fact, to him such a revolution can never be. The true revolution is for him the dialectical conversion of the bourgeois revolution into the proletarian. The demands of the bourgeois revolution which are still on the order of the day can henceforth be actualised only within the framework of the proletarian revolution; but this proletarian revolution is proletarian only in the leadership; it embraces all the oppressed who must become the allies of the proletariat: the peasants, the middle classes, the colonial peoples, oppressed nations, etc. This genuine revolution takes place in the age of imperialism, which, developed by the monopolisation of economy, is for Lenin a 'parasitical', a 'stagnating' capitalism, 'the last stage of capitalist development' immediately before the outbreak of the social revolution. [49] Imperialism leads, in Lenin's conception, "very near to complete socialisation of production; it drags, as it were, the capitalist against his will and without his being aware of the fact, into a social order which offers a transition from complete freedom of competition to complete socialisation." [50]

Monopoly capitalism has, according to Lenin, already made production ripe for socialisation; the only remaining question is to take the control over economy out of the hands of the capitalists and put it in the hands of the State, and then also to regulate distribution according to socialist principles. The whole question of socialism is one of the conquest of political power for the proletarian party, which would then actualise socialism for the workers. Between Lenin and the Social Democracy there were no differences so far as concerned socialist construction and its organisational problems. The only difference had reference to the manner in which control over production was to be acquired: by parliamentary or by revolutionary means. The possession of political power, the control over the complete monopoly, were in both conceptions a sufficient solution of the problem of socialist economy: For this reason also Lenin is not alarmed at the prospect of state capitalism, against the opponents of which he says at the Eleventh Party Congress of the Bolsheviks: "State capitalism is that form of capitalism which we shall be in a position to restrict, to establish its limits; this capitalism is bound up with the State, and the State - that is the workers, the most advanced part of the workers, the vanguard, is us. And it is we on whom the nature of this state capitalism will depend."

While for Otto Bauer the proletarian revolution depended alone on the attitude of the class-conscious, organised workers, on the political will (which from a single glance at the social-democratic organisation, by which its members were completely dominated, practically meant that it depended on Otto Bauer & Company), so here for Lenin the fate of the state capitalism depends on the attitude of the party, which in turn is determined by the bureaucracy, and the whole of history is again the history of the magnanimity, the selflessness and the gallantry of a group of people who are trained in these virtues by the most supremely virtuous.

But with this position of Lenin's on state capitalism, which for him is determined in accordance with will and not by economic laws, in spite of the fact that the laws of state capitalism are no other than those of monopoly capitalism, Lenin had only remained true to himself, for to him in the last analysis the revolution also depended on the quality of the party and of its leadership. In harmony with Kautsky, for whom the revolutionary consciousness, indispensably necessary to the revolution (a consciousness which for Kautsky was ideology and nothing else) could only be brought to the workers from the outside, since the workers were incapable of developing it out of themselves, Lenin also asserted that "the working class, exclusively by its own efforts, is able to develop only trade-union consciousness; that is, it may realise the necessity for combining in unions, to fight against the employers and to strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc. The social doctrine, however, has proceeded from the philosophical, historical and economic theories which originated with educated representatives of the owning classes, the intellectuals." [51] A political consciousness, the necessary presupposition of the socialist victory, the workers, according to Lenin, were incapable of developing. Thus socialism had again ceased to be the 'work of the working class', as Marx viewed it; socialism now depended on the revolutionary ideology of the bourgeoisie; and no doubt the religious 'Marxist' J. Middleton Murry is today merely following in the traces of Kautsky and Lenin when he comes to the logical conclusion that the whole of socialism is nothing more than "substantially a movement of converted bourgeois." [52]

Certainly, Lenin stands on Marxist ground when he asserts that the workers are incapable of developing a political consciousness. In his polemic against Arnold Ruge, who so sadly deplored the lack of political consciousness, and was puzzled by this lack because after all such consciousness ought to have been developed by the impoverishment existing at the time, Marx said: "It is false to say that social distress creates political understanding. The truth is rather the reverse: social well-being creates political understanding. Political understanding is an intellectual quality and is given to him who already has, who lives in clover." [53]

But Lenin has no further connection with Marx, and sinks to the level of the bourgeois revolutionist Arnold Ruge, when he cannot conceive of a proletarian revolution without this intellect-consciousness, when he makes the revolution a matter of the conscious intervention of the 'knowing ones', or of the professional revolutionists. Against this Ruge-Lenin conception, Marx said: "The more cultivated and general the political understanding of a people, the more does the proletariat ... dissipate its energies in irrational, useless and brutally suppressed revolts. Because the proletariat thinks along political lines, it perceives the cause of all evils in the wills of men and all remedies to lie in force and the overthrow of a particular form of the State ... Political understanding conceals from it the roots of social distress; distorts its insight into its real aims, deceives its social instinct." [54]

To Ruge's assertion (and Lenin's position) that a revolution without the 'political soul' is impossible, Marx answers: "A revolution of political souls organises a ruling clique in society, in accordance with the limited and doubly-cleft nature of these souls, at the cost of society." [55] But Lenin had never aimed at more than a change of mastery over the means of production, since this seemed to him to suffice for socialism. Hence also his over-emphasis on the subjective, political factor - a circumstance by which he was led to view the organisational work of socialism as a political act. According to Marx there is indeed no socialism without revolution, and this revolution is the political act of the proletariat. But the

proletariat "requires this political act only insofar as it has need of the process of destruction and dissolution. Where the organising activity begins, where its proper aim, its soul emerges, there socialism casts away the political hull." [56]

The bourgeois elements in Lenin's thought, which in the first place make the end of capitalism dependent on certain political presuppositions which are not necessarily present; which, furthermore, fancied that increasing monopolisation was identical with the socialisation of production (a thing which today it is obvious to anyone is not the case), which made the whole matter of socialism dependent on the taking over of the monopolies by the State and the replacing of an old by a new bureaucracy, and for which the revolution was reduced to a contest between the revolutionists and the bourgeoisie for winning the masses: such a position had necessarily to minimise the revolutionary element of the spontaneous mass movement and its power and clarity of goal in order to be able to magnify correspondingly the individual role and that of socialist consciousness which has become congealed to an ideology.

Lenin cannot, to be sure, deny the element of spontaneity, but for him it is "essentially nothing other than the germinal form of consciousness," [57] which is brought to completion in the organisation and only then is truly revolutionary because completely conscious. The spontaneous awakening of the masses does not satisfy him; it does not suffice for socialist victory. "The fact that the masses are spontaneously entering the movement," he writes, "does not make the organisation of this struggle less necessary. On the contrary, it makes it more necessary." [58]

The mistake inherent in the spontaneity theory, he says, is that "it belittles the role of the conscious element" and that it "refuses strong individual leadership," which for Lenin is "essential to class success." The weaknesses of organisation are to him the weaknesses of the labour movement itself. The struggle must be organised, the organisation planned; all depends on that and the correct leadership. This latter must have influence over the masses, and this influence counts more than the masses. Where and how the masses are organised, whether in soviets or in trade unions, is, to him, a matter of indifference. The important thing is that they be led by the Bolsheviks.

Rosa Luxemburg sees these matters in a quite different light. She does not confuse revolutionary consciousness with the intellect-consciousness of the Leninist professional revolutionists, but for her it is the act - consciousness of the masses themselves, growing from the constraint of necessity. The masses act revolutionarily because they cannot act otherwise, and because they must act. Marxism to her is not only ideology which crystallises in the organisation, but the living and struggling proletariat which actualises Marxism not because it wants to, but because it cannot do otherwise. While for Lenin the masses are only the material which the conscious revolutionists work, just as to the streetcar motorman the streetcar serves only for travelling, in Rosa Luxemburg's writings the conscious revolutionists spring not only from growing insight but more still from the mass in its actual revolutionary activity. It is not only that she rejects on principle the over-emphasis on the role of organisation and leadership; she demonstrates from experience that "during the revolution it is extremely difficult for any directing organ of the proletarian movement to foresee and calculate which occasions and factors can lead to explosions and which cannot ... The rigid, mechanical, bureaucratic conception," she says, "cannot conceive of the struggle save as the product of organisation at a certain stage of its strength. On the contrary, the living, dialectical explanation makes the organisation arise as a product of the struggle." [59]

With reference to the Russian mass-strike movement of 1905 she says: "There was no predetermined plan, no organised action, because the appeals of the parties could scarcely keep in pace with the spontaneous rising of the masses; the leaders had scarcely time to formulate the watchwords of the on-rushing crowd." And generalising, she continues: "If the situation should lead to mass strikes in Germany, it will almost certainly not be the best organised workers who will develop the greatest capacity for action, but the worst organised or totally unorganised." [60]

"Revolutions," she expressly emphasises, "cannot be made at command. Nor is this at all the task of the party. Our duty is only at all times to speak out plainly without fear or trembling; that is, to hold clearly before the masses their tasks in the given historical moment, and to proclaim the political programme of action and the slogans which result from the situation. The concern with whether and when the revolutionary mass movement takes up with them must be left confidently to history itself. Even though socialism may at first appear as a voice crying in the wilderness, it yet provides for itself a moral and political position the fruits of which it later, when the hour of historical fulfillment strikes, garners with compound interest." [61]

Rosa Luxemburg's spontaneity conception has often been denounced, the usual thing being to denominate it as a 'catastrophe policy' as directed against the organisation of the labour movement itself. She frequently found it necessary to emphasise that her conception was not "pour la des organisation." [62] "The Social Democrats," she wrote, "are the most enlightened, most class-conscious vanguard of the proletariat. They cannot and dare not wait in a fatalistic fashion, with folded arms, for the advent of the revolutionary situation; wait for that which, in every spontaneous movement, falls from the clouds. On the contrary, they must now, as always, hasten the development of things and endeavour to accelerate events." [63]

This role of the organisation she regards as possible and therefore welcome and a matter of course, while Lenin regards it as absolutely necessary and makes the whole revolution dependent on the fulfillment of this necessity. This difference regarding the significance of organisation for the revolution involves also two different conceptions regarding form and content of the organisation itself. According to Lenin, "the only serious principle of organisation for our movement is the most absolute secrecy, the strictest selection of members, [64] the forming of professional revolutionists. Once these qualities are present, something more still is assured than 'democracy', namely, complete comradely confidence among the revolutionists. And this 'more' is for us unconditionally necessary, for with us ... there can be no question of replacing it by democratic control. It is a great mistake to believe that the impossibility of a real democratic control makes the members of the revolutionary organisation uncontrollable. They have no time to think of puppet-like forms of democracy, but they feel their responsibility very keenly." [65]

By means of the rules of organisation (which, so long as they were democratic, meant nothing) Lenin wanted to "forge a more or less sharp weapon against opportunism. The deeper the source of opportunism lies, the sharper must be this weapon." [66] This weapon was 'centralism', the strictest discipline in the party, the complete subordination of all activity to the instructions of the central committee. Of course, Rosa Luxemburg was admirably capable of tracing this "nightwatchman spirit" [67] of Lenin's to the special situation of the Russian intellectuals; but "it is false to think," (she writes against Lenin) "that the still impracticable majority rule of the workers within their party-organisation may be replaced by a sole-mastery on the part of the central authority of the party, and that the lacking public control on the part of the working masses over the acts and omissions of the party organs would be just as well replaced by the inverted control of a central committee over the activity of the revolutionary workers." [67] And even though the self-leadership of the workers should lead to blunders and false steps, Rosa Luxemburg is nevertheless ready to take all this into the bargain, for she is convinced that "even mistakes which a truly revolutionary labour movement commits are, in historical perspective, immeasurably more fruitful and valuable than the infallibility of the very best 'central committee'." [67]

The differences between Luxemburg and Lenin which we have here pointed out have in part already been more or less surpassed by history. Many of the things which gave substance to this dispute are of no moment today. Nevertheless, the essential factor in their debates, whether the revolution depends on the organised labour movement or on the spontaneous movement of the workers, is of the most pressing significance. But here also history has already decided in favour of Rosa Luxemburg. Leninism is buried under the ruins of the Third International. A new labour movement which has no concern with the social-

democratic remains which were still recognisable in Lenin and Luxemburg, nor yet has any intention of renouncing the lessons of the past, is arising. To separate itself from the deadly traditional influences of the old labour movement has become its first prerequisite, and here Rosa Luxemburg is as great an aid as Leninism has been a hindrance. This new movement of the workers with its inseparable nucleus of conscious revolutionists can do more with Luxemburg's revolutionary theory, in spite of its many weaknesses, and derive from it more hope, than from the total accomplishment of the Leninist International. And as Rosa Luxemburg once said, in the midst of the World War and collapse of the Second International, so the present-day revolutionists can say in view of the collapse of the Third International: "But we are not lost, and we shall conquer if we have not unlearned how to learn."

Paul Mattick (1935)

Notes

1 Cf. Letter of the editorial board of *Neue Zeit* to Rosa Luxemburg, Jan. 6, 1916.

2 Cf. C. Zetkin: 'Rosa Luxemburg's Position on the Russian Revolution'. Published by the Communist International, 1922.

3 In innumerable articles in the social democratic press.

4 Cf. Max Shachtman's article 'Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg' in *The New International*, March 1935.

5 R. Luxemburg: *Social Reform or Revolution*. We refrain hereafter from giving more precise references for the quotations (volume, page, etc.) since we translate from the German or Russian text, and it is an easy matter to look them up, in so far as the works are available in English.

6 Cf. R. Luxemburg: *Social Reform or Revolution*.

7 Cf. Lenin: *On the Right of Self-Determination of Nations* (1916), in the *Collected Works*.

8 Cf. Lenin: *On the Caricature of Marxism and on Imperialistic Economism* (1916), in the *Collected Works*.

9 Ibid.

10 Lenin: *On the Right of Self-Determination of Nations*.

11 Cf. R. Luxemburg: *The Russian Revolution*.

12 Ibid.

13 R. Luxemburg in *Letters to Luise Kautsky*, November-December 1917.

14 R. Luxemburg: *The Russian Revolution*.

15 K. Liebknecht: *Politische Aufzeichnungen aus dem Nachlass*, Berlin 1921.

16 E. Varga: *Die wirtschaftspolitischen Probleme der proletariatschen Diktatur*, Hamburg 1921.

17 R. Luxemburg: *Spartacus*.

- 18 Max Shachtman in The New International, March 1935.
- 19 Lenin and Zinoviev: Gegen den Strom, Hamburg, 1921. Articles of 1914-1916.
- 20 R. Luxemburg: The Russian Revolution.
- 21 Ibid.
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- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.
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- 29 Lenin: The Development of Capitalism in Russia, 1899.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid.
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- 36 O. Bauer: Die Akkumulation des Kapitals, Neue Zeit, 1913.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 H. Grossman: Das Akkumulations- und Zusammenbruchsgesetz des kapitalistischen Systems.
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- 40 H. Grossman: Die Wert-PreisTransformation bei Marx und das Krisenproblem.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid.

44 R. Luxemburg: The Accumulation of Capital.

45 R. Luxemburg: Anti-Critique.

46 Lenin: Karl Marx, in the Collected Works.

47 Ibid.

48 R. Hilferding: Das FinanzKapital.

49 Lenin: Address to the First Congress of the Soviets 1917.

50 Lenin: Imperialism.

51 Lenin: What is to be Done?

52 Marxism - a symposium, London 1935.

53 K. Marx: On the King of Prussia and Social Reform.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 K. Marx: Selected Essays.

57 Lenin: On Trade Unions, in the Collected Works.

58 Lenin: What is to be Done?

59 R. Luxemburg: The Mass Strike.

60 Ibid.

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62 R. Luxemburg: Brief an Kautsky, 1905.

63 R. Luxemburg: The Mass Strike.

64 This 'principle' was dropped by Lenin whenever such a course appeared opportune. Thus he once threw away the 50,000 revolutionary workers of the German Communist Labour Party (K.A.P.D.) in order not to be deprived of the five million votes of the reformist Independent Socialist Party (U.S.P.D.) of Germany.

65 Lenin: What is to be Done? Lenin's idealism comes to light in this formulation as well. Instead of actually and materially assuring control through organising that control within the organisation, he replaces it by 'something better', by the phrases 'comradely confidence' and 'feeling of responsibility'. Practically, however, this meant: mechanical obedience, order from above, conformity below.

66 Lenin: One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward, 1904.

67 R. Luxemburg: Organisational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy, Neue Zeit 1905.