

# Rosa Luxemburg

VOLUME I



Rosa Luxemburg as a school girl

# Rosa Luxemburg

J. P. NETTL

*In Two Volumes*

VOLUME I

LONDON  
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS  
NEW YORK TORONTO  
1966

*Oxford University Press, Ely House, London W. 1*

GLASGOW NEW YORK TORONTO MELBOURNE WELLINGTON  
BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS KARACHI LAHORE DACCA KUALA LUMPUR HONG KONG  
CAPE TOWN SALISBURY IBADAN NAIROBI LUSAKA ADDIS ABABA

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*Printed and Bound in England by  
Hazell Watson & Viney Ltd  
Aylesbury, Bucks*



## 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*.

Dr. Z. Rappaport and Mr. Henry Richmond generously helped me with translating Polish, Mrs. Betty Gruss with Yiddish, and Mrs. Rose Gillinson with Russian.

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.

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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.

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## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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?’<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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).<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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-

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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 Liebknecht 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

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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.’<sup>1</sup>

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-

<sup>1</sup> 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*.'<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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 Unszlicht 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

<sup>1</sup> 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 Jeziarska, 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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:

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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!’<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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?<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> The contrast between influence and power

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

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

<sup>3</sup> 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—

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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.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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

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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.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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. . . .<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> *Patryotyzm i socjalizm*, Geneva 1881.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by M. K. Dziewanowski, *The Communist Party of Poland*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1959, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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—

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> But it was not the 'poverty-stricken place with a population of low cultural level' which Rosa's biographers describe.<sup>3</sup> 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'.<sup>4</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

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

<sup>4</sup> Frölich, *loc. cit.*



Town Hall surrounded by a late-Renaissance square complete with arcades.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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'.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> Klausner, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>4</sup> Frölich, p. 13. He exaggerates the German influence.

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

<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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. . . .'<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> '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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

Even less is known about Rosa's mother, Line, born Löwenstein. Her brother Bernhard, Rosa's uncle, was said to have been a Rabbi.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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-

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

<sup>2</sup> Luise Kautsky, *Gedenkbuch*, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 86, n. 1.

<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup> Up to the end of 1899, her first year in Germany, she sometimes asked for money

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

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Minna Kautsky dated 30 December 1900, in Kautsky Archives, IISH.

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

<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> See below, p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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.

<sup>1</sup> 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’.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> Frölich, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> *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 Wesołowski.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> Marchlewski wrote and was usually known under the pseudonym of Karski, Warszawski under the pseudonym of Warski, and Wesołowski as Smutny. For the next twenty years the first two particularly were referred to indiscriminately by their real names or by their pseudonyms. (Wesołowski 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.

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

<sup>3</sup> 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'.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> Little is

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

<sup>2</sup> Especially in *Gedenkbuch*, and by Henriette Roland-Holst.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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. . . .<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> He had already been arrested and imprisoned twice and

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Frölich, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> 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.'<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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*.<sup>3</sup> At this Plekhanov declared open war. His instant dislike of Jogiches turned into noisy and public hatred.

<sup>1</sup> *Historische Shriftn*, Vilna 1939, Vol. I, part 3, p. 371 (Rabinovics), translated from Yiddish.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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.'<sup>4</sup> As proof of his contemptuous disregard for the usual émigré courtesies, Plekhanov

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

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

<sup>4</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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 *gruppa*. 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.<sup>3</sup> 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,

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

<sup>2</sup> John Mill in 'Vilna', *Historische Shriftn*, pp. 74 ff. For Plekhanov see below, pp. 75, 95-96.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

*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.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> '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.

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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'.<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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'.<sup>1</sup>

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.'<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

Memory and chivalry—the Second International was not ungalant—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.<sup>4</sup> 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

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

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> For Plekhanov's manœuvres 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.’<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> *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).

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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*.<sup>4</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> See declaration in *Sprawa Robotnicza*, No. 2, September 1893.

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

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

<sup>4</sup> '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'.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> O. B. Szmids, *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.

<sup>2</sup> O. B. Szmids, 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> That it flourished in spite of all setbacks and

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.

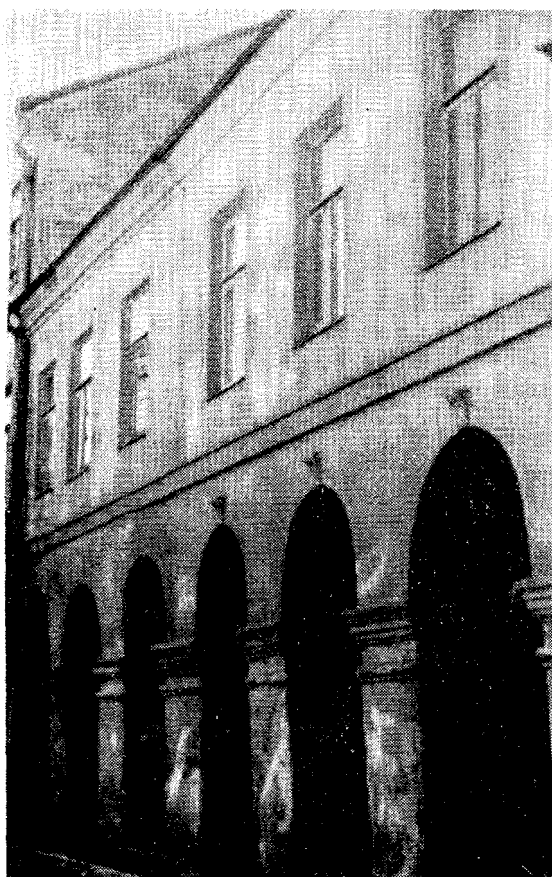
The nucleus of the leadership was formed between 1890 and 1893 in Switzerland. Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches had been installed in Zürich since 1890. In 1892 Julian Marchlewski arrived, after a year of imprisonment in Warsaw followed by expulsion.<sup>2</sup> Marchlewski was a somewhat patrician figure 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

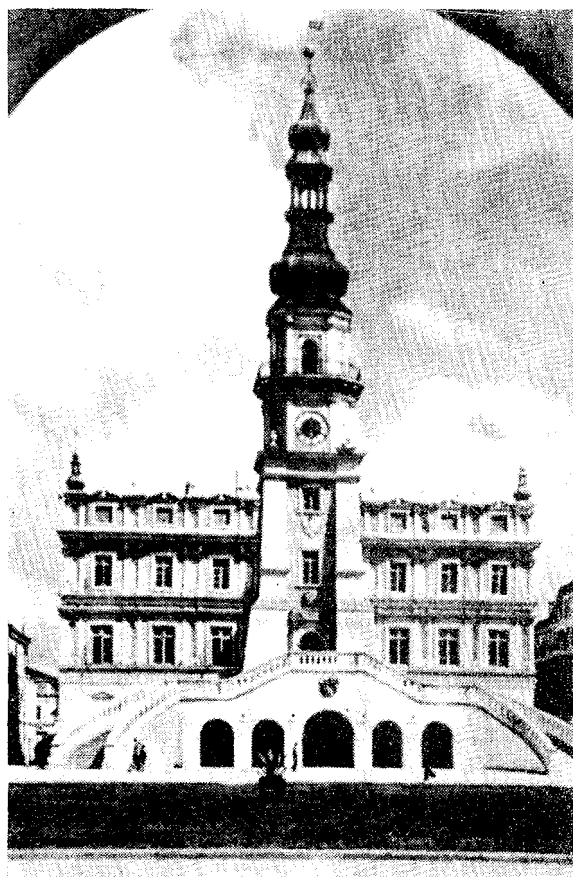
<sup>2</sup> Marchlewski later used the party pseudonym of Karski on most occasions. In Germany during the war he was known as Johannes Kämpfer. In the official service of the Soviet Union after 1919 he reverted to his own name. He died in Italy in 1925 as a senior Soviet official.



(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.<sup>1</sup> 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 Bolsheviki 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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 admission of the Lithuanian group.<sup>1</sup> 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—

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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:

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> John Mill, *Pionirn un Boier*, Vol. I, p. 167.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>3</sup> *Historische Shriftn*, pp. 388-90.

so blackened by the PPS that she was considered unclean [*tref*].<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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-

<sup>1</sup> *Historishe Shriftn*, p. 391 (translated from Yiddish).

<sup>2</sup> See below, pp. 107 ff.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> When Krichevskii and Teplov founded their own paper in 1899 they called it *Raboochee 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*.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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”.’<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> John Mill, *Pionirn un Boier*, Vol. I, p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> For a particularly striking instance, see below, p. 586.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> After his first visit to Zürich, John Mill was asked to take back an important letter from Rosa Luxemburg to an SDKP

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

<sup>2</sup> ‘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.<sup>1</sup> 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.'<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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

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

<sup>2</sup> *Historische Schriften*, p. 389. The particular phrase loses its savour in translation from Yiddish.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> The policy of the paper was always to indicate the need

<sup>1</sup> 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.'<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> It was her first cohesive statement on the national question. The theoretical implications were

<sup>1</sup> *Sprawa Robotnicza*, February 1895.

<sup>2</sup> *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.'<sup>1</sup> The *bourgeoisie* thus had to play a double, even contradictory, role to satisfy Rosa, supporting

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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'.<sup>1</sup> 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].'<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

The offensive was not confined to political polemics. Warsz-

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

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

<sup>3</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> '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.

Attest.

Das zehnjährige Kind der Warschauer 11ten Forman-  
 gymnasiums, laut des 39 allerhöchst bestimmten vom 5/12/  
 Jänner 18 erhaltenen Reglements für Formangymnasien  
 in Preussensien im König. Polen, halten des Befehl-  
 von des genannten Gymnasiums, Rosalie Luxemburg, 14 jah-  
 re alt, vom mosaischen Konfession, dort Attest aus, daß sie  
 in der 1<sup>ten</sup> Klasse dieses Gymnasiums eingeschrieben, bis zu  
 gottsfürdigen Grundlegung des Schuljahres (7 Klassen) in-  
 gegen bis zum 14 Juni 1887 darin blüht. Der fort bei ausge-  
 zeichnetem Belagen aus andern Lehren folgende

Notizen		erhalten:	
Religion	5	Geographie Rußlands	5
Russische Sp.	4	Naturwissenschaften	5
Pädagogie	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
Allgem. Geographie	4	(5 = ausgenommen, 4 = sehr gut)	

Da Rosalie Luxemburg mit sehr guten Anstrengungen im  
 Allgemeinen den gottsfürdigen Dienst erledigt hat, so hat das  
 zehnjährige Kind bestätigt, daß sie mit dem richtigen Fleiß  
 in Unterricht, dem ungetadelten Attest, zu genügen

So haben die Unterrichtslehrer in Warschau  
 Konstanze in beiliegendem Original N<sup>o</sup> 339.  
 Rosa Luxemburg

1887

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

Civilstands-Kreis Basel-Stadt.

Seite 289

Ehe-Register A

Heute den neunzehnten April ————— eintausend acht-hundert

aacht und neunzig sind vor dem unterzeichneten Civilstandsbeamten erschienen

1. Lübeck, Gustav Johannevinnsohn, —————

von Basel, ————— wohnhaft in

Basel, Gbamerstrasse N. 165, 6. Etg., —————

gehört in

Basel ————— den ersten September ————— ein-tausend acht-hundert

dreizehzig, ————— Sohn des v. Lübeck, Karl Wilhelm Stra-

mann Offenbacher und der Wilmberg geb. Luder, in Basel, St. N. 1

2. Luxemburg, Rosa, —————

von Luxemburg, Gemeinde Sellen, d. Basler, wohnhaft in

Weggen, St. Luzern, 4. Etg., —————

gehört in

Luxemburg ————— den ersten September ————— ein-tausend acht-hundert

sechzig, ————— Tochter des Luxemburg, Oswald, Kauf-

mann in Wiesbaden und der Lina geb. Löwenstein, —————

Die Verkündung hat stattgefunden in Basel am achtzehnten Sep-tem-

ber, im Basler den neunzehnten April 1898, im Weggen

St. Luzern Sellen Basel St. N. 1 Basel St. N. 1 Basel St. N. 1 Basel St. N. 1

Nach Prüfung der von den Verlobten nach Vorschrift des Gesetzes vorgewiesenen

Papiere und nachdem dieselben einzeln angefragt worden, ob sie sich zur Eheur

und zum Ehemann nehmen wollen hat der unterzeichnete Civilstandsbeamte auf

ihre bejahende Antwort die Ehe im Namen des Gesetzes als geschlossen erklärt.

<p>Abgegebene Papiere:</p> <p>(Verbindungsregister 189 J. Nr. 77)</p> <p>2 Heiratsverträge</p> <p>2 D. &amp; Verkündungsprotokolle von <u>Basel</u>, im <u>Weggen</u></p> <p>4 9a. Erklärung der <u>Basel</u> <u>St. Luzern</u> <u>Sellen</u></p> <p><u>Basel</u></p> <p>4 9b. Bescheinigung über die <u>Basel</u> <u>St. Luzern</u> <u>Sellen</u></p> <p>4 9c. Bescheinigung über die <u>Basel</u> <u>St. Luzern</u> <u>Sellen</u></p> <p>Mitgeteilt von Civilstandsbeamten von</p> <p><u>Basel</u> <u>St. Luzern</u> <u>Sellen</u></p>	<p>Unterschriften der Ehegatten:</p> <p><u>Lübeck, Gustav</u></p> <p><u>Luxemburg, Rosa geb. Luxemburg</u></p> <p>Unterschriften der Zeugen:</p> <p><u>Lübeck, Robert</u></p> <p><u>Luxemburg, Rosa</u></p> <p>Civilstandsbeamte:</p> <p><u>Lübeck, Gustav</u></p>
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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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.’<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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’.<sup>5</sup> Berfus, one of the leaders of the PPS organization in Germany, was offered space in the official German party paper to reply.<sup>6</sup> The debate went on right up to the eve of the International congress, with Rosa Luxemburg insisting on the right to

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> *Z Pola Walki*, *ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>3</sup> *Vorwärts*, 23 July 1896.

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

<sup>5</sup> *Naprzód*, No. 20, 14 May 1896.

<sup>6</sup> *Vorwärts*, 15, 17 July 1896.

reply both in *Vorwärts* and in *Neue Zeit*.<sup>1</sup> 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].’<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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. . . .<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Vorwärts*, 25 July 1896, Supplement No. 2.

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

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

<sup>4</sup> 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*.<sup>1</sup> 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'.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

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

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> Rosa eagerly seized the chance to reply offered by the

<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> *SAZ*, 25 November, 1 December 1896.

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

<sup>3</sup> 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.'<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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-

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

<sup>2</sup> See below, pp. 173-84.

<sup>3</sup> 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 naive, 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.<sup>1</sup> Both Polish parties benefited from this resurgence. The SDKP, particularly, received an important reinforcement through the adherence of the Lithuanian Social Democrats under

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup> Contributions from her pen could safely be solicited. The *Bund* asked her for articles and in 1899 reprinted her article in *Neue Zeit*.<sup>5</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Dziewanowski, *Communist Party*, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> See below, pp. 271-82.

<sup>4</sup> John Mill, *Pionirn un Boier*, Vol. II, p. 250.

<sup>5</sup> '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*.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> As with so many of Rosa Luxemburg's friendships, the emphasis subtly

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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).

<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> John Mill, *Pionirn un Boier*, Vol. I, p. 175.

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

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Karl Kautsky, *ibid.*, p. 445.

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

<sup>3</sup> See below, p. 200.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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-

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

The theoretical part of the Erfurt programme was the work

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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'.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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. . . .'<sup>3</sup>

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,

<sup>1</sup> 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'.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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).<sup>2</sup>

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.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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*.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> The importance of this *Jungen* group

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 'mised'. 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> See *Protokoll . . . 1894*, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> The status of the party congress was precisely that of an all-powerful last court of appeal which English

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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 preoccupied 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.’<sup>2</sup> 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:

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

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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.'<sup>2</sup> 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.'<sup>3</sup> 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

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

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>3</sup> *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. . . .<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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

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

<sup>2</sup> *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.'<sup>1</sup> Rosa Luxemburg and he entered into a working alliance right from the start and their cooperation, 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.<sup>2</sup>

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

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

<sup>2</sup> See below, p. 173.



quent visits to Upper Silesia as her stint in the desert—at least to acquaintances like the Kautskys.<sup>1</sup> 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?<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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 Schönlank, 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. Schönlank 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 Schönlank 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.<sup>2</sup> The difficulty was to decide which friendships

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

<sup>2</sup> Much of the correspondence with Schönlank 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, Schönlink 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] Schönlink.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.'<sup>3</sup> 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-

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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.)

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

<sup>2</sup> See below, p. 148.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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. . . .’<sup>1</sup> 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.’<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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).

<sup>2</sup> 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. . . .<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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. . .<sup>1</sup>

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.'<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1962, No. 1(17), pp. 159-60.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 2(18), pp. 77-78.

<sup>3</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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. . . .<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

. . . 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.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For the letter in question, see below, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> Bernstein himself was a distinguished figure in the German party—he was particularly well liked for his good nature

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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'.<sup>1</sup> 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'.<sup>2</sup> 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

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

*Vorwärts*, too, welcomed any critical appraisal of Marxist theory on principle even though Bernstein's ideas could in part have given rise to 'misunderstandings'.<sup>2</sup> 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'.<sup>3</sup>

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.'<sup>4</sup> Only Schönlanke 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

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

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

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> 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'.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.'<sup>3</sup> 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

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.)

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 Schönlink would give her review absolute priority. Schönlink 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]. . . . Schönlink 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!<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>2</sup> 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. Schönlink 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. . . .<sup>1</sup>

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*.'<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup>

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*

<sup>1</sup> 'Einige Briefe', p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Protokoll . . . 1898*, p. 133.

<sup>3</sup> 'Einige Briefe', p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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.'<sup>2</sup>

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.)<sup>3</sup>

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.

<sup>1</sup> *Protokoll . . . 1898*, p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>3</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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.'<sup>2</sup>

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. . . .'<sup>3</sup> Bebel's own reaction

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 118 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>3</sup> 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.'<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.'<sup>3</sup> 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]

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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.

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

<sup>2</sup> See below, pp. 157 ff.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.'<sup>4</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

<sup>3</sup> *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.

<sup>4</sup> *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.'<sup>1</sup> 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'.<sup>2</sup>

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*.<sup>3</sup> 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.

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

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

<sup>3</sup> 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.'<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> '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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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?’<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> ‘Einige Briefe’, *Bulletin IISH*, p. 13: Rosa Luxemburg to August Bebel, 31 October 1898.

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

<sup>3</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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.

<sup>1</sup> 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).

<sup>2</sup> 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 Schönlink. 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> '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*].<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> Victor Adler in the Vienna *Arbeiterzeitung*, 16 October 1898.

<sup>2</sup> 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 Schönkank'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

**A**FTER 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>2</sup> *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.'<sup>1</sup> 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'.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> *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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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 Schönlink, its distinguished and influential editor. 'The gossip has gone round Kautsky, Mehring and Bebel . . . that Schönlink's attitudes are largely due to my influence. Curious mud slinging!'<sup>1</sup> 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: Schönlink 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].'<sup>2</sup> She certainly received many letters of support and admiration.

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

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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?'<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> *Protokoll* . . . 1899, p. 173.

<sup>3</sup> *Protokoll* . . . 1899, p. 215.

<sup>2</sup> See below, pp. 210-11.

<sup>4</sup> *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.'<sup>1</sup> 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.'<sup>2</sup> She developed an almost gallic gift for political epigram, which made her not only readable but quotable, that essential prerequisite for political influence.<sup>3</sup>

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 Schönlank, the editor of *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, and Rosa's intellectual *beau*.<sup>4</sup> It became one of Rosa's regular if unofficial duties

<sup>1</sup> 'Unser leitendes Zentralorgan', *LV*, 22 September 1899.

<sup>2</sup> *LV*, 26 September 1899.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 'Einige Briefe', p. 28.

to act as an intermediary between the over-sensitive Mehring and the group of party editors—Kautsky, Schönlanck, 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Victor Adler, *Aufsätze, Reden und Briefe*, Vol. 6, p. 297.

<sup>3</sup> 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. . . .'<sup>1</sup> 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.'<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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*.'<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> Adolf Hoffmann to Karl Kautsky, 27 November 1899.

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

<sup>3</sup> Jogiches letters, end of November 1899, IML (M).

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

<sup>5</sup> *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.'<sup>1</sup> Certainly the political alliance with Winter was, this December, blossoming unseasonably. He had reviewed Rosa's doctoral dissertation most favourably in *Neue Zeit*.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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-

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 94 ff.

<sup>2</sup> 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].'<sup>1</sup>

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.'<sup>2</sup> Rosa supported the resolutions with a pointed and polemical speech.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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

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

<sup>2</sup> *Vorwärts*, 3 April 1900; *Gazeta Robotnicza*, 7 April 1900.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> *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'.<sup>1</sup> '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

<sup>1</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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.'<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> *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.

<sup>2</sup> *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.

<sup>3</sup> 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'.<sup>1</sup>

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]

<sup>1</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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.'<sup>2</sup> 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',<sup>3</sup> 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'.<sup>4</sup> Even Bebel criticized Rosa Luxemburg's intransigence—

<sup>1</sup> *Protokoll . . . 1901*, p. 127.

<sup>2</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *W obronie narodowości*, Poznań 1900.

<sup>3</sup> Frölich, p. 94. I have been unable to trace the history of this prosecution through the Prussian archives.

<sup>4</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Protokoll . . . 1902*, p. 152.

<sup>2</sup> *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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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’.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> *Vorwärts*, 1 January 1903; *Volksmacht*, Breslau, 12 January 1903; in general, see Wehler, *Sozialdemokratie*, p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> Rosa Luxemburg’s note in *Open Letter*, p. 20 (see p. 180, note 2 above).

<sup>3</sup> *Protokoll . . . 1903*, p. 280. See below, pp. 366, 446.

<sup>4</sup> *Protokoll . . . 1903*, p. 277.

the toss intermittently for another two months in the hospitable but indifferent pages of *Vorwärts*.<sup>1</sup>

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.'<sup>2</sup>

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.'<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> *Vorwärts*, 17 October, 5 December, 20 December 1903.

<sup>2</sup> *Protokoll . . . 1903*, p. 278. See above, p. 99.

<sup>3</sup> Rosa Luxemburg to Franz Mehring, 1903(?) IML(M) Fund 201, No. 844, photocopy IML(B), NL2 III-A/18.

<sup>4</sup> Waclaw 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.'<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.'<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> Otto Bauer to Karl Kautsky, 9 November 1913, IISH Archives, D II, 499.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.'<sup>2</sup> 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.'<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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].

<sup>1</sup> 'Der Opportunismus in der Praxis', *NZ*, 1900/1901, Vol. II, pp. 609, 673, 740, 786.

<sup>2</sup> Parvus to Kautsky, no date (1901), 'Einige Briefe', p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> August Bebel to Karl Kautsky, 24 July 1901, 'Einige Briefe', p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> 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. . . .<sup>1</sup>

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'.<sup>2</sup> 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 [*Gefühlsmeyer*] 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.<sup>3</sup>

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.'<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup> Richard Fischer

<sup>1</sup> August Bebel to Karl Kautsky, 29 August 1901, 'Einige Briefe', p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 179.

<sup>3</sup> August Bebel to Karl Kautsky, 4 September 1901, 'Einige Briefe', p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Ignaz Auer to Karl Kautsky, 11 June and 9 December 1901, *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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.'<sup>2</sup> The warmest support for Rosa and Parvus on this issue came from the Russians, especially Martov.<sup>3</sup>

On 30 October 1901 Bruno Schönlink 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. Schönlink 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]'.<sup>4</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> *Protokoll* . . . 1901, pp. 191, 189, 195.

<sup>2</sup> 'Unmassgebliche Betrachtungen', *NZ*, 1900/1901, Vol. II, p. 779.

<sup>3</sup> See Ignatus (Martov), 'The Lübeck SPD congress', *Zarya*, Nos. 2-3, December 1901, pp. 417-19.

<sup>4</sup> *LV*, 31 May 1902.

do as we like on the paper. We can carry out all necessary reforms, hire and fire collaborators, etc.<sup>1</sup>

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!<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> In the course of her departure she fell out with

<sup>1</sup> Photocopy IML(B), NL2/20, pp. 46-47.

<sup>2</sup> 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).

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Frölich, p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> Seidel letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1959, No. 1(5), p. 86.

<sup>3</sup> 'Einige Briefe', p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> '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. . . .'<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> See below, pp. 671–5.

<sup>2</sup> See below, p. 216.

<sup>3</sup> *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!'<sup>1</sup>

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.'<sup>2</sup> 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.'<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> *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.

<sup>2</sup> *Protokoll . . . 1903*, p. 313.

<sup>3</sup> Jogiches letters, 3 January 1902, IML (M).

<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.'<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, pp. 68-69, dated 3 October 1901.

<sup>2</sup> See below, p. 243. Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel*, p. 430, 14 October 1904.

<sup>3</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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-

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.'<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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,

<sup>1</sup> *Protokoll, Internationaler Sozialistenkongress zu Amsterdam . . . 1904*, Berlin 1904, p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> *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.

<sup>2</sup> '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'.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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*.

<sup>2</sup> *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.'<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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*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.

<sup>1</sup> *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 77, dated 1 September 1904.

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> H. Roland-Holst, *Rosa Luxemburg*, pp. 210–11, letter dated 27 October 1904.

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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'.

<sup>1</sup> *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, Introduction, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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*”.’<sup>2</sup> 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.’<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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 Schönlink at the 1895 Breslau party congress when he spoke of the proposals for agrarian reform being a ‘revision’ of the SPD programme.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 December 1898, No. 588.

<sup>3</sup> 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?<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.’<sup>2</sup> 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.’<sup>3</sup>

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-

<sup>1</sup> See Bernstein’s autobiographical sketch in Felix Meiner (ed.), *Die Volkswirtschaftslehre der Gegenwart in Selbstdarstellungen*, Leipzig 1924.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Rosa Luxemburg, *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 16, Introduction by Paul Frölich.

<sup>3</sup> *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’.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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-

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Gay, *Democratic Socialism*, p. 232.

ness.<sup>1</sup> 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'.<sup>2</sup> 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.'<sup>3</sup>

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*.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> *Vorwärts*, 26 March 1899.

<sup>2</sup> A[ugust] B[ebel], 'Zum Erfurter Parteitag', *NZ*, 1891/1892, Vol. I, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> *Protokoll . . . 1898*, p. 219.

<sup>4</sup> *Sozialreform oder Revolution*, Leipzig 1899, reprinted in *Collected Works*, Vol. III, pp. 35–100, from which quotations are taken.

<sup>5</sup> *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.'<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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]

<sup>1</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III [edited by Frederick Engels and translated by Ernest Untermann], Chicago 1909, Part 2, pp. 288–9.

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> See Georg Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, Berlin 1923; reprinted as *Histoire et Conscience de Classe*, Paris 1960.

<sup>2</sup> *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*.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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*.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> In the end liberalism was to be examined afresh

<sup>1</sup> Compare particularly pp. 683–6, below.

<sup>2</sup> *Collected Works*, III, p. 82.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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*.'<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> See below, Chapter XII.

<sup>2</sup> *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*.<sup>1</sup>

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*.<sup>2</sup>

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."<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 57–58.

<sup>2</sup> 'Miliz und Militarismus', *LV*, 20–22 February 1899. See also 'Possibilismus und Opportunismus', *SAZ*, 30 September 1898.

<sup>3</sup> '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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.'<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> See below, Appendix 1.

<sup>2</sup> See Fred Oelssner, *Rosa Luxemburg, Eine Kritische biographische Skizze*, Berlin 1951, pp. 164 ff.

<sup>3</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.'<sup>1</sup> 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.'<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> Winfried Scharlau, *Parvus-Helphand als Theoretiker in der deutschen Sozialdemokratie 1867-1910*. Unpublished dissertation, Münster (Germany) 1960, pp. 279-80.

<sup>2</sup> 'Der Opportunismus in der Praxis', loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup> '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.<sup>1</sup>

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.’<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> *Protokoll . . . 1903*, p. 311.

<sup>2</sup> ‘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.<sup>1</sup> 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*.<sup>2</sup> 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'.<sup>3</sup> 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'.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Kautsky, *Bernstein und das Sozialdemokratische Programm*, Stuttgart 1899.

<sup>3</sup> *Protokoll . . . 1903*, p. 382. See also Erich Matthias, 'Kautsky und der Kautskyanismus', p. 170.

<sup>4</sup> 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'.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1962, No. 4(20), p. 181.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

*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-*

<sup>1</sup> *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.'<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62. My italics.

in the polemics about organization in 1903.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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'.<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> For this, see below, pp. 286-94.

<sup>2</sup> Lenin, 'What is to be done?', *Sochineniya*, Vol. V, pp. 368-409, 442 ff.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> *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. . . .<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 'Hohle Nüsse', *LV*, 22 July 1899; *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 215.

and expulsion of the former as to any dialectic necessity.<sup>1</sup> 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!<sup>2</sup>

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,

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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.

<sup>1</sup> *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 237.

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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. . . .<sup>2</sup>

But this was not simply an outright rejection of academics and their peculiar values. One of the greatest moments in Mehring's

<sup>1</sup> 'Im Rate der Gelehrten', *NZ*, 1903/1904, Vol. I, p. 5; *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 249.

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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.’<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Ignacy Daszyński to Karl Kautsky, 28 October 1924, IISH Archives, D VII, 336.

<sup>3</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

### *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.<sup>2</sup> Participation in elections, particularly with the system of the second ballot existing in Germany, raised the problem of temporary

<sup>1</sup> *LV*, 14 September 1899, quoted in *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 175.

<sup>2</sup> See below, pp. 451-4, 457-8, 518.

alliances and coalitions on every electoral occasion.<sup>1</sup> 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*. . . .<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> *LV*, 30 August 1899, reporting Rosa Luxemburg's speech in Leipzig on 29 August. My italics.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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-

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 218 ff.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

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 dickerings 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

<sup>1</sup> 'Eine taktische Frage', *LV*, 6 July 1899, quoted in *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 273.

<sup>2</sup> '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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 achieved<sup>2</sup>—the same shotgun unity which Plekhanov described as 'the way a man desires to be united with a piece of bread, by swallowing it'.<sup>3</sup>

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".'<sup>4</sup> 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. *Tempi 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.<sup>5</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 'Zum französischen Einigungskongress', *NZ*, 1901/1902, Vol. I, p. 202, quoted in *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 355.

<sup>2</sup> 'Nach dem Kongress', *NZ*, 1901/1902, Vol. I, p. 299, quoted in *Collected Works*, Vol. III, pp. 362-3.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Bertram D. Wolfe, *Three who made a Revolution*, New York 1948, p. 611.

<sup>4</sup> 'Der Abschluss der sozialistischen Krise in Frankreich', *NZ*, 1901/1902, Vol. II, pp. 710, 751, quoted in *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 366.

<sup>5</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> See below, pp. 555–6.

<sup>2</sup> 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. . . .<sup>1</sup>

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.'<sup>2</sup>

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-

<sup>1</sup> *Protokoll, Internationaler Sozialistenkongress zu Amsterdam . . . 1904*, p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> '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.'<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 'Der dritte Akt', *LV*, 15 April 1902; *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, p. 330.

<sup>2</sup> '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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 38–39, note 1. For the treatment of pre-war Social Democracy in Communist analysis, see below, Chapter XVIII.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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-

<sup>1</sup> 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 I; 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.<sup>1</sup> It was, however, the Russian revolution and her participation in it that brought about a complete reversal of the direction of her thrust.

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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. . . .'<sup>4</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> V. Akimov, 'Pervii S'ezd RSDRP', *Minuvshie Gody* No. 2, 1908, pp. 129 ff.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> See above, Ch. III, particularly p. 69.

<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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. . . .<sup>2</sup>

Relations with the *Bund* were if anything rather closer. The foreign representatives of the *Bund* organization, John Mill and

<sup>1</sup> See below, p. 327.

<sup>2</sup> 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*.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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 Teplov and Krichevskii—the villainous 'economists' of the very near future. Subsequent conferences in Russia were to represent this deliberate and emphatic alignment.<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> *Nasha Zarya*, 1913, No. 6, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> 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 *Minuwshie 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.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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'.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> The picture of things at home varies considerably according to the person reporting it: Dzier-

<sup>1</sup> Feliks Dzierżyński to Cezaryna Wojnarowska, 10 August 1902, reprinted in *SDKPiL dokumenty*, Vol. II, pp. 100-1.

<sup>2</sup> Rosa Luxemburg to Cezaryna Wojnarowska, 17 January 1902, *SDKPiL dokumenty*, Vol. II, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> 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.)

<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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-

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> See *Vorwärts*, 1 January and 14 January 1902.

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 175, 181.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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 lifebelt 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.)

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> *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.'<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.’<sup>2</sup> 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.’<sup>3</sup> 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!’<sup>4</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> Feliks Dzierżyński to Cezaryna Wojnarowska, about 15 June 1903, IML (M), Fund 76, No. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Jogiches letters, 19 May 1903, IML (M). Not even a close party friend like Kasprzak could be forced or instructed!

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

matters. . . . You must approach Władek [Olszewski], the cashier, in such matters', Marchlewski wrote indignantly to Cezaryna Wojnarowska in 1902.<sup>1</sup> 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!<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> Julian Marchlewski to Cezaryna Wojnarowska, quoted in *SDKPiL dokumenty*, Vol. II, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> 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.’<sup>1</sup> 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.’<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rosa Luxemburg to Cezaryna Wojnarowska, 17 January 1902, IML (M), Fund 209, No. 922.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in K. Grünberg and Czesław Kozłowski, *Historia polskiego ruchu robotniczego 1864–1918*, Warsaw 1962, p. 161.

<sup>3</sup> 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 Bolsheviki, 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

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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.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 70, letter dated 6 June 1903; p. 137, letter dated Easter 1907.

<sup>2</sup> '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.<sup>1</sup> 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!<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> See Rosa Luxemburg's introduction to *Kwestia polska a ruch socjalistyczny* (The Polish question and the Socialist movement), Cracow 1905.

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> At the *Bund's* third and fourth congresses the pursuit of Polish independence was roundly condemned and with it its chief supporters, the PPS.<sup>2</sup> 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."<sup>3</sup>

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."<sup>4</sup> 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-

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> M. Rafes, *Ocherki po istorii 'Bunda'*, Moscow 1923, p. 45.

<sup>3</sup> Feliks Dzierżyński to Cezaryna Wojnarowska, June 1903, *SDKPiL dokumenty*, Vol. II, p. 324.

<sup>4</sup> 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.'<sup>1</sup>

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*.'<sup>2</sup> 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!<sup>3</sup> 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*.<sup>4</sup>

The actual negotiations in the early summer of 1903 between Russians and Poles were delicate and protracted. The Poles

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.'<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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'.<sup>4</sup> The outline of the negotiators' instructions was almost certainly penned by Rosa Luxemburg herself—though she did not personally attend the

<sup>1</sup> Warszawski to SDKPiL Foreign Committee, *SDKPiL dokumenty*, Vol. II, p. 319.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> *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’.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> After some perfunctory applause, negotiations

<sup>1</sup> Hanecki, *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya*, p. 189.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> *Protokoly, vtoroi ocherednoi s’ezd RSDRP, izdanie tsentralnogo komiteta*, Geneva 1903, pp. 47–54, 375.

<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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,

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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.

<sup>1</sup> 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'.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> Lenin, 'The National Question in our Programme', *Iskra*, No. 44, reprinted in *Sochineniya*, Vol. V, p. 346.

<sup>2</sup> See below, pp. 321–2.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> *SDKPiL dokumenty*, p. 372.

<sup>3</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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’.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> See resolution of conference of SDKPiL activists in Warsaw on 27 December 1903, *SDKPiL dokumenty*, Vol. II, p. 537.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

For Rosa Luxemburg the next year was one long open season in

<sup>1</sup> See 'Iskra and the Polish Question', *Przedświt*, September 1903, No. 9, pp. 362 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> For the details of these efforts at Poznań, see above, pp. 178–81.

<sup>2</sup> '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.'<sup>1</sup> 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.'<sup>2</sup>

Thus Bebel, Kautsky, and the others were naturally predisposed to support those whom they had known so long rather than

<sup>1</sup> *Sotsial-demokraticheskoe dvizhenie v Rossii, Materialy* (edited by Potresov and Nikolaevskii), Moscow/Leningrad, 1928, p. 124.

<sup>2</sup> 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.'<sup>1</sup>

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.'<sup>2</sup> 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. . . .'<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.)

<sup>3</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> First, Rosa Luxemburg's knowledge of Russian conditions was in fact more limited than might

<sup>1</sup> *Leninism or Marxism?*, pp. 84, 89, 108.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> *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?<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> *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'.<sup>1</sup> 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.'<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 439–41.

as with any Russian opponents.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> See below, pp. 589–91, 595–6.

<sup>2</sup> *Tretii s'ezd RSDRP, Protokoly*, Moscow 1959, pp. 339–40. The congress took place in April–May 1905.

<sup>3</sup> 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

**I**N 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.”<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> ‘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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> Even more important in creating solidarity was the negative aspect of common

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For the Königsberg trial of 1904, the most spectacular of these prosecutions, see above, pp. 197–8, note 2.

<sup>2</sup> *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

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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.'<sup>1</sup>

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.

<sup>1</sup> 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.'<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Rosa Luxemburg in her speech on 21 September 1905 at the Jena party congress, *Protokoll . . . 1905*, p. 269.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 'Die Debatten in Köln', *SAZ*, 31 May 1905.

<sup>2</sup> 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'.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.'<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> See below, p. 327, for the skilful use made of this proclamation by the SDKPiL leadership in its propaganda war against the PPS.

<sup>2</sup> *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, p. 387 (Sectional introduction by Paul Frölich).

<sup>3</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> See letters dated 17 and 25 July 1905 to Stadthagen in *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

Rosa Luxemburg had pushed the analogy of the Russian ex-

<sup>1</sup> 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. I.) 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.’<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> Carl E. Schorske, *German Social Democracy 1905-1917*, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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.

<sup>1</sup> Jogiches letters, end of September 1905, IML (M).

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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,

<sup>1</sup> *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'.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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!<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Protokoll . . . 1905*, pp. 320–1.

<sup>2</sup> *Protokoll . . . 1905*, pp. 336, 339.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.'<sup>2</sup>

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.'<sup>3</sup> This differentiation between leaders

<sup>1</sup> *Protokoll . . . 1905*, p. 334, speech by Bömelburg.

<sup>2</sup> *Le Temps*, 21 September 1905, quoted by Joll, *Second International*, p. 128.

<sup>3</sup> *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 legitimation 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.<sup>1</sup> *Tempis mutandis*—this was the job that he had advised her to refuse in 1899.

<sup>1</sup> 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. . . .'<sup>1</sup> 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

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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.

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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?<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> Jogiches letters, 3 November 1905, IML (M).

<sup>2</sup> *Stenographische Berichte . . . Reichstag*, 11th Legislative Period, II Session 1905/1906, col. 359 ff., 15 December 1905.

<sup>3</sup> *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.'<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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-

<sup>1</sup> Jogiches letters, end of November 1905, IML (M).

<sup>2</sup> Parvus, *Im Kampf um die Wahrheit*, Berlin 1918, p. 9.

paper reports of her words.<sup>1</sup> 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'.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 96.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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’.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> The Poles

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 277 ff.

<sup>2</sup> O. B. Szmidt, *SDKPiL dokumenty*, 1893–1904, Vol. I, p. 568; also appeal by SDKPiL Central Committee, *ibid.*, p. 562.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.'<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> See Introduction, pp. 1–11, to *PPS-Lewica 1906–1918, Materiały i dokumenty*, Warsaw 1961, Vol. I, 1906–1910.

<sup>2</sup> 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'.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

Who was she writing for? Who were these youngsters and intellectuals?<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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. . . .<sup>1</sup>

'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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

Though she sincerely believed this infighting against competitors for the workers' allegiance to be a vital part of the struggle as

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Bogdanov and Gusev, 11 February 1905, *Sochineniya*, Vol. VII, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> 'Revolutionary Action', *Czerwony Sztandar*, January 1905, No. 23, pp. 6–8. See also *Czerwony Sztandar*, July 1905, No. 27, pp. 7–9.

<sup>3</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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?<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> Jogiches letters, *Z Pola Walki*, 1931, Nos. 11/12, p. 214.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> Her *ad hoc* appointment following Cezaryna Wojnarowska's resignation the year before was confirmed at the SDKPiL's fifth congress in June 1906.

<sup>2</sup> 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).

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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'.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.'<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> Next day, however, she smuggled herself aboard

<sup>1</sup> Jogiches letters, end of September and early October 1905, IML (M).

<sup>2</sup> *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."<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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!

<sup>1</sup> *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, pp. 98-100. Rosa Luxemburg's italics.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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. . . .<sup>2</sup>

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:

<sup>1</sup> *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, pp. 102–3, dated 11 January 1906. Rosa Luxemburg's italics.

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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."<sup>4</sup>

Clearly Rosa Luxemburg's 'spontaneity' was not autonomous

<sup>1</sup> *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.)

<sup>2</sup> See 'Blanquism and Social Democracy', *Czerwony Sztandar*, 27 June 1906, No. 82.

<sup>3</sup> *Z doby rewolucyjnej: co dalej?*, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> '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.<sup>1</sup> 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 Piłsudski'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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> We must, however, distinguish here between two quite different

<sup>1</sup> *Z doby rewolucyjnej: co dalej?*, pp. 23–27.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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:

<sup>1</sup> *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.

<sup>2</sup> 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*.’<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 103, dated 11 January 1906.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> *Julian Marchlewski*, anonymous biographer, Warsaw 1951, p. 59. See also *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 111, dated 11 January 1906.

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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'.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Rzecz o konstytucyjności i o rządzie tymczasowym*, Warsaw 1906, pp. 13-14.

<sup>3</sup> 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!<sup>1</sup>

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."<sup>2</sup> 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

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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.

<sup>1</sup> See below, pp. 715, 720–8.

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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.'<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of these difficulties and their relevance to the peculiar German context, see above, Chapter VI, pp. 215-16.

<sup>2</sup> *Czego chcemy?*, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> *Rzecz o konstytucji . . .*, 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*.<sup>1</sup> 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. Piłsudski 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),

<sup>1</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> *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.

<sup>2</sup> 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 fistcuffs 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.<sup>1</sup> 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”.’<sup>2</sup> The news

<sup>1</sup> *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?).

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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. . . .<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> *Letters from Prison*, Berlin 1923, p. 17, dated 18 February 1917.

<sup>2</sup> 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 'Luxemburg-geois'—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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> Correspondence in Kautsky Archives, IISH.

<sup>2</sup> Adolf Warszawski to Karl Kautsky, 15 May 1906, IISH Archives, D XXIII, 64.

<sup>3</sup> 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'.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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 gossipy Russian official gleefully told her that even if the Russians let her

<sup>1</sup> *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 41, letter dated 8 July 1906.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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.'<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

If anything, Rosa Luxemburg was anti-Lenin rather than pro-Menshevik. Her criticism of the Mensheviks certainly did not

<sup>1</sup> See letter from Bebel to Akselrod, 4 June 1904; Kautsky to Akselrod, 10 January 1905, in Akselrod papers, IISH.

<sup>2</sup> Jogiches letters, mid-October 1905, IML (M).

<sup>3</sup> *SAZ*, 20 June 1905.

make the Bolsheviks any more attractive. *Bolszyńsiwo*—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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> More significantly, the Poles accepted the Bolshevik version of events in both Moscow and St. Petersburg

<sup>1</sup> 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, *Z 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.

<sup>2</sup> '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.<sup>1</sup> 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.'<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> *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.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 104, dated 11 January 1906.

<sup>3</sup> '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.<sup>1</sup>

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-

<sup>1</sup> 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.’<sup>1</sup> 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.’<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 126, 11 August 1906.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> She made a considerable impression on them; 'the first Marxist who was able to evaluate the Russian revolution correctly and as a whole'.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> N. Krupskaya, *Memories of Lenin*, p. 112. From memory Krupskaya wrongly gave the date as June and the place as St. Petersburg.

<sup>2</sup> 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)’.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 119, dated 7 April 1906.

<sup>2</sup> 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. 2/1, *Die Auswirkungen . . . auf Deutschland*, p. 140. The authorities were visibly determined to ‘get’ Rosa once more.

<sup>3</sup> *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'.<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> By this time Rosa Luxemburg had been back in Germany for some months.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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:<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> '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.

<sup>3</sup> For the full story, see below, Chapter IX, pp. 378–84.

<sup>4</sup> *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*.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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*].'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> *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.

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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?<sup>2</sup>

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'.<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> *SM*, 1906, Vol. X, No. 2, p. 914.

<sup>2</sup> *Protokoll . . . 1906*, p. 261. See above, pp. 311 ff., especially 316–17.

<sup>3</sup> *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*'.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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,

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> 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)<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> *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.'<sup>1</sup> 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".'<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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'.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The similarity of *character* is stressed, indeed overstressed, by Deutscher in *The Prophet Armed*, p. 183.

<sup>2</sup> '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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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,

<sup>1</sup> Prince Bernhard von Bülow, *Imperial Germany*, New York 1914, pp. 208-47.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

Rosa Luxemburg did not entirely agree, but she reserved her

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

Here was the left-wing tactic in embryo for the next seven years.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> *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).

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> *Vorwärts*, 16 April 1907.

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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,

<sup>1</sup> See below, pp. 458-67.

<sup>2</sup> *Protokoll . . . 1913*, p. 295, speech by Gustav Bauer, deputy chairman of the Trade Union Commission. Are not all unions the same?

<sup>3</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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

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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.

<sup>1</sup> 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'.<sup>1</sup> 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 Dostoievsky'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'.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> *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.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Konstantin Zetkin, May 1907.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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?'<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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. . . .'

<sup>2</sup> *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 191, dated 26 January 1917.

<sup>3</sup> 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.'<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> I do not doubt that this was something of an exaggeration, though equally it will not have been altogether invented.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.)

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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."<sup>1</sup> 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 judgment 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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?'<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> *NZ*, 1907/1908, Vol. II, p. 883.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 133.

<sup>3</sup> From Werner Blumenberg.

<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> But similar praise came from a later right-wing member of the SPD, Tarnow.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kautsky Archives, IISH.

<sup>2</sup> Fricke, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

<sup>3</sup> *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?<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

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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.

<sup>1</sup> Rosa Luxemburg to Wilhelm Dittmann, 4 February 1908, Dittmann papers, SPD Archives, Bonn.

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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*.<sup>3</sup> 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,

<sup>1</sup> Rosa Luxemburg to Wilhelm Pieck, 1 August 1908, Henke papers, SPD Archives, Bonn.

<sup>2</sup> *Die Akkumulation des Kapitals*, Berlin 1913; see below, pp. 530–47, 830–41.

<sup>3</sup> *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'.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.

<sup>1</sup> *Protokoll . . . 1908*, p. 230.

<sup>2</sup> *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.'<sup>1</sup> 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.'<sup>2</sup>

The suggestions that Rosa Luxemburg had made at the congress

<sup>1</sup> *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.

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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. . . .'<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> Rosa Luxemburg to Wilhelm Dittmann, 23 May 1911, in Dittmann papers, SPD Archives, Bonn.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> 'Gewerkschaftsschule und Parteischule', *LV*, 21 June 1911.

wonder whether the whole party school has really any point?'<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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'.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> Fricke, 'Parteischule', p. 246.

<sup>2</sup> *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 73, to Hans Diefenbach, 1 November 1914.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> For this see below, pp. 461 ff.

<sup>5</sup> 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'.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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).<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> *Protokoll, Internationaler Sozialistenkongress zu Stuttgart . . . 1907*, Berlin 1907, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>3</sup> 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.'<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> For Hervé, therefore, Bebel's caution was nothing but evidence of cowardice and an extreme lower-middle-class *Spiessbürgertum*.<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> *Protokoll . . . Stuttgart 1907*, p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> A false impression as it turned out, since Hervé was one of those who rallied to the colours in 1914.

<sup>3</sup> *Protokoll . . . 1907*, p. 85. *Spiessbürger* is a derogatory epithet for respectable, blinkered, collar-and-tie citizens.



the voting in committee.<sup>1</sup> 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*.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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. . . .'<sup>1</sup> Lenin was mistaken in differentiating thus sharply between Bebel's intentions

<sup>1</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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,

<sup>1</sup> '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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> A short biography of this interesting figure is S. Grünebaum, *Ludwig Frank, Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklung der deutschen Sozialdemokratie*, Heidelberg 1924.

<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> See Karl Korn, *Die Arbeiterjugendbewegung*, Berlin 1923, pp. 89-90. For Rosa Luxemburg's intervention, see below, pp. 481-5.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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,

<sup>1</sup> For this organizational development see Schorske, Chapter V, pp. 116–45, and quoted sources.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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 manœuvring members' wishes; the attitude of the SPD during the war was possible only because the bulk of the members supported

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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’.<sup>2</sup>

It fell to Karl Kautsky to knead the listless dough of these years into an apparently cheerful doctrine in *The Road to Power*.<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.)

<sup>2</sup> *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.’

<sup>3</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Kautsky, *Der Weg zur Macht*, pp. 107–18.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>4</sup> 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',<sup>1</sup> 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.'<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> Matthias, *Kautsky*, p. 172.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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'.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> From there she moved to Italy, breaking through the barrier of the Alps 'on to the sunny and superb Italian plains'.

<sup>1</sup> Eduard Engel, *Menschen und Dinge. Aus einem Leben*, Leipzig 1929, p. 214.

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 142-3.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, p. 153.

## 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'.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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*.<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>3</sup>

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;

<sup>1</sup> *NZ*, 1908/1909, Vol. II, pp. 838 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Protokoll . . . 1909*, p. 364.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Protokoll . . . 1908*, p. 363.

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 243 f.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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'.<sup>3</sup> 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-

<sup>1</sup> See Heinrich Ströbel's article in *Vorwärts*, 5 January 1910.

<sup>2</sup> Rosa Luxemburg to Luise Kautsky, 17 March 1910, in 'Einige Briefe', *IISH Bulletin*, 1952, Vol. VII, pp. 41-42.

<sup>3</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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,

<sup>1</sup> *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> 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).

<sup>3</sup> '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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> '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'.

<sup>2</sup> '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.’<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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.’<sup>4</sup>

In another letter to Konrad Haenisch, Rosa Luxemburg referred

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 335–6.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> *NZ*, 1909/1910, Vol. II., p. 337; Rosa Luxemburg’s correction, *ibid.*, p. 568.

<sup>4</sup> 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"'.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 27, dated 8 November 1910.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.'<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky*, pp. 156-7, dated 13 April 1910.

<sup>2</sup> *Briefe an Freunde*, p.27.

<sup>3</sup> *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.

<sup>4</sup> '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.’<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 March 1910. For an analysis of this ‘spontaneity’ and its importance, see below, pp. 532 ff.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 'Zeit der Aussat', *Volkswacht*, Breslau, 25 March 1910.

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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.'<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 'Was nun?' (What Now?), *NZ*, 1909/1910, Vol. II, pp. 33-40, 68-80.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 336.

a victory must result in nothing less than catastrophe for the whole ruling system.’<sup>1</sup>

Rosa replied as soon as possible after her return with a major piece of theoretical delineation between herself and Kautsky.<sup>2</sup> 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 trumpeting 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!<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup> 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-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Ermattung oder Kampf?’ (Attrition or Collision?), *NZ*, 1909/1910, Vol. II, pp. 257, 291 (27 May, 3 June 1910).

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.'<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Wilhelm Keil in *SM*, Vol. XIV, No. 3, p. 1186.

<sup>3</sup> *NZ*, 1909/1910, Vol. II, p. 564.

preoccupations when there was vital internal work to be done.<sup>1</sup> 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.'<sup>2</sup> 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 Bolsheviki, 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

<sup>1</sup> NZ, 1909/1910, Vol. II, pp. 652–67.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

Though this was the same situation which was agitating Kautsky, she presented it in a form from which he could take little comfort.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> ‘Die Badische Budgetabstimmung’, *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, August 1910.

<sup>2</sup> For a further discussion of Rosa Luxemburg’s writings on the Baden question, see below, pp. 438-40.

<sup>3</sup> Hans Diefenbach to Karl Kautsky, no date (presumably Autumn 1910), IISH Archives, D VII, 425.

obscurity.<sup>1</sup> 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.'<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> August Bebel to Karl Kautsky, 6 August 1910, IISH Archives, D III, 140.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> *NZ*, 1909/1910, Vol. II, p. 610.

<sup>4</sup> '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. . . .<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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’.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 431–2.      <sup>2</sup> *Protokoll . . . 1910*, p. 178 (Resolution No. 91).

<sup>3</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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.'<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> *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.'<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.'<sup>3</sup>

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. . . .

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 428.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 441 (speech by Leinert).

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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.

<sup>1</sup> 'Die Badische Budgetabstimmung', *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*, August 1910.

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> 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’.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Reported by Friedrich Stampfer, ‘August Bebel’ in *Die Grossen Deutschen*, Vol. III, p. 559.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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—

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 466-7.

<sup>2</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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 . . . ’<sup>2</sup> 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’.<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> *LV*, 24 July 1911.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

public protest.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> And at the congress he performed superbly, in a tone of simple, homely confidence, conjuring up an atmosphere reeking of old comradesly 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. . . .<sup>4</sup>

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'.

<sup>1</sup> 'Unser Marokko-Flugblatt', *LV*, 26 August 1911. The executive's manifesto is in *Vorwärts*, 9 August 1911.

<sup>2</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, 'Um Marokko', *LV*, 24 July 1911; 'Friedensdemonstrationen', *LV*, 31 July 1911; 'Die Marokkokrisis 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.

<sup>3</sup> Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel*, p. 539.

<sup>4</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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].'<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> *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.’<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

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!<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Protokoll . . . 1911*, p. 204.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Protokoll . . . 1900*, p. 116.

<sup>4</sup> *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.'<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> *Protokoll . . . 1911*, p. 247.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

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'.<sup>2</sup> 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.'<sup>3</sup> As to Huysmans's statement that Rosa Luxemburg had committed

<sup>1</sup> *Protokoll . . . 1911*, pp. 212-13.

<sup>2</sup> Victor Adler, *Briefwechsel*, p. 539.

<sup>3</sup> *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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.'<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> *Vorwärts*, 27 September 1911.

<sup>2</sup> *LV*, 28 September 1911. For Rosa's relationship with the Leipzig paper at the time, see below, pp. 460–1.

<sup>3</sup> *Bulletin Périodique du BSI*, Brussels 1912, No. 8, pp. 129 ff.