



Martyrs of the Third International:

Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg

BY LEON TROTSKY

FIRST PUBLICATION IN ENGLISH

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MARTYRS OF THE

INTRODUCTION

In January 1919, the young Soviet Republic was fighting for its life. Armies of intervention from Britain, America, France and Japan had invaded Soviet soil. Imperialist-financed and armed White Guards were engaged in battle to crush the first workers' state. The revolution's first line of defence was the Red Army under the leadership of its founder, Leon Trotsky. But to the Bolsheviks the October Revolution was "Russian" only because it had taken place within the territory of the former tsarist empire: for them it was only the first victorious breakthrough of the world revolution. They looked to the workers of Europe, and first of all to the workers of Germany, to speedily follow in their footsteps and extend the revolution. Typical of this internationalism which permeated not only the Bolshevik leadership but the whole of the Russian proletariat at the time was the fact, alluded to by Trotsky in his speech, that Karl Liebknecht was elected as Honorary Chairman at meetings and congresses throughout the length and breadth of the Soviet land.

The death of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxembour was a severe blow to the international proletariat, and to its vanguard, the workers of Soviet Russia. They personified the revolutionary spirit of the best of the German fighters. Their murder, at the instigation and with the connivance of the leaders of German social-democracy, Ebert and Scheidemann, effectively beheaded the revolution. The newly-founded Communist Party was too young and inexperienced to withstand such a damaging blow as the death of their two outstanding leaders.

It was fitting that Trotsky, Commander-in-Chief of the embattled and subsequently victorious Red Army, should act as spokesman to express the grief and shock of the Soviet proletariat. For to Lenin, Trotsky, Liebknecht and Luxembour, the battles fought on the streets of Berlin were part of the same war which the Red Army was fighting on Soviet soil—for the victory of the world proletarian socialist revolution.

The International Marxist Group is pleased to publish the first English translation of Trotsky's speech in this year, the centenary of Rosa Luxembour's birth.

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MARTYRS OF THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL

KARL LIEBKNECHT

AND ROSA LUXEMBOURG

(Speech made at the session of the Petrograd Soviet, 18 Jan. 1919)

We have just suffered two heavy losses, which taken together are a tremendous waste. Two of our leaders have been knocked out of our ranks. Their names are entered forever in the great book of the proletarian revolution: Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxembourg. They have been killed. They are no longer with us.

**KARL LIEBKNECHT - "A Spartacus
appeared in the ranks of the
Spartacists and died with their
banner in his hands . . ."**

The name of Karl Liebknecht, famous even earlier, acquired immediate world-wide significance from the first months of the terrible European slaughter. It sounded like a name of revolutionary honour, like a promise of future victory. In those first weeks, when German militarism was celebrating its first orgies, rejoicing over its first mad victories; in those weeks when German regiments were marching through Belgium, sweeping away Belgian fortresses like houses of cards; when the 420mm German cannons were apparently threatening to enslave and subjugate to Wilhelm the whole of Europe; in those days, when official German social democracy, headed by Scheidemann and Ebert, was bowing its patriotic knee to German militarism, to which, it seemed then, everything had succumbed, both externally: crushed Belgium, and France where the North had been seized—and internally: not only the German junkers, not only the German bourgeoisie, not only the chauvinistic petty-bourgeois, but also the officially recognised party of the German working class—in those dark, terrible, base days, there resounded in Germany the stormy voice of protest, indignation, denunciation—this

was the voice of Karl Liebknecht. And it sounded throughout the world!

In France, where the mood of the broad masses was weighed down by the German invasion; where the ruling party of the French social-democrats was proclaiming to the proletariat the necessity of a fight not for life, but for death—how could it be otherwise, when in Germany the “whole nation” was striving to seize Paris!—even in France the sober, warning voice of Liebknecht sounded, tearing down the barriers of lies, slander and panic. One felt that Liebknecht alone spoke for the smothered masses.

In fact, though, he was no longer alone, even then. For hand in hand with him from the first day of the war was the courageous, unhesitating, heroic Rosa Luxemburg. Arbitrary German bourgeois parliamentarism denied her the opportunity of sounding her protest from the parliamentary platform as did Liebknecht, thus less was heard from her. But her share in arousing the best elements of the German working class was no less than the share of her co-fighter in the struggle and in death, Karl Liebknecht. These two fighters, so different by nature and yet so alike, complemented each other, strove unyielding for the common goal, met death at the same time, and will go down together in history.

Karl Liebknecht represented the true, complete incarnation of the unbending revolutionary. During the last days and months of his life countless legends were circulated. Some were senselessly malicious—through the bourgeois press; some heroic—through the mouths of the working masses.

In the personal life of Karl Liebknecht there was—alas, already we say “was”!—the incarnation of kindness, simplicity and fraternity. I first met him more than 15 years ago. He was a charming person, attentive and sympathetic. You could say that in his character there was almost a woman’s tenderness, in the best sense of the word. But along with this womanly tenderness he was distinguished by an exceptional temper of revolutionary will, an ability to fight for what he considered just and true, to the last drop of his blood. His spiritual independence was shown even in his youth, when he dared more than once to insist on his own opinion against the indisputable authority of Bebel. His work among young people was distinguished by great courage, as was his struggle against Hohenzollern war-mongering. Finally, he revealed his true worth when he raised his voice against the united warlike bourgeoisie and the treacherous social democracy in the German Reichstag, where the whole atmosphere was permeated with the miasma of chauvinism. He revealed the full measure of his personality when, as a soldier, he raised in Berlin’s Potsdam Square the banner of open insurrection against the bourgeoisie and its militarism. Liebknecht was arrested. Prison and penal servitude did not break his spirit. In his cell he waited and confidently predicted. Liberated by the revolution of November last year, Liebknecht immediately took his place at the head of the best, the most decisive elements of the German working class. A Spartacus appeared in the ranks of the Spartacists and died with their banner in his hands.

ROSA LUXEMBOURG - "She knew how to hate the enemies of the proletariat and for that very reason she could arouse their hatred of her . . ."

The name of Rosa Luxembourg is less well-known in other countries, and even here in Russia. But it can be said with great confidence that her nature was in no way less than that of Karl Liebknecht. Small in height, frail, with a noble cast of face, and beautiful eyes which shone with intelligence, she was striking for the courage of her thought. The Marxist method she mastered completely, as if it were an organ of her body. You could say that Marxism was in her blood.

I have said that these two fighters, so different in temperament, complemented each other. I want to underline and clarify this. If the inflexible revolutionary Liebknecht had a woman's tenderness in his personal manner, then this frail woman had a manly power of thought. Ferdinand Lassalle once spoke about the physical strength of thought, and its imperious tension when it had as it were overcome the material hindrances in its path. That's just the very impression you got, chatting with Rosa, reading her articles, or hearing her speak from the rostrum against her enemies. And she had many enemies! I remember once at a party conference—in Jena, it would be—how her high-pitched voice, tense as a violin string, cut through the stormy protests of the Bavarian, Baden and other opportunists. How they hated her! And how she scorned them! Small in height and frail in build, she dominated the congress from the rostrum, like the incarnation of proletarian revolutionary thought. By the force of her logic and the power of her sarcasm she silenced her most sworn enemies. Rosa knew how to hate the enemies of the proletariat and for that very reason she could arouse their hatred of her. She was marked out by them beforehand.

From the first day, no, from the first hour of the war, Rosa Luxembourg started a campaign against chauvinism, against patriotic excesses, against the vacillation of Kautsky and Haase, against the centrist formlessness—for the revolutionary independence of the proletariat, for internationalism, for the proletarian revolution.

Yes, they complemented one another!

In the force of her theoretical thinking and in her capacity for generalisation, Rosa Luxembourg was head and shoulders above not only her enemies, but also her comrades. She was a genius. Her style—terse, exact, brilliant, merciless—was, and will ever remain, a true mirror to her thought.

Liebknecht was not a theoretician. He was a man of direct action. Impulsive and passionate by nature, he possessed exceptional political intuition, a sense of the masses and of circumstance, and finally, an incomparably courageous revolutionary initiative.

An analysis of the internal and international situation in which Germany found herself after 9th November 1918, and also a revolutionary prognosis, one could have, indeed should have, expected first of all from Rosa Luxemburg. A summons to direct action, and—at a certain moment—to armed uprising, would probably have come first from Liebknecht. These two fighters complemented each other in a way that could not be bettered.

Luxemburg and Liebknecht were scarcely out of prison when they took each other's hand, that indefatigable revolutionary and that unyielding female revolutionary, and went together, at the head of the best elements of the German working class—to meet new battles and trials of the proletarian revolution. And on the first steps of this path a treacherous blow has slain them on one and the same day.

* * * * *

Indeed, the reaction could have chosen no worthier victims. What a well-aimed blow! And no wonder: reaction and revolution knew each other well, for reaction this time was embodied in the person of the former leaders of the former party of the working class, Scheidemann and Ebert, whose names will forever be inscribed in the blackbook of history, as the shameful names of the organisers responsible for this treacherous murder.

True, we received the official German communication which described the murder of Liebknecht as a chance incident, as a street "misunderstanding", due, perhaps, to the insufficient watchfulness of the guard in the face of the enraged crowd. A court of inquiry has even been set up to investigate. But you and I know only too well how these "spontaneous" onslaughts on revolutionary leaders are arranged by the reaction; we well remember the July days, experienced by us here, within the walls of Petrograd; we remember only too well how the Black Hundreds summoned by Kerensky and Tseretelli to fight against the Bolsheviks systematically annihilated the workers and slaughtered their leaders, making short work of individual workers in the streets. The name of the worker Voinov, murdered by way of a "misunderstanding", is remembered by most of us. If we then managed to protect Lenin, it was only because he was not in the hands of the enraged Black Hundreds. There were then among the Mensheviks and the S.R.s some pious people, indignant because Lenin and Zinoviev, who had been accused of being German spies, were not going to appear in court to refute the slander. This made them especially guilty. Which court? The one on the road to which they would have arranged for Lenin to "flee", as Liebknecht did, and if Lenin had been shot or stabbed, the official communication of Kerensky and Tseretelli would have said that the Bolshevik leader had been killed by the guard while trying to escape. No, now, after the terrible Berlin experience, we have tenfold grounds for being pleased that Lenin did not then appear at an unjust trial, and still more—that he did not suffer punishment without even a trial.

But Rosa and Karl did not hide. The enemy nand held them firm. And this hand strangled them! What a blow! What a misfortune! And

what treachery. The best leaders of the German communist party are no more—our great comrades are no more among the living. And their murderers stand under the banner of the social democratic party, and have the effrontery to trace their descent from no other than Karl Marx! What distortion! What a mockery! Only consider, comrades, that the "Marxist" German social democracy, leading the Second International, is that same party, which betrayed the interests of the working class from the first days of the war, which supported unbridled German militarism during the rout of Belgium and the seizure of the Northern provinces of France; that party, which betrayed the October Revolution to German militarism after the Brest truce; that party, whose leaders, Scheidemann and Ebert, are now organising gangs of thugs to murder the heroes of the International, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxembourg!

What a monstrous historical perversion! Looking far back through the centuries, you can see a certain parallel with the historical fate of Christianity. The evangelical teaching of slaves, fishermen, toilers, the oppressed, everyone on earth crushed by slave society—this teaching of the poor, which has its roots in their history, was later taken over by the monopolisers of riches, kings, aristocrats, metropolitans, money-lenders, patriarchs, bankers, the Roman pope—and became an ideological cover for their crimes. However, there can be no doubt that between the teachings of original Christianity, as it took shape from the consciousness of the lower classes, and official Catholicism or Orthodoxy, there is nothing like the gap that exists between the teachings of Marx, which is the kernel of revolutionary thought and revolutionary will, and those despicable offshoots of bourgeois ideas on which the Scheidemanns and Eberts of all countries live and prosper. Through the social democrat leaders, the bourgeoisie has made an attempt to rob the proletariat of its spiritual property, and conceal its brigandry under the banner of Marxism. But it is to be hoped, comrades, that this foul crime will be the last for which the Scheidemanns and Eberts will be responsible. The German proletariat has suffered much from those who were placed at its head; but this will not pass unnoticed. The blood of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxembourg will cry out. This blood will set the pavements of Berlin talking, and the bricks of that same Potsdam Square on which Liebknecht first raised the banner of insurrection against the war and against capital. And one day sooner or later on Berlin's streets barricades will be raised from those bricks against the real grovellers and chained dogs of bourgeois society, against the Scheidemanns and Eberts!

Now in Berlin the rogues have crushed the Spartacist movement, the German communists. They have killed two of the best inspirers of that movement, and maybe today they are celebrating their victory. But there is no real victory there, for there has not yet been a direct, open and all-out fight; there has not yet been an uprising of the German proletariat in the name of the conquest of political power. This was only a big reconnaissance operation, a deep reconnoitring of the opponent's encampment. Reconnaissance precedes battle, but it is not yet battle. The German proletariat needed this deep reconnaissance, as we needed

it in the July days. The unfortunate thing is that in the reconnaissance two of the best commanders fell. It is a cruel loss, but it is not a defeat. The fight is still to come.

We shall understand what is going on in Germany better if we take a look at our own situation of yesterday. You remember the course of events and their internal logic. At the end of February, Old Style, the masses overthrow the Tsar's throne. For the first weeks there was a feeling as if the main thing had already been accomplished. The new people coming forward from the opposition parties, which had never been in power in our country, enjoyed for the first period the trust or partial trust of the popular masses. But this trust quickly began to develop cracks in it. Petrograd was in the lead at the second stage of the revolution too, as it should have been. In July, just as in February, it was the far advanced vanguard of the revolution. And this vanguard, which called the popular masses to open warfare against the bourgeoisie and the conciliators, paid heavily for the deep reconnaissance which it carried out.

In the July days the Petrograd vanguard came into collision with the Kerensky government. This was not yet the insurrection we went through in October. It was a skirmish by the vanguard, the historical significance of which the broad masses in the provinces did not yet fully realise. In this clash the Petrograd workers showed the popular masses not only of Russia, but of all countries, that behind Kerensky there was no independent army; that the forces supporting him were the forces of the bourgeoisie, the White Guard, the counter-revolution.

At that time, in July, we suffered a defeat. Comrade Lenin had to go into hiding. Some of us were in prison. Our newspapers were silenced. The Petrograd Soviet was caught in a vice. The presses of the party and the Soviet were broken up, the working buildings and rooms were sealed. Everywhere the violence of the Black Hundreds was raging. In other words, what was happening was what is happening now on the streets of Berlin. And nonetheless not one of the real revolutionaries then had a shadow of doubt of the fact that the July days were only a prelude to our triumph.

A similar situation has arisen in the last few days in Germany. Like Petrograd here, Berlin has gone beyond the rest of the popular masses; as they did here, all the enemies of the German proletariat were howling that the dictatorship of Berlin could not be tolerated; that Spartacist Berlin was isolated; that a constituent assembly must be called and moved from red Berlin, corrupted by the propaganda of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, to a more healthy provincial town of Germany! Everything the enemy did here, all the malicious agitation, all the base slanders we heard here, all this—in German translation—was fabricated by the Scheidemanns and Eberts and spread about Germany, against the Berlin proletariat and its leaders, Liebknecht and Luxemburg. True, the German proletariat's reconnaissance developed wider and deeper than ours in July, and there are more victims there, and more important ones—all that is true. But this is explained by the fact that the Germans are going through an episode which we have already gone through once; their bourgeoisie and military have learnt from our

July and October experience. But the main thing is that the class relations there are incomparably more definite than ours were; the possessing classes are incomparably more tightly knit, cleverer, more active—and that also means more ruthless.

In our country, comrades, there were four months between the February revolution and the July days; the Petrograd proletariat needed a quarter of a year to feel the incontrovertible necessity of coming out on to the streets and attempting to shake the pillar on which the state treasury of Kerensky and Tseretelli was supported. After the defeat of the July days it took another four months for the heavy reserves of the provinces to support Petrograd, and it was with the confidence of victory that we were able to declare a direct attack on the bastion of private property in October 1917.

In Germany, where the first revolution, which overthrew the monarchy, broke out only at the beginning of November, our July days are already taking place at the beginning of January. Does this not indicate that in its revolution the German proletariat is living by an abbreviated calendar? Where we needed four months, they need only two. And one may hope that this scale will be kept up. It may be that from the German July days to the German October not four months will pass, as here, but less—perhaps two months will be enough, or even less. But however events proceed, one thing is certain: those shots fired into Karl Liebknecht's back have echoed powerfully round all Germany. And that echo has sounded like a death knell in the ears of the Scheidemanns and Eberts, German and otherwise.

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Here have we just been singing the requiem for Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. The leaders are dead. We shall never again see them alive. But have many of you, comrades, ever seen them alive? An insignificant minority. Nevertheless, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg have lived among you constantly for the last months and years. At meetings and congresses you have elected Karl Liebknecht honorary chairman. He himself has not been here, he did not manage to get to Russia—but he was still in your midst, sitting as a guest of honour at your table, as one of you, as a near one, as a kinsman—for his name has become not just the name of an individual man—no, it has become for us a word for all that is good, brave, noble, in the working class. If any one of us had to imagine a man whole-heartedly devoted to the down-trodden, tempered like steel from head to foot, a man who never dipped his standard before the enemy, we immediately named Karl Liebknecht. He has entered the consciousness and memory of the peoples forever by his heroism of action. In the frenzied camp of the enemy, when triumphant militarism was sweeping all before it and crushing everything, when all those who should have been protesting were silent, when it seemed as if there was no outlet anywhere—he, Liebknecht, raised his fighter's voice. He said: You, you reigning tyrants, martial butchers, aggressors, you, you servile lackeys, conciliators, you are swamping Belgium, you are threatening France, you want to crush the

whole world, you think there will be no justice for you—but I say to you: we, the few, are not afraid of you, we are declaring war on you, and we shall arouse the masses and fight this war to the end! It is such boldness of decision, such heroism of action, which makes the figure of Karl Liebknecht unforgettable for the world proletariat.

And at his side stands Rosa, a warrior of the world proletariat equal to him in spirit. Their tragic death—at their war posts—joins their names with a special link, unbreakable for ever. From now on they will always be named together: Karl and Rosa, Liebknecht and Luxembour!

Do you know the basis for the legends about the eternal life of saints? It is people's need to preserve the memory of those who stood at their heads, who in one way or another led them; the striving to eternalise the personality of the leaders in an aura of sanctity. We, comrades, have no need of legends, have no need to transform our heroes into saints. For us the reality in which we are living now is enough, for that reality is itself legendary. It is awakening miraculous forces in the spirit of the masses and of their leaders, it is creating magnificent figures which tower over the whole of humanity.

Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxembour are such eternal figures. We sense their presence among us with a striking, almost physical, immediacy. In this tragic hour we unite ourselves with the best workers in Germany and the whole world, thrown into sorrow and mourning by the terrible news. We here feel the sharpness and bitterness of the blow just as much as our German brothers. In sorrow and in mourning we are just as much international as in our whole fight.

Liebknecht for us is not only a German leader. Rosa Luxembour for us is not only a Polish socialist who stood at the head of the German workers. No, for the world proletariat they are both our own, our kin, we are all linked with them by a spiritual, indissoluble bond. To their last breath they belonged not to a nation, but to the International!

For the information of Russian workers, male and female, it must be said that Liebknecht and Luxembour were especially close to the Russian revolutionary proletariat, and in the most difficult times too. Liebknecht's flat was the headquarters for the Russian emigres in Berlin. When a voice of protest had to be raised in the German parliament against the aid the German rulers were rendering to the Russian reaction, we turned first of all to Karl Liebknecht, and he knocked on every door and on every skull, including the skulls of Scheidemann and Ebert, to make them protest against the crimes of the German government. And we invariably turned to Liebknecht when it was necessary to give some comrade material aid. Liebknecht was tireless in the service of the Red Cross of the Russian revolution.

At the German social democratic congress in Jena already mentioned, which I attended as a guest, the presidium, on Liebknecht's initiative, proposed that I speak on the resolution, proposed again by Liebknecht, denouncing the violence of the tsarist government in Finland. Liebknecht prepared himself with the greatest care for his own speech, col-

lected figures and facts, questioned me in detail on the customs relations between tsarist Russia and Finland. But before it was time for him to speak (I was to speak after Liebkecht) the news came in by telegraph of the Kiev attempt on Stolypin. This wire message produced a great effect on the congress. The first question which occurred to the leaders was whether it was proper for a Russian revolutionary to speak at a German congress at a time when some other Russian revolutionary had just made an attempt on the Russian prime minister? This notion even caught Bebel; the old man, three heads taller than the other members of the Vorstand (CC), all the same did not like "unnecessary" difficulties. He immediately sought me out and cross-questioned me: what was the meaning of the attempt? What party could be responsible for it? Did I not think that in those circumstances my speaking would merely draw the attention of the German police to me? "You are afraid," I asked the old man carefully, "that my speech might produce certain difficulties?" "Yes," replied Bebel. "I admit I would prefer you not to speak." "In such a case," I replied, "there can of course be no question of my speaking." On that we parted.

Inside a minute Liebkecht literally ran in to see me. He was extremely agitated. "Is it true that they suggested you shouldn't speak?" he asked me. "Yes," I replied, "I've just agreed that with Bebel." "And you agreed?" "How could I not agree?" I answered, trying to justify myself. "I'm not the host here, I'm a guest." "It's an outrageous thing from our presidium, it's a disgrace, it's an unheard-of scandal, it's contemptible cowardice!" etc, etc. Liebkecht gave expression to his indignation in his speech, in which he mercilessly attacked the tsarist government, despite behind-the-scenes warnings from the presidium, which tried to persuade him not to cause "unnecessary" difficulties in the form of insults to the tsar's majesty.

Rosa Luxembourgh since her youth stood at the head of the Polish social-democratic party, which has now joined the revolutionary part of the Polish socialist party, in the communist party. Rosa Luxembourgh spoke excellent Russian, had a profound knowledge of Russian literature, followed Russian political life day by day, was connected by the closest bonds to the Russian revolutionaries, and lovingly explained in the German press the revolutionary steps of the Russian proletariat. In her second homeland, Germany, Rosa Luxembourgh, with her special talent, acquired to perfection not only the German language, but also a full knowledge of German political life, and she took up one of the most prominent places in the old social democracy of Bebel. There she invariably remained on the extreme left wing.

In 1905 Karl Liebkecht and Rosa Luxembourgh lived through the events of the Russian revolution, in the real sense of the word. Rosa Luxembourgh left Berlin for Warsaw in 1905—not as a Pole, but as a revolutionary. Freed on bail from the citadel of Warsaw, she came illegally to Petrograd in 1906, and there under a false name she visited several of her friends in prison. Back in Berlin, she redoubled the fight against opportunism, opposing to it the way and method of the Russian revolution.

Together with Rosa we went through the greatest misfortune which has hit the working class: I am speaking of the shameful bankruptcy of the Second International in August 1914. Together with her we raised the banner of the Third International. And now, comrades, in our day-to-day work we shall remain faithful to the behests of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxembourg; if we today are constructing in a Petrograd which is still cold and starving the building of a socialist state—we are acting in the spirit of Liebknecht and Luxembourg; if our army advances on the fronts—it is defending with its blood the behests of Liebknecht and Luxembourg. What a bitter thing it is that it was unable to defend them themselves!

In Germany there is no Red Army, for power there is still in the hands of the enemy. We already have an army, it is growing, and growing stronger. And in expectation of the day when the army of the German proletariat will flock around the banner of Karl and Rosa, each of us will consider it his duty to bring to the awareness of our Red Army who Liebknecht and Luxembourg were, what they died for, why their memory must be held sacred by every Red Army man, by every worker and peasant.

It is an unbearably hard blow that has been struck at us. But we look forward, not only with hope, but with confidence. Despite the fact that today in Germany there is a flood of reaction, we do not for a minute lose confidence in the fact that there a red October is at hand. The great fighters have not perished in vain. Their death will be avenged. Their shades will get satisfaction. Turning to those dear shades, we may say: "Rosa Luxembourg and Karl Liebknecht, you are no longer in the land of the living; but you are present among us; we can sense your powerful spirit; we shall fight under your banner; our fighting ranks will be inspired by your moral fascination! And each of us swears, if the time comes and the revolution demands it—to die without flinching, under the same banner you died under, friends and comrades-in-arms, Rosa Luxembourg and Karl Liebknecht!"

[Translated from the original Russian by Tom Scott and John Fairlie]

LUXEMBOURG AND THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

[On June 24th, 1935, Trotsky completed this article, which was subsequently published in the August 1935 issue of *New International*.]

Efforts are now being made in France and elsewhere to construct a so-called Luxembourism as an entrenchment for the left centrists against the Bolshevik-Leninists. This question may acquire a considerable significance. It may perhaps be necessary to devote an extensive article in the near future to real and alleged Luxembourism. I wish to touch here upon the essential features of the question.

We have more than once taken up the cudgels for Rosa Luxembour against the impudent and stupid misrepresentations of Stalin and his bureaucracy. And we shall continue to do so. In doing so we are not prompted by any sentimental considerations, but by the demands of historical-materialist criticism. Our defence of Rosa Luxembour is not, however, unconditional. The weak sides of Rosa Luxembour's teachings have been laid bare both theoretically and practically. The S.A.P. people and kindred elements (see, for example, the dilettante intellectual "proletarian cultural": French *Spartacus*, the periodical of the socialist students appearing in Belgium, and oftentimes also the Belgian *Action Socialiste*, etc.) make use only of the weak sides and the inadequacies which were by no means decisive in Rosa; they generalise and exaggerate these weaknesses to the utmost and build up a thoroughly absurd system on that basis. The paradox consists in this, that in their latest turn the Stalinists, too—without acknowledging or even understanding it—come close in theory to the caricatured negative sides of Luxembourism, to say nothing of the traditional centrists and left centrists in the social democratic camp.

There is no gainsaying that Rosa Luxembour passionately counterposed the spontaneity of mass actions to the "victory-crowned" conservative policy of the German social democracy especially after the Revolution of 1905. This counterposition had a thoroughly revolutionary and progressive character. At a much earlier date than Lenin, Rosa Luxembour grasped the retarding character of the ossified party and trade union apparatus and began a struggle against it. Inasmuch as she counted upon the inevitable accentuation of class conflicts, she always predicted the certainty of the independent elemental appearance of the masses against the will and against the line of the march of the officialdom. In these broad historical outlines, Rosa was proved right. For the

revolution of 1918 was "spontaneous", that is, it was accomplished by the masses against all the provisions and all the precautions of the party officialdom. On the other hand, the whole of Germany's subsequent history amply showed that spontaneity alone is far from enough for success; Hitler's regime is a weighty argument against the panacea of spontaneity.

Rosa herself never confined herself to the mere theory of spontaneity, like Parvus, for example, who later bartered his social revolutionary fatalism for the most revolting fatalism. In contrast to Parvus, Rosa Luxembourgh exerted herself to educate the revolutionary wing of the proletariat in advance and to bring it together organisationally as far as possible. In Poland, she built up a very rigid independent organisation. The most that can be said is that in her historical-philosophical evaluation of the labour movement, the preparatory selection of the vanguard, in comparison with the mass actions that were to be expected, fell too short with Rosa; whereas Lenin—without consoling himself with the miracles of future actions—took the advanced workers and constantly and tirelessly welded them together into firm nuclei, illegally or legally, in the mass organisations or underground, by means of a sharply defined programme.

Rosa's theory of spontaneity was a wholesome weapon against the ossified apparatus of reformism. By the fact that it was often directed against Lenin's work of building up a revolutionary apparatus, it revealed—to be sure, only in embryo—its reactionary features. With Rosa herself this occurred only episodically. She was much too realistic in the revolutionary sense to develop the elements of the theory of spontaneity into a consummate metaphysics. In practice, she herself, as has already been said, undermined this theory at every step. After the revolution of November 1918, she began the ardent labour of assembling the proletariat vanguard. Despite her theoretically very weak manuscript on the Soviet Revolution, written in prison but never published by her, Rosa's subsequent work allows the sure conclusion that, day by day, she was moving closer to Lenin's theoretically clearly-delineated concept concerning conscious leadership and spontaneity. (It must surely have been this circumstance that prevented her from making public her manuscript against Bolshevik policy which was later so shamefully abused).

Let us again attempt to apply the conflict between spontaneous mass actions and purposeful organisational work to the present epoch. What a mighty expenditure of strength and selflessness the toiling masses of all the civilised and half-civilised countries have exerted since the world war! Nothing in the previous history of mankind could compare with it. To this extent Rosa Luxembourgh was entirely right as against the philistines, the corporals and the blockheads of straight-marching "victory-crowned" bureaucratic conservatism. But it is just the squandering of these immeasurable energies that forms the basis of the great depression in the proletariat and the successful fascist advance. Without the slightest exaggeration it may be said: the whole world situation is determined by the crisis of the proletarian leadership. The field of the labour movement is today still encumbered with huge remnants of the old bankrupt

organisations. After the countless sacrifices and disappointments, the bulk of the European proletariat, at least, has withdrawn into its shell. The decisive lesson which it has drawn, consciously or half-consciously, from the bitter experiences, reads: great actions require a great leadership. For current affairs, the workers still give their votes to the old organisations. Their votes—but by no means their boundless confidence. On the other hand, after the miserable collapse of the Third International, it is much harder to move them to bestow their confidence upon a new revolutionary organisation. That's just where the crisis of the proletarian leadership lies. To sing a monotonous song about the indefinite future mass actions in this situation, in contrast to the purposeful selection of the cadres of a new International, means to carry on a thoroughly reactionary work. That's just where the role of the S.A.P. lies in the "historical process". A left-wing S.A.P. man of the Old Guard can, of course, summon up his Marxian recollections in order to stem the tide of theoretical spontaneity-barbarism. These purely literary protective measures changed nothing in the fact that the pupils of a Miles, the precious author of the article in the French edition of the *Youth Bulletin*, carry on the most disgraceful spontaneity nonsense even in the ranks of the S.A.P. The practical politics of Schwab (the artful "not speaking out what is" and the eternal consolation of the future mass actions and the spontaneous "historical process") also signifies nothing but a tactical exploitation of a thoroughly distorted and bowdlerised Luxembourgeoisism. And to the extent that the "left wingers", the "Marxists" fail to make an open attack upon this theory and practice of their own party, their anti-Miles articles acquire the character of the search for a theoretical alibi. Such an alibi first really becomes necessary when one takes part in a deliberate crime.

The crisis of the proletarian leadership cannot, of course, be overcome by means of an abstract formula. It is a question of an extremely humdrum process. But not of a purely "historical" process, that is, of the objective premises of conscious activity, but of an uninterrupted chain of ideological, political and organisational measures for the purpose of fusing together the best, most conscious elements of the world proletariat beneath a spotless banner, elements whose number and self-confidence must be constantly strengthened, whose connections with wider sections of the proletariat must be developed and deepened—in a word: to restore to the proletariat, under new and highly difficult and onerous conditions, its historical leadership. The latest spontaneity confusionists have just as little right to refer to Rosa as the miserable Comintern bureaucrats have to refer to Lenin. Put aside the incidentals which developments have overcome, and we can, with full justification, place our work for the Fourth International under the sign of the "three L's", that is, not only under the sign of Lenin, but also of Luxembourg and Liebknecht.

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