

# To Some Inspirations of Rosa Luxemburg's Revolutionary Thinking

(A short reflexion on some issues associated with Luxemburg's contribution to a revolutionary thinking)<sup>1</sup>

Dominika Dinušová

Department of Philosophy and of History of Philosophy

Comenius University in Bratislava

The importance of Marxian heritage and of the work of Rosa Luxemburg last but not least consists in assumption of philosophy and political theory as a practical matter, which has sense only in its applications in reality. Also nowadays in this case are developing some cardinal issues. One of them is how to transform current socioeconomic relations and by this way to ostracize negative impacts of capitalist socioeconomic system; and how in this content to project in reality of 21st century the thinking of Marx, Engels and Luxemburg. In this short text I would like to aim on some general impulses in consideration and realisation of revolutionary activities. I don't want to put any definitely statements but only draft out some questions about revolutionary thinking and revolutionary policy in current society.

Rosa Luxemburg same like Marx and Engels perceives revolution as an only one possible and inevitable instrument of establishment of socialism. Luxemburg perceives the difference between revolution and reform (as other way of transformation of socioeconomic system) absolutely. She writes : „... *If someone decides for reform instead of conquest of political power and the upheaval in society; he does not actually choose safer and more protracted way to the same objective, but to different objective,; he does not want to bring about a new social order, but only to slightly modify the old one. Thus we come to the same conclusion from the political view of revisionism, as of its economic theories: they do not tend to make socialist order, but to correct capitalist order, they do not intend to eliminate the wage system, they want just less of exploitation, and they tend to eliminate capitalist excesses, not capitalism itself.*”<sup>2</sup> Also Marx and Engels on the basis on dialectical moving in history think on revolution as on historical necessity for projection of socialist relations. From the antagonism of classes which is deepening, join with the development of forces of production which already not belie to relations of production, is increasing the conflict. The conclusion of

---

<sup>1</sup> This text doesn't want to put any definitely statements. It's only a thinking experiment and short reflexion of current tendencies in revolutionary debate. I tried to emphasize the contribution of Luxemburg's thinking which is still actual also in its revolutionary character, and show on some aspects of perceiving current situation. This reflection consists from some drafts of thinks and short observations.

<sup>2</sup> Luxemburg, R. : *Social Reform or Social Revolution?* , In: [http://www.demokratickalevice.cz/wp-content/uploads/Rosa\\_Luxemburgova-SocialniReformaNeboSocialniRevoluce1900.pdf](http://www.demokratickalevice.cz/wp-content/uploads/Rosa_Luxemburgova-SocialniReformaNeboSocialniRevoluce1900.pdf) ,p. 32

this conflict is new socioeconomic formation. By this way become socialist revolution too, which annihilate the relations of exploitation. Currently we are in the era of global capitalism when an economical impacts, political consequences, new culture values and also revolutionary ambitions by now are not delimited by frontiers of national states. In this case we have to rethinking also the previous statements of realization of social change. Nancy Fraser speaks about affirmative and transformative strategies for social change. Affirmation in this content is aiming on final result; its objective is repair inequitable effects of social order without breaking the basis structure. Transformation is aiming on basis causes and its objective is to repair these inequitable effects by restructuralisation of basis structure.<sup>3</sup> However Fraser doesn't understand the difference between both of these strategies absolutely but conceptually. Accordingly also affirmative strategies in specific conditions – when they are realized radically and objectively - can follow to final transformation of socioeconomic relations. This ideological basement we can find in some efforts of activist movements or in efforts of some governments for example programs of participating budgeting in some cities, project of “Socialism of 21th Century” in Venezuela and other countries of Latin America, models of economic order “after capitalism” which have become an inspirational resource of many local organizations. There is still the question if these activities really will give rise to final transformation of capitalism, if by these activities will manage to negative impacts of capitalism, and if they can in longer time perspective successfully operate in capitalist market.

Marx and Engels are thinking on revolution by analogy with the experiences from French revolution. Precisely analyze situation before revolution, its process and consequences and then from these historical events deduce next routing of society in future. In the spirit of the time enlightenment, same like Voltaire and Condorcet presuppose continual and straightforward historical evolution which is leading by some strictly historical law. Revolution perceive in the spirit of the French experience from the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century. But today we can ask if it is necessary perceive revolution only in this form. Revolution in Marxian tradition is conflict between two classes - on one side is a class of bourgeoisie and on other side a class of proletariat. In the era of global or informational capitalism is springing up transnational capitalist class - TCC (W.I. Robinson) as entity represented the class of bourgeoisie on transnational level. In the sense of class antagonism is offer the question which class will stand up against this TCC? In Marxian pattern who will be the subject of social change? Can we thinking any “transnational proletariat”? If TCC developed from informational technologies (J. Harris), then how can be transnational population which doesn't have access to these technologies? This people, poverty in countries of third world, in front with its antipole – TCC – due to economic conditions and social aspects don't have an access to modern technologies (not only informational, but also they cannot to travel, don't be global but they are still local). The fight of poor man in country of third world is everyday fight for survival. Therefore organization of global resistance on transnational level is for this people impossible.

---

<sup>3</sup> Fraser, N.: *Re-framing Justice in a Globalizing World*. In: Fraser, N.: *Development of Radical Imagination*. Prague : FILOSOFIA – ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΑ 2007, p. 168-169

But if we were coming out the Marxian definition of proletariat like the class in society „*which lives entirely from the sale of its labour power and does not draw profit from any kind of capital; whose weal and woe, whose life and death, whose sole existence depends on the demand for labour...*“<sup>4</sup>, it could be mistake and reduction regard as proletariat only poor people in third world. Also in developed countries are proletarians, but their situation is deeply different. Residues of welfare state, at least minimal social safeties don't lead the people to open fight in which *they can nothing lost only their shackles*. So this hypothetical “transnational proletariat” is inherently heterogeneous not only on ideological level, but also in cultural, social and economical level. There is not a *class for itself* and in contrary of TCC, doesn't push ahead any class project. So what we can do in this situation? Waiting? Organize protests, criticize and so break ideological hegemony of capitalism? Or to believe that one time there will be any unific transnational class for itself of proletarians, which will lead a revolutionary fight and will project a socialism?

The answer we could find in thinking of Rosa Luxemburg and in her dialectical moving in social reality. When we are thinking about the revolution fight between two classes we are tendig to follow strict pattern of relations. First is an imagine of some organization and unific class and then after this, stand the spontaneous fight of people. But Luxemburg's on example of russian revolution events in the beginning of 19th century shows that this moving is oppose. Her dialectics of spontaneously fight and organization is inspirative also nowadays. It seems that activities in many parts of world which try to solute particular problems of each other region are heterogenous, but they are an answer to urgent problems of social situation. In this light divergent activities in different parts of world are spontaneous acts expressing inevitable necessity of revolution process. Luxemburg doesn't dream about unific organization but emphasises spontaneously fight which we cannot construct, but it accrue from real historical situation. An imagine of unific class of proletarians are mistaken, as she writes : „(Capitalist development) *not proceed in a beautiful straight line but in a lightning-like zig-zag. Just as the various capitalist countries represent the most varied stages of development, so within each country the different layers of the same working class are represented. But history does not wait patiently till the backward countries, and the most advanced layers have joined together so that the whole mass can move symmetrically forward like a compact column. It brings the best prepared parts to explosion as soon as conditions there are ripe for it, and then in the storm of the revolutionary period, lost ground is recovered, unequal things are equalised, and the whole pace of social progress changed at one stroke to the double-quick*“.<sup>5</sup> Also nowadays great protests, an alternative models of socialism, social forums, local activities aimed at avoiding negative capitalist impacts we can perceive as little explosion in process of revolution.

The important in the thinking of revolution and its emphasis of Marx, Engels and Luxeburg consists also in educational aspect in which starting an emancipatory process of mass, of people, of every human. In spite of criticism that this ways only seems like

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.marxists.org/glossary/terms/p/r.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Luxemburg, R.: *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*. (1906) In: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1906/mass-strike/ch07.htm> (cap. VII)

revolutionary, but don't content the crucial requirements for forming a socialist society; we can understand the necessity of creation of these types of protests and matters as an answer on particular situation. Some requirements don't must discover immediately in the beginning of revolutionary convulsions, but they will result from emancipatory process of mass in revolution. This shows also H. Arendt on the example of French and American revolution. She emphasises that both of them come to a point, when they are starting to require republican form of government. „*This requirement and with its join new, coercitory antagonism between monarchists and republicans developed from revolutions itself.*“<sup>6</sup> Revolution is not previously projected process, its requirements could be in initial level particular. Same like describe it Luxemburg on example strikes from the beginning of 20th century in Russia, in revolutionary clime, in fight of mass are cristalizing also new requirements which must not be present in initial revolts. Similarly it is possible to think about requirement of abolition of private ownership in current situation. First economic experiments and requirements called for change of socioeconomic system must not inevitably called also for abolition of private ownership.

The Luxemburg's thinking is different in the perceiving of revolution and organization of socialism. After experiences with great byrocracy machine and missappropriating of ideas of socialism in 20th century, we can ask, what is socialism? After experiences from 20<sup>th</sup> century we are witnesses of scepticism against this term and its content. Can we choose the type of socialism? (This question I ask only in context with historical interpretations and desinterpretations of this term and its practical connotations.) In Marxian view, socialism is a historical socioeconomic formation in which human is emancipated, there are no alienation and the capitalist private ownership of instruments of production is abolished. Therefore there are no classes in society, no conflicts between them, and on production, distribution and political, economical and cultural life by democratic way participate all people in society. If I speak about socialism I think democratic society, when *develop of individual presuppose the general develop of all.*<sup>7</sup> But how we can to arrive this socialism? Orthodox repetition of strategies from 19<sup>th</sup> century, ignorance of experiences from 20<sup>th</sup> century I think doesn't lead to socialist society on democratic basements. Therefore I try to draft out a synthesis of Marxian in connection with actual social clime and conditions of global/informational civilization for express possible ideological resource of social change. I try to sketch two general impulses :

(1) In history of western philosophy we can see the thought in dual categories. This antipoles observe in dichotomy of two sides; for example : general – individual, state – citizen, society – its member, whole – its part, man – woman etc. The emphasis is always on first of these poles. It determinates antipole and it is considered as positive and determining value. The emphasis on general, whole can observe also in philosophy of history when in tradition of Aristotle is the whole prefer prior to individual. Also in Marxism predominate over individual the whole – we can see it in alternating of socioeconomic formations and also in the think of class society where the activities of member of some class is determined by this class. Often is adverse of Marxian tradition the liberal concept with its accent on individual.

---

<sup>6</sup> Arendt, H.: *On Revolution*. Prague : OIKOYMENH 2011, p. 126

<sup>7</sup> Marx, K. and Engels, F.: *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Bratislava : Pravda 1977, p. 375

While in this discussion the general and collective is imputed to Marxism and to an idea of socialism, the individual is considered a basement of liberalism and on ideological level a thinking basement of actual socioeconomic relations. (I have to add, that this difference we should not understand absolutely. Also liberty of individual which emphasis Mill is not demonstrated in the idea of “free capitalist market”. And by contraries, socialism is an idea of society where is emphasises individual development of everyone member of society, its emancipation which is not reduce only on prosperity of the whole.) The emphasis on individuality we don't find only in the philosophy of liberals but more early in ancient philosophy, where this ideal impulse resounds in the thought of sophists. The sophists impugned the natural law of society, system of slavery regarded by Aristotle and Plato as natural phenomenon in society. In their fragments we read *that the individual is a measure of everything* (Protagoras) or that *laws are only arbitrariness of potent men* (Gorgias). From one point of view, belief or knowledge that me as an individual can entry and intervene in the world, society, that it isn't given by any strict natural or historical law which is impossible to change, can be a resource of revolution thought. Today when the global social relations seems blind, complicated and untouchables, appreciation of individual as constitutive entity of construction of reality is important moment in destroying of ideological hegemony of capitalism. The dialectics is here in synthesis of dichotomy of western thought, in finding not absolute differences between two poles standing opposite each other. The conceptual synthesis of these poles is also a revolutionary step which we cannot to think without the application in practice. Conceptual connection of an idea of socialism with its emphasis on collective relations and liberal accent on liberty of individual and his autonomy can arrive at by not only the ideal resource of social change, but also to a synthesis of plural thought on the future forms of socialism. Here we can see the dialectical movement between general and individual which synthesis will be democratic socialist society based on plural basement.

(2) Informational technologies are inaccessible to majority of population, but in developed countries create an important part of communication and they are also a work instruments of a lot of people. In spite of the negative aspects (making virtual reality, lost of real social relations, atomization of people etc.), we can see a great positive aspect, which is the ability of fast communication, mobilization of population and then also organization of mass protests. Big protests in Seattle, Bologna or Prague were not only the meetings of discontent activists, the primary place of this protests were not the street, but the social internet networks, where a millions of people expressed their disclaimer opinion in the face of neoliberal routing of society. The aspect of forming a group of people who everyday work with technologies is very important, too. In 1983 A. Toffler in his sociological work “Preview and Premises” showed on creating of new class, which called *cognitariat* and said that this class in future and in transformation of society *will have more power than proletariat have ever had*.<sup>8</sup> Engineers, journalists, teachers, intellectuals and others dispose by their labour power, and same like wage earners in 19<sup>th</sup> century this sale to particular societies. Due to access to informational facilities and to education their protest could be plural and leads to democratic open socialism which doesn't prefer uniformity, doesn't persecute differentness

---

<sup>8</sup> Toffler, A.: *Previews and Premises*. New York : William Morrow 1983

but by contraries, creates open space for emancipation of human in his extensive, creative and unbounded form.

Usually this kind of points of view is specified as an eclectic results of postmoderne situation. The criticism shows on diversion of Marxian basis. But Marxism as a critical theory could be also a criticism of Marxism itself. And the objective of this type of thinking doesn't must be negation of Marxian resources, but in contraries, like emphasises it Rosa Luxemburg in her accentuate on spontaneous fights and warning against bureaucracy; this points of view can legitimate a revolutionary activities and also can avoid the ortodox repetition of old postulate, accent on strict organization of parties, which instead of emancipation of mass can end in fascization and bureaucratization of society.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Arendt, H.: *On Revolution*. Praha : OIKOYMENH 2011
2. Fraser, N.: *Re-framing Justice in a Globalizing World*. In: Fraser, N.: *Development of Radical Imagination*. Prague : FILOSOFIA – ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΑ 2007
3. Luxemburg, R.: *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*. (1906) In: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1906/mass-strike/ch07.htm>
4. Luxemburg, R. : *Social Reform or Social Revolution?* , In: [http://www.demokratickevice.cz/wp-content/uploads/Rosa\\_Luxemburgova-SocialniReformaNeboSocialniRevoluce1900.pdf](http://www.demokratickevice.cz/wp-content/uploads/Rosa_Luxemburgova-SocialniReformaNeboSocialniRevoluce1900.pdf)
5. Marx, K. and Engels, F.: *Manifesto of the Comunist Party*. Bratislava : Pravda 1977
6. Toffler, A.: *Previews and Premises*. New York : William Morrow 1983