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The living substance of world history

Rosa Luxemburg's justification of democratic socialism

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Freedom without equality is exploitation.
Equality without Freedom is Oppression.
Freedom and Equality have a common root - solidarity.

Searching for a theory and practice of revolutionary real politics¹

“Blood has flown... in streams in the four years of imperialistic genocide. Now every drop of the precious juice must be guarded in crystal bowls. Decisive revolutionary action and wide-hearted humanity... this alone is the true content of socialism. A world was to be thrown over, but every tear, which was shed, even though it could be wiped, is an accusation, and a person rushing on to important actions, who out of inattention tramples on a poor worm, is committing a crime.”² Words like these have been rare in the Communist movement. They reflect an expectation of socialist politics not to let means and ends, goal and way get into an antagonistic contradiction with one another. They were written very few weeks before right-wing social democracy let loose its bloodhounds on red Berlin and – “Kill their leaders!” – also took Rosa Luxemburg’s life. As one of the perpetrators admitted later on. “The events of this evening took place as if in a drunken delirium. We had killed one another for four years, one more or less did not matter.”³ Desperately, Paul Levi started his funeral address on Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg with the words: “It is as if earth did not get tired of drinking the blood. It has drunk blood for four years, blood by blood.”⁴

Who does not want to think and construct socialism as dictatorship, emancipation as oppression, liberation not as deadly order, who for the sake of a human future, does not want to turn away from looking at the ruins of history, he or she, thus Heiner Müller “will eat dirt / mingled with the taste of our victim’s blood / on the way to a brighter future / or to none, if we spit it out.”⁵ Rosa Luxemburg put it differently: “Self-criticism, one which is ruthless, cruel and goes to the bottom of things, is the life breath and life light of the proletarian movement... Socialism would be lost only if the proletariat were not able to measure the depth of the fall and were not able to learn from it.”⁶

Remembering requires one to integrate the past into one’s own being, to break through the thousand walls which we use to protect our inner self by way of forgetting and repressing. Memory therefore got to be painful. To remember means to assimilate foreign, expelled things, things that took place and yet should not have happened. Memory therefore challenges our self-certitudes. And what should be remembered more often than the attempts at breaking out from the fatal inversion of goal and means in history, those rebellions and uprisings that resisted the transformation of movements of emancipation into ones of conformity and repression and therefore turned against those organisational forms and power structures, which had as a matter of fact been devised so as not to let emancipation faint, for it to

¹ This article is based on an earlier article about Rosa Luxemburg and Alexandra Kollontai, which will be published in the April 2004 issue of the journal *Utopie kreativ*.

² Rosa Luxemburg, *Eine Ehrenpflicht* (A question of honour) in *Werke*, vol. 4, p. 406.

³ Elisabeth Hannover-Drück, Heinrich Hannover, ed.: *Der Mord an Rosa Luxemburg und Karl Liebknecht. Dokumentation eines politischen Verbrechens* (The murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. Documentation of a political crime), Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1979, p. 139.

⁴ Paul Levi: *Karl Liebknecht und Rosa Luxemburg zum Gedächtnis. Rede bei der Trauerfeier am 2. Februar 1919 im Lehrer-Vereinshaus zu Berlin* (In memory of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. Speech at the funeral celebration on February 2 1919 in the Teachers’ Association House in Berlin), p. 3.

⁵ Müller, *Fernsehen* (Television) in the same: *Die Gedichte* (The poems), Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1998, p. 232.

⁶ Rosa Luxemburg: *Die Kritik der Sozialdemokratie* (The criticism of social democracy), *Werke* (Works), vol. 4, p. 53.

have an effect and a live tradition in history. What could be more tragic than the struggle against the very countervailing powers that were meant to insure emancipation but in turn transformed into new shells of bondage?!

Rosa Luxemburg like very few others stand for the many who tried to resist the fatal logic of the estranged liberation movements of European social democracy and Soviet communism. She belonged to those, who freed themselves from the male master logic of service to the cause, who did not want to suffer that liberation degenerate into a thing, a bureaucratic and ultimately a bloody fetish to whom one was to sacrifice first “the others” and then one’s own individuality and life. Her personal claim to a dignified life was at the same time a social claim for a truly liberating emancipative movement. She personally lived her social claim. For this reason she revolted within her own movement with her demand for a revolutionary real politics that would turn equally against the transformation of social democracy into an apparatus of the status quo and against the erection of a dictatorship. I want to remind us of her rebellion. She developed approaches to a radically democratic, radically emancipative and radically socialist theory and politics, which are today as topical as they could possibly be. I want to ask us to remember her as our own history for the sake of our own future.

Rosa Luxemburg, born in 1871 in the Polish town of Zamość, spent her school years in Warsaw. She grew into a time, when capitalism was expanding with new power, opened itself whole continents, revolutionised whole societies, was able to stabilise in the centres and simultaneously, on that basis, subjected itself the world, carrying its Imperial wars of genocide into the most distant corners. With 16 years she wrote on the back-side of one of her photographs, which she presented to a school friend: “My ideal is a social order such that I will be able to love everyone. In striving for it and in the name of this ideal, I may once be able to hate.”⁷

Rosa Luxemburg experienced these changing times on her own skin through the transformation of the Russian-occupied part of Poland towards a society of dynamic capitalist accumulation and through the rise of Imperial Germany to the most aggressive power of Europe. It was a time, when social reforms were driving forward the integration of workers into society and were seeking to civilise wage-earning labour. It was a time, during which those contradictions accumulated, which later erupted with the First World War and the revolutions and counter-revolutions of the early 20th century. It was a time, when the Second International developed to a seemingly unstoppable counter-power, social-democratic parties in a number of West European countries seemed to be close to assuming power. And it was a time, in which it showed itself ever more clearly that this social-democracy was splitting into the kind of opportunism which finally renounces to a socialist politics and the kind of Bolshevism which wants to exercise socialist politics as a dictatorship over the people.

Rosa Luxemburg’s work in the German complete edition (in which an important part of her writings in Polish are still missing) encompasses five, in part very voluminous books of almost four thousands printed pages total. The letters, also edited in German, are collected in six volumes. They extend over just under thirty years. And while Rosa Luxemburg appears and tries to appear already in her first writings as an accomplished orthodox Marxist⁸ in the best sense of that word, she becomes open, unpolished and interrogative in many articles of the last decade of her life. Rosa Luxemburg was always in the making, even if she often passed ready, not infrequently also much too ready judgments. She became something be-

⁷ Quoted in Maria Seidemann: Rosa Luxemburg und Leo Jogiches. Die Liebe in den Zeiten der Revolution (Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches. Love in revolutionary times), Berlin: Rowohlt 1998, p. 9.

⁸ Orthodox Marxism, in what follows, designates the reception of Marx that was represented in a conclusive way by Karl Kautsky in the years between 1890 until 1914. It is a very specific interpretation of the Marxist heritage before the background of a largely evolutionary development of capitalism and the apparently inexorable rise of social democracy and workers’ movement to leading force in the society of that time.

yond the answers of a rigid Marxism and of a social-democratic policy that failed at the new challenges.

The nature of this Marxism that had become orthodoxy and the politics of German social democracy based on it consisted in the conception that iron laws of history and of the capitalist way of production would prepare socialism in an antagonistic way (objectively above all in the concentration and centralisation of production and subjectively in the development of the working class to a revolutionary class dominating society). Guideline for the strategy founded on it were the remarks by the old Engels in his preface to Marx' writing "Class struggles in France", written in 1895: "Whatever may happen in other countries, German social democracy has a special position, and therefore at least for the time being a special task. The two million voters, which it sends to the ballots, together with the young men and women who stand behind them as non-voters, form the most numerous, most compact mass, the decisive 'heap of force' in the international proletarian army. This mass... increases... incessantly. Its growth proceeds as spontaneously, as continuously, as inexorably and at the same time as calmly as a natural event. All interventions by the government have proved powerless against it... If this goes on like this, we will until the end of the century conquer the greater part of the middle strata of society, small bourgeois as well as small peasants, and will come out as the decisive force in the country, in front of which all other powers will have to incline, whether they like it or not. To keep this growth in motion uninterrupted, until it grows over the head of the present government, [not to wear out this heap of force growing day by day in advance guard skirmishes, but to keep it intact until the day of decision], this is our main task."⁹

Already in the beginning of the new century, it became clear to Rosa Luxemburg that this conception was increasingly hitting its limits. The "heap of force" turned into a mere means to increase organisational power and number of parliamentary seats, and simultaneously those, who controlled this organisation, gave up the goal of the fundamental transformation of society. Without renewal, practically as well spiritually, Marxism and socialism would be cast aside as empty phrase and mere chain on real politics. "The only means to radically fight opportunism, is to go forward oneself, to *develop* the tactic for *strengthening* the revolutionary side of the movement. Opportunism actually is a swamp plant, which quickly and opulently develops in the standing water of the movement; in case of brash, strong stream it dies off by itself."¹⁰ A few weeks after she had written these lines, the first Russian revolution broke out, which seized the whole Russian Tsardom and not last also Russian-occupied Poland. This became the most crucial event in Rosa Luxemburg's life and work. Emphatically she shouted, travelling to the capital Warsaw in order to participate in the revolutionary struggles: "The revolution is great, everything else is cottage cheese."¹¹ This revolution convinced her that the quiet times were over.¹² With the battle taken up after 1905 for the recognition of political mass strike as legitimate means of struggle of the workers' movement, she finally wanted to overcome the stagnation in German social democracy which amounted more and more to a falling back in the face of imperialism, colonialism, and reactionary authoritarianism and pass on to the offensive. Openly distancing herself from Engels, she wrote in February 1905: "Wanting to measure the political maturity and latent revolutionary energy

⁹ Friedrich Engels: Einleitung zu Marx' „Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich“ (Introduction to Marx' Class struggle in France), *MEW*, vol. 22, p. 524.

¹⁰ Rosa Luxemburg: Brief an Henriette Roland Holst vom 17. Dezember 1904 (Letter to Henriette Roland Holst of December 17, 1904), *Collected Letters*, vol. 6, p. 101.

¹¹ Rosa Luxemburg: *Gesammelte Briefe*, vol. 2, p. 259.

¹² "Luxemburg returned to Berlin on September 13, 1906, a different person than the one who had left nearly a year earlier. Her exposure to active revolutionaries and her experiences in Warsaw had increased her feelings of isolation within the SPD." Donald E. Shepardson: *Rosa Luxemburg and the Noble Dream*, New York: Peter Lang 1996, p. 53.

of the working class by electoral statistics or by trade union or electoral association figures, is like trying to approach the Montblanc with a tailor centimetre tape.”¹³

In this revolution, directly triggered off by the inner-imperialistic war between Russia and Japan, the deep tensions in the world of the early 20th century became apparent in full vigour. The overlapping of imperialism, war, partial consolidation of capitalism in its centres, colonisation of the periphery, the linkage between national and social question, of workers' movement and peasant uprising became apparent. Before the background of this revolution, Rosa Luxemburg became aware of the inadequacy of merely defending theory and practice of the Second International against the opportunistic settling within the given relationships of forces, on the one hand, and a policy of coup-like-dictatorial instrumentalisation of the social movement on the other. She begins a autonomous search for a theory and practice that would be capable of intervening in an emancipative as well as a revolutionary way into these contradictions. And this inheritance lies unutilised.

In the small Finnish resort town Kuokkala close to Petersburg, only just released on bail from a four-month detention in Warsaw, she wrote, on behalf of the executive board of the SPD Hamburg, the analysis “Mass strike, party and trade unions”, in which she linked the experiences of the Russian revolution with those in Western Europe and developed approaches to a new offensive strategy of mass mobilisation. As Karl Radek was later to write in his quality of Bolshevik representative. “This brochure means the founding of a new phase of socialism. With it begins the separation of the Communist movement from social democracy.”¹⁴ At the same time, however, it was the attempt to theoretically found a revolutionary practice, which would not usher into a rule *OVER* the people.

Faced with a personality, who was always on an exploratory track, an emancipative reading of Rosa Luxemburg's works is in no way simple. The reading is bound to man and woman wanting to discover for themselves the process of liberation of the authoress from the thought patterns of orthodox Marxism and the organisational structures of the Second International, in particular its German bastion, the SPD, to their not wanting to carry away ready-made knowledge, but from their trying to assimilate, as the most important result of the reading, the formulation of the problems itself and the way of searching.¹⁵ For her whole work, there hold the words by Paul Levi, her closest friends and political disciple: “Her in the profoundest way balanced soul knew no divisions and walls. To her the universe was a living process of becoming, in which leverage and oxygen tanks could never replace the work of nature, in which the struggle, wrestling, striving of people, in which the great struggle, which is the obligation of the individuals, the family dynasties, the professions and the classes, is the *process* of becoming. And where she wanted the most lively battle, because it would be the most lively process of becoming.”¹⁶

¹³ Rosa Luxemburg: Nach dem ersten Akt (After the first act), Werke (Works), vol. 1 / 2, p. 488.

¹⁴ Karl Radek: Leben und Kampf unserer Genossin Rosa Luxemburg (Life and struggle of our comrade Rosa Luxemburg), in Ernst Mandel, Karl Radek: Rosa Luxemburg. Leben – Kampf – Tod (Rosa Luxemburg. Life – struggle – death), Frankfurt-am-Main: isp-Verlag 1986, p. 27.

¹⁵ A noteworthy „collection“ of elements for a critical rereading after the collapse of state socialism has been carried out by Reinhard Hoßfeld. Compare: the same: Rosa Luxemburg oder Die Kühnheit des eigenen Urteils (Rosa Luxemburg or The Boldness of independent Judgment), Aachen: Karin Fischer Verlag 1993. Let us only note on the margin that her criticism of the Bolsheviki, especially on the question of land reform and of national independence, was still most deeply marked by orthodox Marxism.

¹⁶ Paul Levi: Vorwort und Einleitung zu Rosa Luxemburg „Die russische Revolution“ (Preface and introduction to Rosa Luxemburg's The Russian Revolution), in: Paul Levi: Zwischen Spartakus und Sozialdemokratie. Schriften, Aufsätze, Reden und Briefe (Between Spartakus and social democracy. Writings, essays, speeches and letters), edited and introduced by Charlotte Beradt. Frankfurt-am-Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt 1969, p. 130.

Rosa Luxemburg is no classic of theory, but a classic of exploration. The potentials of her search for a theory and practice of a revolutionary real politics for current thought, cut short in a violent way by her getting murdered in 1919, shall be shown with respect to three fields: *First*, who are the actors of an emancipative transformation of capitalist societies? *Second*, how are we to create elements, seeds, basics of socialism within contemporary societies? And *third*, how can we reach her understanding of freedom as freedom of the others? These three questions are chosen, because they are especially important, and certainly neither exhausted nor resolved in the light the new wave of protests reaching from the Zapatistas, Seattle and Genoa to the World Social Forum.

Democracy as goal, democracy as means

Rosa Luxemburg's criticism of the dictatorial tendencies of the Bolsheviks already in 1903 which ushered into her critique of the establishment of a Bolshevik dictatorship in 1918 is all too well-known. The sharpness and the lucidity of this criticism, however, rested mainly on her immediate political experiences in the seemingly so democratic German social democracy. In February 1915, Rosa Luxemburg stated the paradox of self-abandonment of this most successful proletarian party in history: "Never before since the beginning of the history of class struggle, since political parties began to exist, has there been a party which after 50 years of uninterrupted growth, after it had conquered a first-rate position of power, after it had attracted millions to itself, within 24 hours totally dissolved into thin air as did German social democracy. In its case, precisely because it was the best-organised, best-disciplined, best-schooled *avant-garde* of the International, the present-day collapse of socialism can be traced in the clearest fashion."¹⁷

This self-abandonment had been in preparation for a long time. It was the unintentional result of what had been the success of German social democracy in building a mighty class organisation within the Wilhelminic Empire as well as the conscious decision of those who had usurped the fruits of these successes for themselves. The vision of the founding fathers of this class organisation of SPD, social-democratic trade unions, broader cultural, sport associations and other institutional layers of society was the build-up, within the *Junker* - capitalist order, of a countervailing power, as predicted by old Engels, which would grow step by step, electoral victory by electoral victory, so as to finally, by winning state power in a hopefully peaceful fashion, be able to start to introduce the socialisation of the means of production. Linking this class organisation to "scientific socialism" was the guarantee that means would not win over ends. The forcefulness of Bebel's reaction against Bernstein's revisionism, which paved the way for Rosa Luxemburg's earliest and most effective appearance in German social democracy, resulted from his awareness of the danger that relinquishing the revolutionary ideology of a necessary radical breach would mean to his life work and to class organisation as a whole. As Rosa Luxemburg would write with view to the social-democratic trade unions: these "owe their superiority over all bourgeois and Christian confessional unions to the idea of class struggle; their practical successes, their power are a result of the fact that their practice is elucidated by the theory of scientific socialism and is raised above the baseness of a narrow-hearted empiricism."¹⁸

Already ten years before the fatal August of 1914 Rosa Luxemburg noticed ever sharper tendencies of the "emergence of a genuine trade union officialdom"¹⁹ that had its pendant in the parliamentarisation of the social-democratic leadership and the development of party bureaucrats. She considered this a "necessary evil" and warned that "at a certain level of

¹⁷ Rosa Luxemburg, *Der Wiederaufbau der Internationale (Reconstructing the International)* in *Werke*, vol. 4, p. 21.

¹⁸ Rosa Luxemburg, *Massenstreik, Partei und Gewerkschaften (Mass strike, party and trade unions)* in *Werke*, vol. 2, p. 158.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

organisation and at a certain degree of maturity of conditions... these necessary means of promotion... will turn into their contrary, into a brake on the further progress.”²⁰ The parliamentary and trade-unionist forms of struggle within congealed situations of slow evolution would increasingly be seen as the only possible forms and the organisations linked to them “would gradually be transformed into an aim in themselves, into a higher-order good..., to which the interests of the struggle would oftentimes be subordinated.”²¹ From there would follow, thus Rosa Luxemburg in a speech, the opportunistic “policy, ‘from case to case’, or if you wish from one basket case to the next.”²²

Out of fear to put into question the results of the development up to then – position in parliament or degree of trade union organisation – one renounced to the exercise of powerful means precisely at the time when their use would be most urgently required. With the argument that well, we do not yet have a parliamentary majority, even the minimal demands of social democracy were being abandoned; with the thesis, well, we did not yet organise every single worker, we are not able to pay every worker from the strike fund, decisive action would be blocked in situations where it was on the agenda.²³ The electoral defeat of the SPD in 1907, due to strong nationalist tendencies in German society, made the leadership of the party increasingly yield to mass sentiments, even if they stood in direct contrast to their declared principles. This, however, also resulted in the take-over of the SPD leadership by persons representing nationalist and politically conservative positions and even looking favourably upon imperialism and colonialism. The strategy of power increase had turned from a means into a goal. The interests of the workers’ movement were subordinated under the interests of the tops of their own organisations.

The bigger the organisational resources of the German working class, the more impossible it became to use them in political and social class struggle: “The larger our organisations grow, encompassing 100,000s and millions, the more by necessity centralism tends to grow. Yet, in this way, even the small amount of spiritual and political content, initiative and resolution, which is generated in the daily life of the party, is transferred completely to the small group at the head: to boards of associations, regions and parliamentary representatives. What remains to the masses of the members, are the duty to pay contributions, distribute leaflets, participate in elections and get others to do so, do house-agitation for newspaper subscriptions and so on.”²⁴ It was to her “the vital question of social democracy” “that the political thought and the will of the *mass* of the party remain constantly awake and active, that they to an *increasing* degree render it capable of action.”²⁵ This to her was the fundamental condition of the necessary change of strategy.

One of the most important social reasons for the transformation of the social-democratic party into one, which made out of its parliamentary successes a goal in itself, was the fact that the creation of the independent proletarian class organisations of the social-democratic party and their representation in the parliaments as well as of social-democratic trade unions and the establishment of systematic negotiations processes with the bosses simultaneously constituted the birth of a social and political *counter-élite* as well as a process of *integration* thereof into the institutions of imperial Germany and its elites. This counter-élite found itself torn between its linkages to its own organisations with their own culture, ideology and procedures of democratic legitimation and representation on the one hand and its acting in

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Rosa Luxemburg, Rede auf dem Parteitag der SDAPR 1907 in London (Speech at the Party Congress of the SDAPR 1907 in London) in *Werke*, vol. 2, p. 230.

²³ Compare, for example, Rosa Luxemburg, *Massenstreik, Partei und Gewerkschaften* (Mass strike, party and trade unions), as quoted supra, p. 141.

²⁴ Rosa Luxemburg: Taktische Fragen (Tactical questions), in: *Werke*, vol. 3, p. 39.

²⁵ Rosa Luxemburg: Wieder Masse und Führer (Again mass and leader), in: *Werke*, vol. 3, p. 39.

ever closer interrelationships with the ruling elites of Germany on the other. Given that the counter-forces were too weak, these interrelationships developed the propensity for the social-democratic leadership to join the ruling upper class. This possibility opened itself with the unleashing of WWI. By their acceptance of the war credits the new leaders of German social democracy bought themselves their ascent from despised underdogs to recognised state-carrying leadership group. In the eyes of the Emperor they had finally become “Germans”.

In coming to terms with the opportunism of German social democracy which in 1914 resulted in the capitulation before German militarism and 1918 in the alliance with the *Reichswehr*, an opportunism which in both situations rendered impossible an autonomous social and democratic policy, yet in also dealing at the same time with the ultra-centralism of the Bolsheviks and their dictatorial policies after 1917, Rosa Luxemburg over close to 20 years developed a position on the relationship between social movement, political organisation and leadership that is memorable and assumes new importance in the light of the departure of social movements in the present.

The essential characteristic of Luxemburg’s position is what was later disparagingly called her *spontaneism*.²⁶ For her the working class and the mass of the people were the genuine historical actor not only in rhetoric. Neither did she believe that they could be replaced by the broad democratic organisation of this class in trade union or party, as became the view of German social democracy, nor did she believe that an ultra-centralised micro-group should be allowed to order history around.

Her image of history was that of a great stream, in which tankers and boats of parties and organisations, with their imagined and genuine captains and crews are moving, by no means without significance, but not as the real driving force, capable of steering only if they were receptive to the deep currents. The real social movements to her were the genuine source of constant rebirth of the historical streams of renewal. For Rosa Luxemburg organisations ultimately arise out of historical action by social movements, and not the historically relevant actions out of the decisions of bureaucratic structures. “Since when were great historical developments, great popular movements handled by way of secret collusions behind closed doors?”²⁷, she asked in 1906 at the Mannheim congress of the SPD.

She thought that social democracy and its leaders should be at the head of the stream, in order to increase its strength, to reinforce its direction, its resolution to break the dams of capitalist society and to drive them to their head: “...The most important task of the ‘board’ is to give the watchword, the direction to the struggle, to set up the *tactic* of the political struggle in such a way that in each phase and in each moment of the struggle the whole sum of the existing and already sparked off active power of the proletariat is being realised and expressed in the battle positions of the party, it is that the tactic of social democracy, its resolve and sharpness, should never be *under* the level of the actual relationship of forces, but should on the contrary forge ahead of this relationship.”²⁸ The prerequisites for that were

²⁶ Compare the factual and critical analysis from the standpoint of Marxism-Leninism in Fred Oelßner: *Rosa Luxemburg. Eine kritische biographische Skizze* (Rosa Luxemburg. A critical biographical sketch), Berlin: Dietz Verlag 1952, p. 202 ff.; Annelies Laschitzka, Günter Radczun: *Rosa Luxemburg. Ihr Wirken in der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* (Rosa Luxemburg. Her action in the German workers’ movement), Berlin: Dietz Verlag 1971.

²⁷ Rosa Luxemburg, *Speech to the question of mass strike*, Party congress of the Social-Democratic Party of Germany from 23 until 29 September 1906 in Mannheim, in *Werke*, vol. 2, p. 172.

²⁸ Rosa Luxemburg, *Massenstreik, Partei und Gewerkschaften* (Mass strike, party and trade unions), quoted supra, p. 133. Also compare vol. 1.2., p. 433.

complete clarity” concerning the real relationships and perspectives, the “democratisation of the whole party life” and “more self-criticism”.²⁹

To the horror of all those who consider themselves “directors of history” or in the defence of the own interests of existing organisations become blind for new tasks, also in a way very different from the delusions of rationalistic (“male”?) power phantasies, Rosa Luxemburg stated: “The technique of social-democratic struggle is in its main outlines not ‘discovered’, but it is the result of a continuous line of great creative achievements of the experimenting, often elementary class struggle. Here as well the unconscious comes before the conscious, the logic of the objective historical process before the subjective logic of its bearers.”³⁰ The social-democratic leading organs, who were not able to again and again seize on these inventions, would soon turn into conservative bulwarks against “further innovation of a newer style”³¹. As she wrote in another place: “The task of social democracy and its leadership is not to be ground down by events, but to go ahead of them, to oversee the guidelines of development and shortcut it through conscious action, to fasten its course.”³² To do so, however, they cannot be the bureaucratic shell of a frozen organisation, but must be part and soul of the real social movements and determine themselves ever new on the basis of these, using their specific intellectual and organisational resources for this purpose.

Rosa Luxemburg’s political leading figures always remained simultaneously Karl Marx *and* Ferdinand Lassalle, the one above all as founder of a scientific world-view of the working-class, the other as the founder of the first independent political party of this class in Germany. About these two she wrote – stressing the two poles of a political philosophy of historical practice - : “And if Marx had put the bolt on revolution-making of the old style with the words: Men make their history, but they do not make it out of free will, Lassalle with reverse emphasis, but with equal right placed his emphasis on fruitful initiative, on revolutionary energy and determination, and preached to the German working-class: Men do not make their history out of free will, but they make it themselves.”³³

Departing from this understanding of history, Rosa Luxemburg succeeded to develop an understanding of socialist revolution, which at least in its conceptual claim avoided the reversal of ends and means, goal and path. The program of the Spartakus alliance, which she co-authored, in a clear, even if not explicitly noted polemic with the Bolsheviki refused any assumption of power by coup.³⁴ The prerequisite for the assumption of power was the will by the majority of the workers.³⁵ Democracy could only develop from a democratic movement. Above all she argued against the subordination of the November revolution to the preservation of the most important economic, social and political structures of the Empire, based on

²⁹ Rosa Luxemburg. Imperialismus. Rede am 14. Mai 1914 (Imperialism. Speech on May 14 1914), in: Werke, vol. 3, p. 450.

³⁰ Rosa Luxemburg, Organisationsfragen der russischen Sozialdemokratie (Organisational questions of Russian social democracy) in Werke, vol. 1.2, p. 432.

³¹ Ibid., p. 433.

³² Rosa Luxemburg: Das Offiziösentum der Theorie (The officialdom of theory), opus cit. supra, p. 321.

³³ Rosa Luxemburg: Karl Marx, in: Werke, vol. 3, p. 182 f.

³⁴ The strategy of the Spartakists did not aim at immediately seizing power from a minority position. As the chief of staff, General Groener, remarked later: “Herr Liebknecht and his comrades celebrated Christmas and were completely quiet on the days, when there were the fewest troops in Berlin” (quoted in Elzbieta Ettinger: Rosa Luxemburg. Ein Leben (Rosa Luxemburg. A Life), Verlag J.H.W. Dietz Nachf. Bonn 1990, p. 290 f.). They were concerned with the education of the workers and the foundation of their own party. The uprising of January 1919 did not emerge of their conscious decision. Yet once it had broken out, they did not want to leave it unattended.

³⁵ Rosa Luxemburg: Was will der Spartakusbund? (What does the Spartakus alliance want?), in: Werke, vol. 4, p. 450.

the pact between the leadership of social democracy with the general staff of the German army.

Rosa Luxemburg's vision of a democratic-socialist party in Germany (at the founding congress of the KPD in Berlin at the turn of the year 1918/19, she had voted for the name "Socialist Party" so as to stress the difference to the Bolsheviki) could not be realised. Already in 1921, it fell victim to the Bolshevisation of the West European Communist parties. Paul Levi, who after the death of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg had taken over the leadership of the KPD, was excluded from it, after he had criticised the Communist coup attempt of March 1921. He had pointed out rightfully that this coup had to lead to a war by a minority of workers against the majority.

As opposed to Lenin's avant-garde concept, Paul Levi together with Rosa Luxemburg stressed the party as democratic organisation, which does not stand above the proletarians, but with all its lack of accomplishment was part of the masses: "It was no longer a club of absolutely *homogeneous* finished people, ready with themselves and with the world, but the party was the expression of millions of proletarians, who are the way they are, as history has shaped them: with the marks of long oppression, weak of will, with often unclear ideas, with illusions. He, who does not see these weaknesses, is not a socialist... We socialists are... aware that we are the expression of a class, which still has the work of its spiritual and economic liberation ahead of itself. These, in brief, are the differences between 'Luxemburgism' and 'Leninism'."³⁶

To resume, if one wants to come close to Rosa Luxemburg's understanding of history and socialist movement, one has to imagine great streams, but precisely not like the German rivers turned into well-behaved water roads for the purposes of navigation, but like streams which sometimes as if in fast motion continually break themselves a new way, then again flow in a sluggish and tired manner, sometimes even pierce through mountains, newly discover gigantic areas and then again almost seem to stand still in great lakes, only to flow anew and to again revolutionise everything from the ground up. Great literary stylist that she was, she has formulated it this way with view to the mass strikes in the Russian revolution of 1905: "The mass strike, as the Russian revolution presents it to us, is a phenomenon so diverse that it reflects all phases of the political and economic battle, all stages and moments of the revolution. Its applicability, its effectiveness, its origins change permanently. Suddenly, it opens new, wide perspectives to the revolution, where it already had gotten into an impasse, and it fails, where one was already sure to be able to count on it with full certitude. At times it spreads like an ocean wave over the whole country, then again it divides into a wide web of thin streams, at times it sparkles from the underground like a fresh spring, then again it completely seeps into the soil. Political and economic strikes, mass strikes and partial strikes, demonstrative and battle strikes, general strikes of branches and of towns, calm struggles for wages and street wars and barricade fights – everything takes place topsy-turvy, side by side, with cross-overs, with overflows; it is an ever-moving, changing sea of phenomena. And the law of motion of these phenomena becomes clear: it is not the mass strike itself, not its technical specificities, but the political and social relationship of forces in the revolution."³⁷ About this revolution she was able to write in the last hours of her life against those who had created "order" through bloodshed in Berlin: "You blunt henchmen! Your 'order' is built on sand. Tomorrow already the revolution 'will rise again rattling' and pronounce to your horror with the sound of trumpets: *I was, I am, I will be!*"³⁸ She knew that the dead waters would one day again transform into live streams.

³⁶ Quoted in Charlotte Beradt: Paul Levi. A democratic socialist in the Weimar Republic (Paul Levi. A democratic socialist in the Weimar Republic), opus cit. supra, p. 59 f.

³⁷ Rosa Luxemburg, Massenstreik, Partei und Gewerkschaften (Mass strikes, party and trade unions), quoted supra, p. 124.

³⁸ Rosa Luxemburg, Die Ordnung herrscht in Berlin (Order reigns in Berlin) in Werke, vol. 4, p. 538.

When Rosa Luxemburg was writing this testament of hers, civil war was raging in Russia. And today, we have to ask ourselves whether not the unwillingness of the Bolsheviks, to make the democratic and social alliance of revolutionary Russian social democracy and social revolutionaries endure, their decision to hold, in dictatorial fashion, their own conservation of power to be more important than the attempt to shape a social revolution in a democratic way, whether this did not also predetermine the fate of the German revolution and that of Rosa Luxemburg. With the armed dissolution of the Constituent Assembly by Lenin and his comrades in January 1918, a fatal alternative had become valid in world politics: socialism *or* democracy. Marked by the Cain's mark of such an alternative, socialism could never become capable of a majority. This false alternative was the tragedy of democratic socialists, men and women, in the 20th century: they nowhere found a home.

With the claim that the Constituent of January 1918 mirrored past relationships of forces, was no longer representative, it was dispersed by the Bolsheviks, and by no means were new elections called, but democratic elections were rendered impossible in Russia for 70 years. The elimination of representative democracy at the same time was the occasion to finally convert the radical democratic system of councils, *soviets*, into a mere façade of party dictatorship. Thus every path of democratic and civil conflict resolution was barred, and the door to civil war and dictatorship and ultimately to state terror was opened. As Rosa Luxemburg had warned in summer 1918: History showed "that the 'cumbersome mechanism of democratic (institutions)...' has a strong corrective – precisely in the living movement of the masses, in their permanent pressure. And the more democratic the institutions, the more lively and forceful the pulse beat of the political life of the masses, the more immediate and the more precise the effect... Certainly, any democratic institution has its constraints and shortcomings, which it may well share with all human institutions. Only the cure that Trotsky and Lenin have found: the elimination of democracy altogether, is worse than the evil it is supposed to control: after all, it buries the living source, from where alone all shortcomings that social institutions are marked with at their birth can be corrected: the active, unbridled, energetic life of the broadest masses of people."³⁹

The exposition up to now permits to retain basic elements of Rosa Luxemburg's understanding of the socialist movement: *First*, there is a basic trust in the emancipative social movements themselves, which emerge from the depths of capitalist society, ever again underwash its dams, tear down its protective walls. They and only they are the ones, constituting the live stream of history. These mass movements never let themselves suppress or be channelled for the duration and are the true source of strength of any kind of socialism. "The social democratic movement", thus Luxemburg writes in her dispute with Lenin in 1903, "is the first in the history of class societies which in all its moments, in its whole course is counted on the organisation and the independent direct action of the masses."

Already Marx had in his – in Luxemburg's time still unpublished writings – always bound emancipation and revolution to the rebellion of individuals against those property and power relationships obstructing their further liberation. He had summarised this position in "German ideology" in the words that human history is a process of production of ever new and more productive forces and needs of the individuals on the one hand and the creation of the respective property and power relationships and exchange forms on the other.

The continuity in world history emerges from the fact that, thus Marx, "in the place of the previous form of exchange turned into a fetter a new one is set, corresponding to the more developed productive forces and thus the advanced form of job for the individual, which in turn

³⁹ Rosa Luxemburg: Zur russischen Revolution (About the Russian revolution), in: *Werke* (Works), vol. 4, p. 355 f. At this point it becomes obvious that, for Rosa Luxemburg, the democratic institutions were not a goal in themselves and also did not constitute the content of democracy – she held them to be the indispensable condition to liberate the emancipative-solidarity-based potentials of the working classes, to let them design their social life freely.

becomes a fetter itself and is replaced by a new one.”⁴⁰ The class struggle, in a Marxian sense, should always have been understood as the struggle by individuals, marked by their social position, for their own liberation by the transformation of the social conditions, which oppose this liberation. For an emancipative Marxism the living substance of world history first and last is always the self-liberation of people from relationships, in which he or she is a “demeaned, an enslaved, an abandoned, a despicable creature.”⁴¹

This understanding of the living substance of world history opens the view on all relationships, in which people experience humiliation, oppression and exploitation - by capital and labour, social marginalisation, degradation and exclusion motivated on ethnic, racist, civilisation or citizenship grounds, patriarchal rule etc. From the standpoint of the demeaned, enslaved, abandoned and despised, there can be no hierarchy, which places the opposition between capital and labour ahead of all others. Truth like rebellion and liberation is always concrete. Great historical movements always begin, when the many heterogeneous forms of being chained are being experienced as chains on the development of all those discriminated and threatened by exclusion together, when practices of resistance develop, by which these experiences can be come to terms with on the basis of solidarity, when these condense to a movement of movements without at the same time dissolving the diversity, when slogans develop, which bring the different forces together, without enforcing conformity on them.

Today's neo-liberal globalisation is in the process of dissolving the different forms of whole social groups, classes, societies and continents into the general form of an individualisation driven by the unfettered capitalist market and stabilised by imperial power, where each is supposed to be the smith of his or her own luck and many are the smiths of their common misery. This individualisation process, thus Robert Castel, “threatens society with a fragmentation which makes it ungovernable or with a polarisation into those, who can reconcile individualism and independence, because their social position is guaranteed, and those, who carry their individuality like a cross, because it stands for a dearth of relations and a lack of assurances.”⁴² The question of the access of each and everyone, man or woman, independent of all social, ethnic, gender, citizenship and other criteria to the basic goods of a self-determined life thereby moves into the foreground.⁴³ This demand for social goods and basic rights that can be sued for, is at the same time the foundation for the common struggle for dignity or, as John Holloway writes: “Revolution is simply the permanent relentless struggle for something, which cannot be achieved under capitalism: dignity, control over own lives. Revolution in this context can only be thought of as the increasing uniting of *dignities*, as the snowball-like growth of struggles.”⁴⁴ This however – Rosa Luxemburg knew it as well – “can neither be programmed nor predicted.”⁴⁵

Second, Rosa Luxemburg held on to a socialist theory which kept the historical perspective in the consciousness of the relevant actors and served them as compass in times of complete absence of movement or orientation and enlightened them about the deceptive charac-

⁴⁰ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: *Deutsche Ideology* (German ideology), in: *MEW*, vol. 3, p. 72.

⁴¹ Karl Marx: *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie. Einleitung* (To the critique of Hegelian philosophy of right. Introduction), in: *MEW*, vol. 1, p. 385.

⁴² Robert Castel: *Die Metamorphose der sozialen Frage. Eine Chronik der Lohnarbeit* (The metamorphosis of the social question. A chronic of wage labour), Konstanz: Universitätsverlag, p. 412.

⁴³ Compare on that Michael Brie, Michael Chrapa and Dieter Klein: *Sozialismus als Tagesaufgabe* (Socialism as the order of the day), Karl Dietz Verlag: Berlin 2002.

⁴⁴ John Holloway: *Der Aufstand der Würde. Zum Revolutionsverständnis der Zapatistas* (The upheaval of dignity. To the understanding of revolution by the Zapatistas), in Ulrich Brand, Ana Ester Ceceña, eds.: *Reflexionen einer Rebellion. Chiapas und ein anderes Politikverständnis* (Reflections of a rebellion. Chiapas and another understanding of politics), Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot 2002, p. 131.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

ter of this silence: “In Marx’ spirit, theoretical insight does not exist to go after action and to cook a justifying calming pudding for everything that the ‘highest echelons’ of social democracy respectively have or have not done, but the other way around, to march ahead of party action, to spur the party to continuous self-criticism, to uncover shortcomings and weaknesses of the movement, to show new tracks and wider horizons, not to be seen in the valleys of the work of detail.”⁴⁶ Rosa Luxemburg’s question for an analysis which would show up the brittleness of all seemingly consolidated relationships and for an intellectual and moral guideline for emancipative action remains topical.

Socialist theory creation in such an understanding, however, loses the character of process separated from the actors. It stops producing a “superior” knowledge separated from these actors, which the chosen ones then have ahead of the normal workers, the citizens – men and women – , as was still claimed in the “Manifesto”.⁴⁷ Its significance consists in the critical analysis of the real practices of rebellion and liberation under the authority of radical emancipative claims, in the research into the conditions, under which these are uttered, in the exploration and generalisation of discoveries by the real movements, in the uncovering of the non-intended results of social actions and ambiguities up to the perversions of institutional innovations. As Ulrich Brand formulates: “Precisely in times of regression the (theoretical as well as practical) criticism of relations and thus the tracking of emancipative approaches remains important.”⁴⁸ Instead of the dogmatic Marxist-Leninist or neo-liberal proclamation of eternal truths and unquestionable imperatives, we need theory construction in the sense of the Zapatista “advancing by the asking” (*preguntando caminamos*).⁴⁹

Third, Rosa Luxemburg recognised ahead of many others and against many others that there is a need for an open form of organisation, as free as possible, as democratic as possible and as open towards the social movements as possible, receptive to the sub-currents of society and capable of the kind of innovation, without which socialism is impossible. Not by accident, parallels to modern feminism were recognised in that.⁵⁰ Neither transformation of the party members into tools of the central party organs and “the absolute, blind subordination” under them, nor the degradation of the workers to mere voters should be in her opinion features of social-democratic organisation, but these rather would grow ever again “out of the elementary class struggle”.⁵¹

Rosa Luxemburg put it concisely: “The living substance of world history despite the existence of a social democracy still remains the mass of the people, and only if a lively blood circulation takes place between the organisational kernel and the popular masses, if the same pulse beat animates them, only then will social democracy prove capable of great historical actions.”⁵² Quite in contrast to the leading politicians of the Second International from the SPD up to the Bolsheviki, socialist organisation to her was not a bureaucratic machinery with

⁴⁶ Rosa Luxemburg: Das Offiziösentum der Theorie (The semi-officialdom of theory), in: *Werke*, vol. 3, p. 319.

⁴⁷ See Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels: Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei (Manifesto of the Communist Party), in: *MEW*, vol. 4, p. 474.

⁴⁸ Ulrich Brand: Grenzüberschreitungen. „Chiapas“ und die emanzipatorische Politik in den Metropolen (Crossing borders. Chiapas and emancipative politics in the metropolises), in: Ulrich Brand, Ana Ester Ceceña, eds., opus cit., p. 9.

⁴⁹ Compare Anne Hufschmid: Spinnen im Netz. Zapatismus als Maskerade und paradoxe Politik (Spiders in the web. Zapatism as masquerade and as paradoxical politics), in opus cit., p. 152.

⁵⁰ Christel Neusüß: *Die Kopfgeburten der Arbeiterbewegung oder Die Genossin Luxemburg bringt alles durcheinander* (Overly intellectual brainchilts of the workers’ movements or Comrade Luxemburg confuses everything), Hamburg 1985

⁵¹ Rosa Luxemburg: *Organisationsfragen der russischen Sozialdemokratie* (Organisational questions of Russian social democracy), in: *Werke*, vol. 1.2, p. 428.

⁵² Rosa Luxemburg: Taktische Fragen (Tactical questions), opus cit., p. 252.

engineers, driving forces, transmission belts and small screws, “conscious” of their tasks, but the organisations of emancipation were to be formed after the image of self-organising nature. Also for that reason, she is today much more modern than many of her contemporaries. She would have had full understanding for the idea of a World Social Forum that can claim of itself that the diversity of its participants is its strength.⁵³

The seeds of the new in the bosom of the old

In the year 1899, there appeared Rosa Luxemburg’s writing: “Social reform or revolution?”, which made her famous in the German and international workers’ movement. She was just 28 years old, when she thus inscribed herself into the annals of the international social democracy. She defended the basic tenets of Marxism, as she saw them, against one of the immediate pupils of Engels, against Eduard Bernstein and his *revisionism*. She reproached to Bernstein “to give up social revolution, the final goal of social democracy, and to turn social reform from a *means* of the class struggle to its *end*.”⁵⁴ Already in the introduction to her contribution, she made clear: “For social democracy the daily practical fight for social reforms, for the improvement of the situation of the working people still on the basis of the existing and for the democratic institutions by contrast is the only way to conduct the proletarian class struggle and to work towards the ultimate goal, the conquest of political power and the elimination of the wage system. For social democracy, there exists between social reform and social revolution an inseparable relationship, in that the struggle for social reform to it is the *means* and social revolution is the *goal*.”⁵⁵

The strength of Rosa Luxemburg’s position consisted in that she wanted at any price to nail down social democracy and the workers’ movement to their role as systemic opposition and anti-capitalist force. She wanted to construct an impenetrable bulwark against the subordination of this movement under the goals of the ruling *junker* and bourgeois classes in exchange for partial concessions and obtained for that the all-round support by the leadership of social democracy back then, a support which diminished ever more after the Russian revolution of 1905 and was later replaced by a policy of exclusion and marginalisation. In the year 1913, Rosa Luxemburg lost the last influence worth mentioning on the social-democratic party press.

The cause for that also lies in that Rosa Luxemburg’s position apparently had a peculiar weakness: She seemed to represent a position, which reduced the battle for the social, cultural, and political interests of the workers and other parts of the people to a mere tool of preparation for the revolutionary battle. The whole parliamentary and extra-parliamentary work should, thus the consensus of the Second International until the first decade of the 20th century, be subordinated to the build-up of a spiritual and organisational counter-force, which then, at the appropriate time, be it in a peaceful, or if unavoidable, also in a violent way, would take over political and economic supremacy. The reforms reached directly through social and political fights were acknowledged no value of their own in this theory. It was above all a question of strengthening and keeping together the “heap of force”.

Based on this position, Rosa Luxemburg definitively refused any kind of participation of social-democratic parties in governments. The same reforms which would be demanded as necessary from the standpoint of a socialist opposition party, should not be implemented under capitalism by social-democratic government policy, since in this way the bourgeois

⁵³ Social Movement’s Manifesto, in: William S. Fisher, Thomas Ponniah, eds.: Another world is possible. Popular alternatives to Globalization at the World Social Forum, Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing 2003, p. 355.

⁵⁴ Rosa Luxemburg: Sozialreform oder Revolution (Social reform or revolution), in: Werke, vol. 1/1, p. 369 f.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 369.

state “as a whole” would be supported.⁵⁶ Revolutionary real politics would be possible only in three ways: “by posing with their most far-reaching demands a dangerous competition to the bourgeois parties and by pushing these forward through the pressure of the electoral masses; then, by exposing the government in front of the country and influencing it through public opinion; finally, by grouping with their criticism within and outside of the chambers, the popular masses around themselves and thus growing to an imposing power, with which government and bourgeoisie have to reckon.”⁵⁷ There could be no socialist government policy under capitalism: “To the capitalist unity of economy... there corresponds the bourgeois unity of government.”⁵⁸

Rosa Luxemburg’s position as well as that of Marxist orthodoxy of the Second International was based on the assumption that there existed a historical tendency of exacerbation of the contradiction between the social character of productive forces and the capitalist property and power relationships, which would inevitably be the dominating, as it already been formulated by Friedrich Engels.⁵⁹ According to this opinion, there exists in principle no possibility, as Rosa Luxemburg ironically writes against Bernstein, “to transform the sea of capitalist bitterness into a sea of socialist sweetness by way of adding social reformist lemonade bottle by bottle.”⁶⁰ Despite the development of social reforms and democracy, the wall between capitalist and socialist society would only be made higher and harder. It would only be possible to tear it down by the “hammer blow of revolution, i.e. the conquest of political power by the proletariat”⁶¹. And as she writes further on: “Socialism does therefore not at all live in the daily struggle of the workers as a tendency; it only lives here in the ever sharpening objective contradictions of the capitalist economy, and there in the subjective consciousness by the working class of the indispensability of their elimination by a social revolution.”⁶²

Such a conception of socialist politics had an unexpected side effect. It should secure the revolutionary character of the workers’ movement and left the whole field of daily struggles, in so far as it ushered into democratic, cultural and social achievements, which really improved the situation of the working class, to the so-called opportunists and reformers. In this way, nolens volens, a wedge was driven between those, who held on to the socialist goals, and those who prescribed themselves to the struggle for higher wages, improved working conditions etc. Second, this daily struggle at the same time lost its dimension pointing beyond capitalism, since it was at best glorified as schooling of the proletariat in the spirit of revolution. To put it sharply: The revolutionary goal lost its anchor in the real interests of the workers, the working classes and strata in the broad sense. And the battle for real interests was no longer led in the spirit of anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism and anti-militarism. In the ban of Engels’ concept of an evolutionary preparation for the day of decision and the antinomy between revolution and reform, the revolutionaries in the German workers’ movement left the real guidance of the workers to the opportunists, who then in the hour of decision, in August 1914, delivered these workers defence-less to the imperialist world war.⁶³

⁵⁶ Rosa Luxemburg: Eine taktische Frage (A tactical question), in: Werke (Works), vol. 1/1, p. 485.

⁵⁷ Rosa Luxemburg: Die sozialistische Krise in Frankreich (The socialist crisis in France), in: Werke, vol. 1 / 2, p. 33.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁵⁹ Compare Friedrich Engels: Die Entwicklung des Sozialismus von der Utopie zur Wissenschaft (The development of socialism from Utopia to science), in: MEW, vol. 19, p. 228.

⁶⁰ Rosa Luxemburg: Sozialreform oder Revolution? (Social reform or revolution?), opus cit., p. 400.

⁶¹ *Ibidem.*

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 403.

⁶³ Still today, it is frightening to read, how the party press of the SPD tipped from one day to the other. On July 25, 1914, it still said in the central party organ, the Vorwärts: “We don’t want war! Long live international solidarity!” On July 28 it was titled: “Not Tsarism is the worst danger of war, but ill-advised Austria!” On July 30 it said: “The socialist proletariat refuses any kind of responsibility for the events, provoked by a ruling class blinded to lunacy.” On July 31, however, the Turn was per-

Rosa Luxemburg was far from being a sectarian. In the middle of the Russian revolution, she wrote: "For a true worker party like the social democracy, for which the workers are not a means to political goals, but a class, whose elevation and liberation is the ultimate goal, for such a party even the smallest improvement of the daily fate of the workers cannot be indifferent."⁶⁴ More radically than many others, she committed to social reforms and democracy. Ever again, she urged the consequent representation of the demand for an eight-hour day, placed the question for a republic onto the agenda, while the leadership of social democracy until autumn 1918 would rather have held on to the monarchy, to keep the bulwark against a rule by the people as high as possible. She energetically demanded the implementation of the general election right in Prussia, where other than in the Empire, there still existed a three-class election right until 1919. She analysed brilliantly, how unsatisfactory the social reforms were there, where socialist ministers were participating in the government.⁶⁵ For a long time, however, she was of the opinion "that the introduction of socialism could only be begun after the collapse of the capitalist order."⁶⁶

Rosa Luxemburg did not develop a theoretical concept which would have been capable to eliminate the contradiction between revolution and reform in an emancipative way. As long as she looked upon reform as something, which in no way could introduce elements of a new order, but on the contrary would increase the walls between capitalism and socialism even further, her demand that one would have to ask especially radical reforms, but could not expect from their implementation real progress towards socialism, remained politically fruitless.

The experiences of the revolutions of 1917 and 1918, however, led Rosa Luxemburg beyond this distinction between revolution and reform. In the face of the weakness of the left, she looked for alternative ways of socialisation and seized upon the thought of *councils*. Even under conditions of the to a large extent failed revolution, she did not want to abandon this new way of self-organisation and self-administration, which, so she hoped, could develop beyond the old alliance between social-democracy and trade unions: "Today we must concentrate on the system of the workers' councils, the organisations must not be formed by the combination of the old forms, trade unions and party, but be placed on a completely new basis. Works councillors, worker councillors and so on increasing, a completely new structure, which has nothing to do with the traditions handed down to us."⁶⁷

Instead of a general attack, she proposed a new strategy of creation of elements of the new society in the bosom of the old: "We... must place the question of seizing power before us as the question: What does, what can, what should every worker and soldier council in the whole of Germany do? There is the power, we must erode the bourgeois state from down below, by no longer everywhere separating public power, legislation and administration, but unifying them, placing them into the hands of the workers' and soldiers' councils."⁶⁸ Then the question of reform and revolution can be posed anew: socialist revolution is no longer

fect. The new slogan was: "When the hour strikes, we will fulfil our duty and let ourselves in no way be surpassed in this by the patriots." On August 4 the war credits were unanimously approved by the SPD. Critics were held down by the fraction discipline. Compare Frederic W. Nielsen: Rosa Luxemburg. Ein Leben für die Freiheit (Rosa Luxemburg. A life for liberty), Freiburger Echo Verlag 1991, p. 21 f.

⁶⁴ Rosa Luxemburg: In revolutionärer Stunde: Was weiter? (Revolutionary hour: what next?), in: Werke, vol. 1 / 2, p. 558.

⁶⁵ Compare Rosa Luxemburg: Die sozialistische Krise in Frankreich (The socialist crisis in France), in: Werke, vol. 1 / 2, p. 5-73.

⁶⁶ Rosa Luxemburg: Eine taktische Frage (A tactical question), opus cit., p. 484.

⁶⁷ Rosa Luxemburg: Rede gegen eine wirtschaftlich-politische Einheitsorganisation der Arbeiterbewegung (Speech against an economic-political unified organisation of the workers' movement), in: Werke, vol. 4, p. 487.

⁶⁸ Rosa Luxemburg: Unser Programm und die politische Situation (Our program and the political situation), in: Werke, vol. 4, p. 511.

thought exclusively as “day of decision”, but as process, which *can* begin today and here by the change in the relationship of forces, of power and property structures and by institutional innovation. Not every social or democratic reform pushes capitalism backward, but there are some like that, which have a “transformative”, in their essence revolutionary potential.

In this way Rosa Luxemburg begins to overcome the old separation between path and aim, reform and revolution, and in this way she begins to develop positions, in which the path is a real success on the road to the goal (no longer only in the sense of the exacerbation of contradictions and the consolidation of a revolutionary consciousness) and where the goal combines directly with the way and form of the daily struggle and the concrete representation of interests in such a way that real progress towards the real goal can be reached. Such a position, which would overcome the old contrast between reform and revolution could be called a *socialist politics of transformation*, a politics that seeks to change property and power relations in such a way that capitalism is pushed backwards and elements of non-capitalist relationships emerge.

This conception of a socialist transformation politics is based on a number of theoretical principles, which need to be discussed in more detail.⁶⁹ It requires above all to break with the conception that there could exist a capitalist society, which would not be marked by strong non-capitalist sectors. For that, however, it is necessary to comprehend capitalism not as a totalitarian closed form of capital utilisation, which would be able to subjugate itself everything and all without leaving something out. Rosa Luxemburg had hit upon this problem in connection with

the analysis of capitalist accumulation. She was challenged to this by the examinations by the British economist John Hobson in his work “Imperialism. A study”, which in the underconsumption of the workers saw the reason that the capitalist states would be competing with military means for external product markets and would thus get into an imperialistic competition with each other. Rosa Luxemburg believed to have found out that the expanded solvent demand could principally not result from the process of capitalist accumulation itself⁷⁰ and reaches the conclusion “that *at least* the surplus value to be realised and the part of capitalist product mass corresponding to it cannot possibly be realised within the capitalist circles and must of necessity find its takers outside of these circles, among social strata and forms not producing in a capitalist way.”⁷¹

Rosa Luxemburg claimed that there was an economic compulsion to utilise capital, to have to open up to oneself ever new non-capitalist takers of capitalistically produced goods, often by brutal force. Departing from this thesis, Rosa Luxemburg was able to accomplish something, at least in her own eyes, which Marx had been incapable of doing, which to her however appears as the basic condition of scientific socialism – the strictly economic justification of the inevitable breakdown of capitalism: “Capitalism is the first economic form with propagandistic force, a form which has the tendency to expand itself on the earth and to push aside all other economic forms. However, it is also the first, which cannot exist without economic forms other than its milieu and its nurturing ground, which thus simultaneously with the

⁶⁹ Compare to that, in a more systematic fashion Michael Brie: Freiheit und Sozialismus: die Programmatik der PDS in der Diskussion (Freedom and socialism: the PDS programs under discussion), in: Michael Brie, Michael Chrapa and Dieter Klein: *Sozialismus als Tagesaufgabe* (Socialism as the order of the day), Karl Dietz Verlag Berlin, p. 7-65; also compare the systematic approach in Stuart Hall, David Hell, Don Hubert, Kenneth Thompson, eds.: *Modernity. An Introduction to Modern Societies*, Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers 1996.

⁷⁰ Rosa Luxemburg: Die Akkumulation des Kapitals (The accumulation of capital), *Werke*, vol. 5, p. 101 ff., 280 ff.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

tendency to become a world form, will be wrecked by its inner incapacity to become a world form of production.”⁷²

Regardless of how the theoretical answer to the problem raised by Rosa Luxemburg looks like, it shall be claimed here that Rosa Luxemburg in any event had discovered a basic fact of modern society – they cannot survive as solely capitalist societies.⁷³ Also the later feminist analyse hit upon that and drew attention to the large field of unpaid social labour, especially work by women.⁷⁴ The new tendencies of all-round-capitalisation of knowledge and services⁷⁵ in turn testify to ever new areas developing, which at least at first stand outside of capital utilisation. The historical fights of the past also prove that it is possible under certain circumstances to take some areas out of capital utilisation. Departing from these experiences it will be argued that two tendencies are inherent to modern societies – that of continually more comprehensive all-round-capitalisation of all areas of life and that of the fight for and maintaining of production and areas of life that function according to non-capitalist logic. The relationship between these two tendencies is determined on the one hand by the concrete requirements of socialisation at the respective point of development of the productive forces, needs and culture and on the other by the relationship of forces in the respective societies.

Yet also within the areas directly seized by capital utilisation, the interests of capital utilisation and the interests of the wage-dependent workers, social interests in the upkeep of the environment, in communal development etc. are in a contradictory relationship to one another. The orthodox Marxist idea of a continuously ever stricter subjugation of work under capital, the reduction of work to the mere execution of trained natural forces of people has not materialised, neither has that of an inevitable impoverishment. Although these tendencies exist and are dominant in quite a few countries and economic sectors, there ever again also exist counter-tendencies, which follow from the requirements of development of the forces of production as well as the pressure of social counter-forces.

Rosa Luxemburg describes capitalist society in its pure form, as it presented itself to her during the first world war as a self-destructive barbarism killing all humanity: “Shamed, dishonoured, wading in the blood, dripping with dirt – thus bourgeois society stands, such it is. Not when it, spick and span and well-behaved, mimics culture, philosophy and ethics, order, peace and state of law – but as rapacious beast, as witch Sabbath of anarchy, as breath of the Plague for culture as well as people, thus it shows itself in its true and naked shape.”⁷⁶ This seems to repeat itself today as result of an unleashed capitalist globalisation, in which the authoritarian rule by an economic and political reaction is coupled with the unveiled “horror of economics”, the supremacy of the military, the extension of the police state.⁷⁷ Against

⁷² Ibid., p. 411.

⁷³ Compare to that also very convincingly with reference to the factors labour and money Karl Polanyi: The great transformation. Political and economic origins of societies and economic systems, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft 1978.

⁷⁴ Compare Claudia von Werlhof: „Hausfrausierung der Arbeit“ (Turning work into housework), in: Courage, no. 3/1982; the same: Was haben die Hühner mit dem Dollar zu tun? Frauen und Ökonomie (What do chicken have to do with the Dollar? Women and economy), München 1991.

⁷⁵ Compare on that Jeremy Rifkin. Access. Das Verschwinden des Eigentums (Access. The disappearance of property), Frankfurt a.M./New York: Campus Verlag 2000; André Gorz: Kritik der ökonomischen Vernunft (Criticism of economic reason), Berlin: Rotbuch Verlag 1989.

⁷⁶ Rosa Luxemburg: Die Krise der Sozialdemokratie (The crisis of social democracy), in: Werke, vol. 4, p. 53.

⁷⁷ Compare on alternative scenarios Dieter Klein, ed.: Leben statt gelebt zu werden. Selbstbestimmung und soziale Sicherheit. Zukunftsbericht der Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung (Live instead of being lived! Self-determination and social security. Future Report by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Foundation), Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag 2003, p. 69 ff., Holger Fließbach, Jean Ziegler: Die neuen Herrscher der Welt und ihre globalen Widersacher (The new rulers of the world and their global detractors), München: Bertelsmann, 2003; Samir Amin: Für ein nicht-amerikanisches 21. Jahrhundert. Der in die Jahre gekommene

that a broad resistance has formed, which asks for other forms of globalisation and regionalisation. It will turn out whether, as already earlier in the struggle against Manchester capitalism, imperialism and colonialism, Fascism and National Socialism, it will be possible to mobilise adequately large forces to oppose to this barbarism powers of humanity, liberty and equality.

Departing from what was just said, the following definition may be offered: Capitalistic are all societies, in which capital utilisation dominates the economy and such an economy the whole society. Put in brief, all societies, for which such a profit dominance holds, can be called capitalistic. Such a definition has the advantage of leaving room to also be able to recognise non-capitalist and even anti-capitalist tendencies and does justice to the plurality and heterogeneity of real societies, without at the same time having to ignore the capitalist character of the development of the whole society.⁷⁸ This definition allows to reconstruct the present societies as social space, in which the capitalist tendencies (still) impose themselves as the determining tendencies, social forces however also bring counter-tendencies into play, even create own spaces and occupy others and in turn fight for a turn in the trend.

If this kind of definition is right, then socialist transformation politics could no longer be understood as preparation for the “hammer blow of revolution”, but as struggle for the change in the relationships of forces in contemporary society and as the extension of sectors and strengthening of tendencies, which are not marked by the logic of capital, but by an emancipative and solidarity-based *social logic*. The push for debt release, control of financial capital and trans-national enterprises, of social minimal rights and a basic need-based social security, the expansion of solidarity-based economy, the protection of the rights of the public to free access to knowledge and culture, participative democracy and peaceful conflict resolution and all further demands by the movements united in the social forum⁷⁹ would then be the true process to push back the capitalist, the imperialist, the patriarchic, the racist tendencies in contemporary society and to abolish profit dominance. It would be the process to overcome the capitalist character of contemporary society.

Such a policy of radical transformation of the relationship of forces, property and power structures, the modes of socialisation, departing from the interests of those, who in a special way are exposed to repression, exploitation and marginalisation, in alliance with all those who see their claim to a life in self-determination and solidarity threatened and hurt, is everything else but the “adding of social reformist lemonade bottle by bottle” into the “sea of capitalist bitterness” (Luxemburg), but no less but the long, the troubled, the extremely hard, but also the beautiful and human struggle for another world. To participate in it constitutes the core of socialist real politics. In contrast to a policy of opportunism, it follows clear criteria, in contrast to an abstract revolutionarism it is practical. In the here and now it defends tendencies of the solidarity-based and emancipative and expands them against the logic of capital utilisation. In changing the capitalistically dominated reality, it points beyond capitalism. The means used by it in themselves already constitute progress in emancipation and solidarity.

Kapitalismus (For a Non-American 21th century. Capitalism getting older, but not better), Hamburg: VSA 2001, p. 78 ff.

⁷⁸ Compare on that with view to state socialism, Michael Brie: Von den Schwierigkeiten, über die DDR zu sprechen (It is difficult to talk about the GDR), in: Michael Brie, Dieter Klein: Der Engel der Geschichte (The angel of history), Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag 1993.

⁷⁹ Compare William S. Fisher, Thomas Ponniah, eds.: Another world is possible. Alternatives to Globalization at the World Social Forum, opus cit.

Freedom is always the freedom of the others – the discovery of a radical, solidarity-based notion of freedom

“Freedom is always the freedom of those who think otherwise”, Rosa Luxemburg wrote in Summer 1918 in critical discussion with the Bolsheviki in her essay “The Russian Revolution”. Freedom should not become a “privilege”. No sentence by her is so often cited by (almost) all sides as this one. And none is in this way more easily disposed of. It seems, as if it had exhausted its explosive power on state socialism, at whose beginning as well as end it stood. This, however, is fatally wrong.

One may remember the circumstances, in which Rosa Luxemburg wrote this sentence: She, who was incarcerated between 1915 and 1918 over 1200 days in German prisons, she, whose friends fell in the war or were persecuted and arrested like her, she, who had protested against the barbarism of militarism with a sharpness unheard of in Germany and for that was sentenced like a criminal, she, who had turned against the barbarism of the world war with her whole personality, in this way passed a hard judgment on her closest political friends, who had just won a revolution and unilaterally ended the war.

Although the dictatorship of the Bolsheviki was a dictatorship of those *thinking more or less like* Rosa Luxemburg, although the social goals of this dictatorship were also her goals, although she could hope to be liberated by such forces, although she thus seemed to be benefited by this dictatorship, Rosa Luxemburg refused it. She saw higher values than her own interests at stake. But for the first time in her life Rosa Luxemburg upon pressure by Paul Levi and out of political considerations suppressed her own thinking otherwise in public. Maybe this was her greatest political mistake. Only three years after her death, much too late, this writing of hers, appeared as an instrument in the fight between democratic socialists and the Bolshevik Third International.

In her coming to terms with the Bolsheviki and with the inherent tendency of many radical left to dictatorship, Rosa Luxemburg was concerned about more than the achievements of “formal” democracy. She was concerned by freedom within equality, it was a matter of the relationship between political freedom and social equality and of a new notion of liberty in general. It was at the same time also a dispute with right social democracy and liberalism. Precisely that has been “skipped over”, however, again and again.

Rosa Luxemburg for herself, behind walls for three years in prisons, makes a fundamental discovery – freedom is always the freedom of the others! Or put differently: she found a valid maxim for her life practice and her political philosophy. Where others see freedom only as the right of the individual to arbitrary behaviour, which only finds its limit in the right of others to equal arbitrariness, where others see freedom as the natural right of the individual that can only be limited by the equal natural rights of others, there Rosa Luxemburg realised that freedom is a social, an obligating relationship of people to one another. And the core of this relationship is a behaviour, by which people make possible the freedom of other people - it is *solidarity*.

For this reason it is also clear why she radically renounced the means of political terror so extensively used by the Bolsheviks and recognised in it, in clear continuity with her “The Russian Revolution”, the bourgeois-dictatorial method of rule by a minority: “The proletarian revolution to its ends needs no terror, it hates and despises the murder of people. *It does not need this means of struggle, because it is not fighting people, but institutions*, because it does not step into the arena with naïve illusions, whose disappointment it would have to bloodily avenge. It is not a desperate attempt by a minority to model the world after its ideal by force, but the action of the great mass of millions of the people...”⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 445 (italics mine – M.B.)

Turning against every kind of opportunism, Rosa Luxemburg demanded that liberty so that it be true liberty and not the covered compulsion to conform, had to make possible the freedom of others as being different. She strived for a world, in which many worlds would have a place. Equality in freedom is an equality of those different. Acting as a free person, thus she understands and practices it, consists precisely in giving others the possibility, *to be free as others*. And before this liberty is a right, it is a claim of own action.

Nobody after all is free by nature or by birth. The dignity of men and women as well as his or her freedom are violable. Nobody can durably push through claims for right for him- or herself, if he or she does not have enough solidarity to concede it to others and to work for it actively, otherwise he becomes an oppressor and an exploiter. Liberty is not a good, one can take, rob or buy. One has to above all give it out, fight for it on behalf of others and push it through, in order to be free oneself.

If freedom is not understood as freedom of the egoistic individual, but as behaviour which has to create the conditions for the liberty of others, than the objection by socialism is being taken seriously that the liberty of the individuals mediated by the market in no way produces the freedom of all others. And if freedom is not understood as freedom of everyone, if freedom is reduced to the readiness to yield to the prescribed orders by those who represent everybody (or claim to do so), then the objection of classical liberalism is being taken seriously that rule in the name of liberty of all is oppression of the individuals. Freedom is then understood with liberalism as freedom of the individuals, and with socialism it is being departed from the certitude that this presupposes actions and institutions based on solidarity, by which the freedom of the others can be brought forth and secured.

Liberty in Rosa Luxemburg's understanding is infinitely far from egoism based in market liberalism or the self-realisation cult of the new elites. Freedom as Rosa Luxemburg practiced it as social virtue, was a struggle for freedom of the others. Not that every society is a society of free people, whose citizens, men and women, only resist, if they are oppressed. Too fast, thus experience tells, they will begin to oppress others, if the relationships of power permit it and own egoism let it appear as favourable. Only those people are really free, who resist the oppression of others even if they themselves profit from this oppression. In Luxemburg's understanding, freedom is a behaviour, which constitutes conditions such that others are being offered the same conditions of freedom. This concerns equally the question of fundamental freedom goods as well as the demolition of those privileges, which do not immediately contribute to overcoming of social inequality. This, however, is impossible without the fundamental transformation of the ownership and power relationships and the overcoming of profit dominance over economy and society.

Only the kind of society is to be called free, in which truly the free development of everyone and everybody contributes to the solidarity-based development of all. And only blind believers or cynics can believe that the "invisible" hands of the market or the "visible" hands of the state would do this without our help. This precisely would mean to renounce liberty by laziness or cowardice, to delegate it to others and to thereby become unfree.

The liberty to invest money in stocks, whose movement becomes a totalitarian capital utilisation, which rules world society and dishes out wealth and poverty, health and sickness, education and illiteracy, peace and war among opposing groups, classes, people and parts of the earth, to Rosa Luxemburg would have been cruellest oppression. Freedom that consists in those 5% of the world population living in the USA using up a quarter of all of the world's natural resources, and the West Europeans only shortly less than that, she would have brandished as brutal domination. The "free world order", based on arms build-up, of the *pax Americana* to her would have been a case of imperialism. The newly implemented liberty to appropriate genetic codes and stocks of knowledge as private property, she would have

condemned as criminal robbery. The destruction of biological diversity of this earth she, who suffered with every abused animal and every tread upon plant, would have cursed as barbarism.

This legitimization of privileges, which is everything else but freedom of all, could be dispensed with as the ordinary cynicism of any kind of rule, if then there was not added to it the brazen use of Rosa Luxemburg to justify this rule-securing ideology of liberty. And this even and mostly in Germany, the country of her murderers, who were never really held accountable.

It belongs to the most deep-rooted prejudices of Western societies that freedom stands in contrast to equality and justice. Placed before the alternative, thus the ruling opinion (which is above all that of the rulers), to have to choose between liberty and equality, freedom should be given priority. Rosa Luxemburg's understanding of liberty has solidarity as its basis. Only those who make possible a free life to others as *others*, act in a just manner. Such a notion of liberty, grounded in solidarity, is not only extremely critical of the transformation of liberty into the barbarism of privileged use of social advantages, but at the same time directed against all those social structures and the corresponding relationships of rule, which make this barbarism possible in the first place. The words, ever again used by her, "socialism or barbarism" could also be spelled "freedom or barbarism", "justice or barbarism". But the sentence "freedom or socialism" to her would be equally meaningless as "freedom or freedom".

While ruling neo-liberalism celebrates as liberty a kind of rule that polarises the social chances between rich and poor, North and South, present and future generations more and more and in a manner guided by interest exchange freedom with privilege, whereas this neo-liberalism practices liberty as the barbarism of forced implementation of privileges of rule and to that end employs WTO, IMF, World Bank or the armed forces of the USA and NATO, Rosa Luxemburg's discovery that freedom is always that of the others leads to the insight that real freedom must be grounded in solidarity. Capitalism, militarism and nationalism as well as the political and social dictatorship of the conformists to her were grimaces of barbarism, to which she opposed freedom as freedom of the others, and thus freedom as practiced solidarity.

Rosa Luxemburg stayed at her post in January 1919 after the repression of the uprising in Berlin. Nobody can say, what kind of ways she would have found, if she had not been murdered. Neither in a social democracy, which did not seek to overcome the basic structures of capitalism even when it had the possibility to do so, nor in a Communist party, preparing its own dictatorship and in 1921 excluded a Paul Levi, because he was not ready to give "more than the life" - "his own personality to the party"⁸¹, she could have been able to act as a free person in a self-determined way. The tragedy of her life urges us to seek new and independent ways of liberty. A step in this direction would be the rediscovery of Rosa Luxemburg's radical solidarity-based understanding of freedom.

Epilogue

Rosa Luxemburg's theoretical as well as theoretical work over thirty years until her death in the November revolution of 1918/19 is above all and until the last moment also the desperate attempt to found a revolutionary real politics beyond the already mentioned positions within the Second International. This attempt points back into the history of emancipative rebellions for which the *Movement of the Angry* of the Great French Revolution with their call for

⁸¹ Thus Thalheimer in justification of the exclusion of Paul Levi from the KPD in 1921. Quoted in Charlotte Beradt: Paul Levi. Ein demokratischer Sozialist in der Weimarer Republik (Paul Levi. A democratic socialist in the Weimar Republic), Frankfurt-am-Main: EVA 1969, p. 53.

freedom, equality and democracy⁸² stand just as that of the *Chartists* in England in the beginning of the 19th century and that of the *Commune*, which wanted to give to itself and to all communities of France the right to carry out, within their borders, “at their own discretion, the administrative and economic reforms desired by their population: the creation of appropriate institutes of education, production, exchange, credit, the communalisation of power and property in accordance with the necessities of the moment, the wishes of the concerned and the experiences of the practice”⁸³ – all of these rights that WTO, GATS and TRIPS today even more as before want to transfer to multinational enterprises. As the murdered General Secretary of the Communist Party of South Africa, Chris Hani, said what Luxemburg might have said as well: “Socialism is not about big concepts and heavy theory. Socialism is about decent shelter for those who are homeless. It is about water for those who have no safe drinking water. It is about health care, it is about a life of dignity for the old. It is overcoming the huge divide between urban and rural areas. It is about a decent education for all our people. Socialism is about rolling back the tyranny of the market. As long as the economy is dominated by an unelected, privileged few, the case for socialism will exist.”⁸⁴

Rosa Luxemburg’s attempt to conceptualise a revolutionary real politics at the same time anticipates goals and practices, as they have increasingly become important again since the uprising of the Zapatista of 1994 and the formation of an anti-neo-liberal movement of movements and which have brought a new pure wind into the world: “this wind from below, the wind of rebellion, the wind of dignity, of hope, and more precisely the hope to convert dignity and rebellion into freedom and dignity.”⁸⁵ Who knows the living stream of the protests against the WTO and G8 in Seattle and Genoa, who knows the protests by the social forums will remember Rosa Luxemburg’s analysis of the mass strikes. Her attempt to link freedom and equality in the program of the Spartakus alliance of 1918 anticipates the program of the World Social Forum, where the Charta says: “The alternatives proposed at the World Social Forum stand in opposition to a process of globalisation directed by the large multinational corporations and by the governments and international institutions at the service of those corporations’ interests, they are designed to ensure that globalisation in solidarity will prevail as a new stage in world history. This will respect universal human rights, and those of all citizen – men and women – of all nations, and the environment, and will rest on democratic international systems and institutions at the service of social justice, equality and the sovereignty of the people.”⁸⁶

At a time when social democracy lapsed into opportunism, capitulated in front of militarism, imperialism and colonialism, and Lenin’s Bolsheviki prepared and implemented a dictatorship in the name of socialism and working class, Rosa Luxemburg has explored paths which were to overcome the opposition of goals and means, aim and path of emancipative movements.

⁸² “Freedom is an empty craze, as long as one class of people can starve the other without punishment. Equality is an empty craze as long as the wealthy one with the monopoly executes justice over life and death of his fellow men. The republic is an empty craze, as long day by day the counter-revolution is at work with goods prices that three-quarters of citizens can only afford under tears.” Manifest of the Angry in: Joachim Höppner, Waltraud Seidel-Höppner: Von Babeuf bis Blanqui. Französischer Sozialismus und Kommunismus vor Marx (From Babeuf to Blanqui. French Socialism and Communism before Marx), vol. 2, Texts, Leipzig: Verlag Philipp Reclam jun., 1975, p. 8.

⁸³ Quoted in Jean Villain: Die großen 72 Tage. Ein Bericht über die Pariser Kommunarden (The great 72 days. A report about the Paris Communards), Berlin: Verlag Volk und Welt 1975, p. 200.

⁸⁴ Quoted in Mazibuko K. Jara: Time to make Hani’s dreams come true, <http://www.sacp.org.za/pr/press/2000/nw0414.html>.

⁸⁵ „Ya Basta!“ Declaration by the EZLN of January 1, 1994. Quoted in John Holloway: Uprising of dignity. About the Zapatista understanding of revolution, in: Ulrich Brand, Ana Ester Ceceña, eds.: Reflexionen einer Rebellion. Chiapas und ein anderes Politikverständnis (Reflections of a rebellion. Chiapas and another understanding of politics), opus cit. supra, p. 110.

⁸⁶ World Social Forum: Charta of Principles, in: William S. Fisher, Thomas Ponniah, eds., opus cit. supra, p. 355.

She was sharply attacked for that. Both hostile wings of the old socialism to a large extent handed over her work to oblivion, if they did not succeed in instrumentalising it. But her work just as the life of Rosa Luxemburg is a spark, from which ever new fire rises, the fire of a non-alienated philosophy and politics of liberation.

Rosa Luxemburg belongs to those “new women”, about which Alexandra Kollontai tells in her famous book “The New Morale and the Working Class”. In her partnerships she was devoted to the search for a new ideal – “the harmony between passion and proximity of the souls, the compatibility between love and freedom, the comradeship based on the independence of both sides”⁸⁷, committed to a human idea: “Before us stands the woman as personality, in front of us stands a human with her own value, her own inner world, before us stands an individuality, which asserts herself, the woman who tears off the corroded chains on her own gender.”⁸⁸ Rosa Luxemburg saw an inseparable connection between her personal emancipation as a person and the socialist emancipation movement of her time. Her work and life, other than in the case of many male contemporaries, cannot be separated from each other. She wanted a political life for herself and for all others a human politics. She did not accept it, not even for the sake of the best cause, to have to be inhuman: “To be good is the main thing. To purely and simply be good, that is what severs and binds everything and does better than all smartness and bigotry.”⁸⁹

In Rosa Luxemburg revolutionary activity and wide-hearted humanity were never dead. She has left us something, which could hardly be more important: the task to make the world more human in a humane way. Us the stream of history – breaking through the walls of self-inflicted dependence – has torn along to great new journey. Whether we want it or not, history is coming along. It will also depend on our looking back onto the work of Rosa Luxemburg, whether a human future becomes of it.

⁸⁷ Alexandra Kollontai, Die neue Moral und die Arbeiterklasse (The new moral and the working class), p. 30.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁸⁹ Rosa Luxemburg: Brief an Hans Diefenbach (Letter to Hans Diefenbach), Gesammelte Briefe (Collected Letters), vol. 5, p. 183.