

Socialist Martyr: Rosa Luxemburg and the Failed Spartacist Uprising in Germany, 1918-1919.

A Senior Honors Thesis

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## **Glossary of Parties, Organizations and Terms**

**Spartacist League** – Anti-war and Revolutionary group co-founded by Rosa Luxemburg

**SPD** – Social Democratic Party of Germany

**KPD** – Communist Party of Germany

**USPD** – Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany

**Revolutionary Shop Stewards** – German revolutionary organization/trade union

**Revolutionary Committee** – Leadership during Spartacist Uprising, made up of members of the USPD, KPD, and Revolutionary Shop Stewards

**Central Committee** – Leadership of the KPD

**Bolsheviks** – Russian socialists/communists led by Lenin

**Proletariat** – the working class

## I. Introduction

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of January, 1919, Rosa Luxemburg, one of the leading voices of European socialism, was murdered. Though her body would not be recovered until months later, those who knew her had little doubt the news was true. Her death, the culmination of a week of revolt in Germany that has since been dubbed “The Spartacist Uprising,” marked the end of the independence of German communism and the beginning of a Soviet influence that would grow to control the party for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As one of Lenin’s most outspoken critics within the European left, Luxemburg was in the minority. As a woman, a Jew and a constant critic of her own party’s majority, she was on the margins as well. But despite, or perhaps because of the numerous obstacles which stood in her way, she became a household name in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Germany.

Through her years as a member of Germany’s Social Democratic Party (SDP), she made herself its leading voice for revolution. Beginning with efforts to aid unions on the country’s periphery, she quickly rose to prominence in the party, becoming one of its leading theorists and educators of the next generation’s socialists. Though her sex prevented her from parliamentary membership and voting, she never joined the fight for women’s suffrage. Luxemburg’s fate was tied to that of the working class. Their rights were her rights and she would accept nothing less than the total victory of the proletariat.

Luxemburg's death at the end of the Spartacist Uprising was no surprise to the citizens of Berlin. After heading up an attempt to overthrow the current government, she was, technically, a traitor to the German state. Equally was she a traitor to her former party, the SDP, whose right wing was by then running the government. Her murder at the hands of a German Free Corps unit, however unjust and criminal, was a product of the turbulent mess of the German state following the overthrow of the Kaiser. The uprising which she had taken part in--as will be shown in the analysis further ahead--was doomed to fail from the start. At its inception, she had opposed the idea of a putsch. But as events moved closer to revolution, she not only joined the movement, but backed it fully, staking her entire life on its success.

The decision to participate in this uprising was seemingly in conflict with Luxemburg's beliefs. While she had always supported revolution over reform, she was also a proponent of democracy within socialism and opposed to violence. So what had happened that changed her mind and forced her to reject much of her previous political and social philosophy in favor of a poorly led coup? The focus of this thesis will be to attempt an explanation.

### *Importance of an Answer*

In conducting extensive research, the difficulty of finding an answer to this question became apparent for a variety of reasons. While Rosa Luxemburg has, since her death, become a well known figure in socialist history, even more so than when she was alive, the majority of writing about her life and work has been done by members of the far-left. In most cases, the bias of the writer brings the story to a place between fact and fiction which can be unacceptable to the

discerning historian. Few attempts have been made to draw from sources on both sides of the political spectrum in hopes of creating a more unbiased view of the events which took place during the Spartacist Uprising. Even the attribution of the uprising to the Spartacists can be called into question, as the majority of the participants in the insurgency had little to do with the Spartacists, and the majority of its leadership did not call for or initially support the decision to overthrow the government. One writer will blame the SPD for this supposed misnomer, while another blames the SPD for inciting the whole event. In the memoirs of former SPD leaders, of course, claims are made of the exact opposite.

Additionally troubling to an only slightly bi-lingual researcher of these events is the language barrier created by a vast number of the available sources. While there are a number of English language biographies of Luxemburg, and some translations of her letters, I was only able to locate one book in English which focused exclusively on the Spartacist Uprising. This forced heavy dependence on the work of one writer to develop a full historical context. While the author, Eric Waldman, is (or was) an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Marquette University, and his citations were impeccable, his attempt to tell a full version of the story through research conducted “within the geographic limits of the United States”<sup>1</sup> is limited. And this is to say nothing of his political bias!

While Waldman provided the most in-depth analysis of the situation of the Spartacist Uprising, he never answered the question of “what drove Luxemburg to join?” A further look at other writings on Luxemburg, the Spartacists and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Germany reveals that this

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Waldman, *The Spartacist Uprising of 1919 and the Crisis of the German Socialist Movement* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1958), vii.

has not been a question that other historians have been interested in, or possibly, that they were wise enough to know that it would likely lead to a dead end. However, knowing this in advance only made the topic more intriguing.

Through a thorough search for unknown private manuscripts and letters, I hoped to find a definitive statement from Luxemburg or someone close to her which would explain her actions during her last week on earth. In all of her published letters, however, none were dated any later than 1918. Nothing written by her during the Spartacus Uprising exists today, if it ever did to begin with.

After an aborted trip to Germany, which would have likely still left me empty-handed, I discovered the existence of a large archival collection in the Hoover Institution at Stanford University in California. The collection of manuscripts and other ephemera belonging or related to Rosa Luxemburg had been saved by her secretary, Mathilde Jacob, and acquired by the Hoover Institution during World War II.

My research at Stanford provided little more to explain Luxemburg's actions, although it led to the discovery of Mathilde Jacob's memoir, *Rosa Luxemburg and Her Friends in War and Revolution 1914-1919*. This memoir would provide the closest thing to a concrete answer that could be found, and only in a letter by Jacob which had been tacked on to the end by the editor. Jacob made it seem very easy: it was Karl Liebknecht's fault.<sup>2</sup> So after months of research, there was one sentence to explain Luxemburg's actions and this sentence was not even from Luxemburg herself.

Because one sentence will not work as an explanation of an extremely complex historical event, and because this event was so pivotal in the history of the European socialist movement, as I will further establish, an in-depth analysis must be made. Through an examination of Luxemburg's theoretical works, editorials and letters to friends, I seek to explain, in as much detail as possible, her decision to participate in an ill-conceived revolution which, I believe, would have made more sense without her.

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<sup>2</sup> Mathilde Jacob, *Rosa Luxemburg: An Intimate Portrait* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2000), 128.

## **II. Historical Background of the Spartacist Uprising**

The revolution which occurred in Germany at the close of the First World War would be the only true revolution that Germany would ever see. Throwing off the yoke of the Kaiser and the land Junkers who had led the country into the disaster of World War I, the new SPD-led Germany made the move towards becoming a parliamentary republic. The same disastrous war which would bring the SPD to the forefront of German politics would be just as formative for their allies-turned-enemies in the Spartacus League.

By placing this situation in the proper historical context, I will show how events which led up to Rosa Luxemburg's death transpired. Before going on to further explain her participation in the uprising, an explanation of her background and the setting of the post-war German state is necessary.

### *Opponents of War, Proponents of Revolution*

When the German Reichstag was initially asked to approve war funding to the government in August of 1914, they voted as a solid block, authorizing credits and thereby condoning the country's actions in joining the war. Mere months later, however, when further

credits were brought to the Reichstag for approval, there was one vote of dissent. Karl Liebknecht, future cofounder of the Spartacus League, cast that sole vote. While this vote did nothing to stop the chugging German war machine from moving forward, it did set a precedent for things to come.

As the earliest and most prominent opposition to the war, the future Spartacists put themselves in an unpopular position. As the years went on and Germany's successes turned to increasing failures, however, Liebknecht, Luxemburg and the rest of a very small faction at the left of the SPD began to grow in numbers. For their outspokenness against the war, Liebknecht and Luxemburg would be punished. Both would spend a large portion of the war as political prisoners. Still, both persisted in their efforts to end the war and fight the revisionist policies of the SPD, which had come to be dominated by its right wing, led by Friedrich Ebert and Philipp Scheidemann.

Even before the war began, Luxemburg had made herself a vocal and tireless opponent of the reform-oriented Marxist revisionism of the right. Published in 1900, her essay "Social Reform or Revolution?" attacked head-on the SPD's move away from classical Marxist doctrine towards a tamer, more parliamentary approach. At the center of the SPD's shift in policy was the work of Eduard Bernstein, who in a series of articles and a book entitled *The Pre-Conditions of Socialism and the Tasks for Social Democracy*, had argued against Marx' ideas of an inevitable socialist revolution led by the proletariat. Bernstein instead stressed the importance of the socialist party (in this case, the SPD) and its ability to institute governmental reforms from the inside. He believed, as Luxemburg quoted him in the introduction to her essay, that "the

Final goal, no matter what it is, is nothing; the movement is everything.”<sup>3</sup>

As Bernstein’s ideas became more popular and the SPD more and more conservative, Luxemburg’s voice would be increasingly marginalized. Still, she continued to push for revolutionary action and refused to abandon the party. She insisted, and rightfully so, that she could exert a bigger influence from the inside. Her membership in the party would continue throughout the duration of World War I, and only end as the war drew to a close, when the USPD (Independent Social Democrats) and Spartacist League were officially formed as an alternative.

Throughout the duration of the war, the eventual founders of the Spartacist League always led the calls to end the violence. In January and February of 1915, Luxemburg, Liebknecht, and Franz Mehring--another associate from the far-left--wrote *The Crisis in the German Social-Democracy*, also known as “The Junius Pamphlet.” Printed in Switzerland to be distributed secretly in Germany, the pamphlet condemned the war as a product of capitalist society, “wading in blood and dripping in filth.”<sup>4</sup> Rather than blame the monarchy or middle classes, however, they pointed their collective finger at the fallen SPD, the former “jewel of the organization of the classconscious proletariat.”<sup>5</sup> Because the “Junius” writers (all members of the SPD) still saw the party as “the thinking brain of the International,” they felt that “the process

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<sup>3</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution* (Bombay: Modern India Publications, 1951), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg and Franz Mehring, *The Crisis in the German Social Democracy* (New York: The Socialist Publication Society, 1918), 8.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

of self-analysis and appraisal must begin in its own movement.”<sup>6</sup> Luxemburg also underlined the importance of insuring that the workers did not affiliate themselves with the military of any nation. Because socialism was to be an international movement, the international proletariat should instead be banding together to do battle with the imperialists instead of each other.<sup>7</sup>

The publication of this pamphlet can be seen as the beginnings of the Spartacist movement, its leadership based in the disenchanted former far left of the SPD. The group would convene in January 1916 to hold its first national conference and then join the ranks of the USPD upon its formation in 1917. It would not become an officially separate party until the end of 1918, when it would be rebranded as the German Communist Party (Spartacus League), or KPD.

As a result of “Junius” and other pacifistic pamphlets and speeches, Luxemburg and Liebknecht were arrested and imprisoned. Both would spend the rest of the war jailed, albeit with a few brief intervals of freedom during which their continued outspokenness landed them in prison yet again.

During her time in prison, Luxemburg continued to write articles on socialist theory, criticizing Lenin’s handling of the Russian Revolution and warning of the potential for dictatorship if the Soviets continued to follow this model. This essay, *The Russian Revolution*,

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>7</sup> Eric Waldman, *The Spartacist Uprising of 1919 and the Crisis of the German Socialist Movement* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1958), vii.

would not be published until after her death.<sup>8</sup> In spite of her criticisms, friends encouraged her to travel to Russia to help with the revolution when she was released from prison. Luxemburg refused, insisting “I am too bound up with the shame of the German working class... I remain at my post, and I still hope to experience something in Germany, and in the not too distant future at that.”<sup>9</sup>

### *The Turning Tides of War*

The German experience in World War I began as a series of triumphs. But what initially appeared to be an unstoppable force quickly ground to a halt as the Allied Powers began to engage the Germans in trench warfare on the Western Front. Years of bloody deadlock ensued, and the popularity the German state had enjoyed with its people, feeding off of the rampant nationalist feelings of the time, began to fade. Seeing the inevitability of defeat on the battlefield and at home, in October of 1918, Germany’s military leaders convinced the Kaiser that he must immediately move for an armistice and alteration of the political status quo. This attempted “revolution from above”<sup>10</sup> created a parliamentary monarchy and left the reins of power in the hands of Prince Max von Baden and a coalition from the Reichstag that included members of the SPD. This move by the SPD “can be interpreted as the culmination of the reformist policies

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<sup>8</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Workers Age Publishers, 1947).

<sup>9</sup> Mathilde Jacob, *Rosa Luxemburg: An Intimate Portrait* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2000), 87.

<sup>10</sup> Alfred Niemann, *Revolution von oben --Umsturz von Unten* (Berlin: Verlag für Kulturpolitik), 98ff, quoted in Waldman, 70.

pursued by the party throughout the war.”<sup>11</sup> By taking an important role in a bourgeois parliamentary monarchy, the SPD was betraying the initial revolutionary ideals of socialism.

The German people were not satisfied with the new government, however. The war continued, as did many of the restrictions placed on citizens as an effect. All over Europe, soldiers and civilians began to feel that the war would never end. By 1918, With the death toll steadily rising, the German populace had had enough. In a truly spontaneous fashion, the people began to revolt. Workers, soldiers and bourgeois citizens alike had had enough of the senseless bloodshed and took to the streets to protest. As a result, the coalition government would prove to be extremely short-lived. As military units mutinied and the government fell apart, the Kaiser abdicated and Prince Max was sent packing as well. The revolution from above quickly gave way to a true revolution from below.

### *Spartacists and the Revolution*

On November 9, 1918, the revolution was ablaze in Germany. In Berlin, it would be Karl Liebknecht who would issue for the Spartacists the proclamation of a socialist republic. Only a few weeks prior, the government had declared an amnesty for political prisoners, “a mere gesture, as the revolution was already impending and the storming of the prisons was bound to follow.”<sup>12</sup> It was during this time that Karl Liebknecht was pardoned. However, Luxemburg would have to wait for the Revolution, as she was being held in an unofficial capacity and the

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<sup>11</sup> Waldman, 73.

<sup>12</sup> Mathilde Jacob, 87.

amnesty did not apply to her. Immediately upon her release, she went to Cathedral Square in Breslau (the city of her imprisonment) and spoke before a crowd of workers before departing by train for Berlin the next day.

Sensing the intentions of the Spartacists, the majority SPD, whose standing in the Reichstag leaned to their legitimacy, sent Philipp Scheidemann to proclaim a democratic republic instead. Making their announcement only a few hours before Liebknecht's, the SPD sought to end the revolution as quickly as it had begun.

The November Revolution had, in truly Luxemburgist theoretical fashion, been a spontaneous one. German workers and people of all classes had stormed the streets, insisting on an end to armed conflict and the establishment of a democratically elected government. While the majority of the population had backed the government throughout the war, the surprise of military defeat shocked the public and removed any confidence they previously had in their government.<sup>13</sup>

While the Spartacists and other leaders of the left had been ramping up propaganda production in hopes of spurring on a revolution in the previous months, it is generally agreed that their planning and propaganda had little or no significance for the events that came after.<sup>14</sup> Some analysis asserts that “the German Revolution was definitely not inspired by socialist ideas,” but

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<sup>13</sup> Waldman, 79.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

was made by the German people for the sole purpose of establishing peace.<sup>15</sup>

The Spartacists had their desired revolution, but they found the government in the hands of the more powerful SPD and the real power in the hands of a population that did not share their political ideals, especially their desire for a socialist state. For this reason, the Spartacists felt that Germany had not yet experienced a complete revolution and that they must continue to agitate for a continuation of revolutionary action until this end could be achieved. It was at this point that Rosa Luxemburg, whose huge body of political theory had been solely in favor of popular spontaneous revolt, opted for a change in tactics.

With their leadership free from prison, the Spartacists initiated a mass of propaganda directed at the German worker from their base in Berlin. *Die Rote Fahne*,<sup>16</sup> a daily newspaper, became the party's chief organ for propagandistic "information." Edited and chiefly written by Luxemburg, the paper continuously called for the "overthrow of the Ebert-Scheidemann government"<sup>17</sup> and the continuation of the revolution towards the formation of a socialist state. Increased attention was also given to putting the power of the German government into the hands of workers' and soldiers' councils as "the only agencies vested with legislative and administrative authority"<sup>18</sup> as opposed to the SPD government's plans for a constituent assembly based on popular elections with voting extended to all people above age 20.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>16</sup> Trans.: "The Red Flag"

<sup>17</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, "Die Rote Fahne" 14 January 1919:  
<http://marxist.org/archive/luxemburg/1919/01/14.htm>

The Spartacists' focus on the council system was likely influenced by the Soviet model. By making the workers' and soldiers' councils the only body with governmental power they could create a version of rule by minority that on its face appeared to be built upon a majority.<sup>19</sup> By doing this, they could ensure the "dictatorship of the proletariat" which they were calling for in *Die Rote Fahne* and the propaganda leaflets they were distributing in Berlin.<sup>20</sup>

Because of paper shortages brought on by the war and because of the more moderate views of the owners of Germany's various printing houses, publication of Spartacist newspapers and leaflets was incredibly difficult. To create the first issue of *Die Rote Fahne*, a band of Spartacists forcibly took over control of the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, a move which Luxemburg was opposed to, due to the danger posed to the small number of Spartacists attempting to defend the building. As an additional obstacle, workers in the factory refused to continue printing the paper. This type of "guerilla printing" would continuously be used by the Spartacists over the coming months and would become one of the major sore points with the SPD, whose *Vorwärts* building they occupied in December of that same year. In their own propaganda, the SPD targeted the Spartacists' idea of "freedom of the press" in a cartoon drawing depicting a Spartacist rebel binding newspaper men and soldiers with rope,<sup>21</sup> and through articles in *Vorwärts*.

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<sup>18</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, "Die Rote Fahne" 10 November 1918, quoted in Waldman, 103.

<sup>19</sup> Waldman, 107.

<sup>20</sup> 6. Spartacist propaganda leaflet, box 1, "Rudolf Franz Collection," The Hoover Institution, Stanford.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Throughout the entire period, although the Spartacists' supporters and other far left radicals continued to make attempts against the government and rival factions by force, Rosa Luxemburg continued to caution against "rash actions."<sup>22</sup> Along with Liebknecht, she favored the continuation of propaganda and agitating the workers through speeches and pamphlets, as opposed to violent revolt against the government along the lines of the Bolsheviks. Because of their outspoken position for continued revolution and overthrow of the government, however, the Spartacists received a negative reputation among many Germans. Luxemburg argued against this, saying "the proletarian revolution requires no terror methods [to realize] its objectives; it hates and despises violence and murder."<sup>23</sup> While this may have been her belief at the time, her participation in and support of the Spartacist Uprising of January, 1919, would be in direct opposition to this statement.

### *Uprising and Death*

The continued clashes between the Spartacists and the SPD came to a head early in the next year. In an article in *Vorwärts*, the SPD decried the actions of the left and asked for the help of the masses in combating the Spartacists' attack on the newly established government:

The despicable actions of Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg soil the revolution and endanger all of its achievements. The masses must not sit by quietly for one minute longer while these brutal beasts and their followers paralyze the activities of the

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<sup>22</sup> Waldman, 128.

<sup>23</sup> *Illustrierte Geschichte der Deutschen Revolution* (Berlin: Internationaler Arbeiterverlag, 1929), 261, quoted by Waldman, 132.

republican governmental offices, incite the people more and more to civil war, and strangle with their dirty fists the right of free expression.<sup>24</sup>

Here and elsewhere, the SPD and other opponents of the left continuously tried to pin the blame for chaos in the new German state on the Spartacists, although their membership was in actuality limited to only around 1,000 people, and in Berlin, merely 50. While the Spartacists may have been unhappy with their reputation as “armed sluggards,”<sup>25</sup> this constant attention in the press kept them in the public eye, giving credence to their cause and providing free advertising to potential allies.

As tensions flared on both sides, fear of an impending coup against the government rose. According to Waldman, “neither side intended to start a civil war,”<sup>26</sup> but the incompleteness of the November Revolution coupled with the deep hostility between the SPD and the Spartacists,<sup>27</sup> turned Berlin into a powder keg, ready to explode at even the sign of a potential spark. That spark came in early January, 1919, in the form of a new series of street protests.

Following the SPD’s decision to fire Berlin’s Chief of Police, Emil Eichhorn, and his non-compliance with the directive, far-left radicals came to his immediate support. The SPD felt that his leftist political stance, which showed in his support of revolutionary actions and refusal to accept SPD authority, made him a danger to the stability of the already fragile new republic.

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<sup>24</sup> *Illustrierte Geschichte*, 269, quoted by Waldman, 161.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>26</sup> Waldman, 164

<sup>27</sup> By now renamed the German Communist Party (KPD)

The left saw his dismissal by the SPD as a provocation to revolt and came immediately to his “rescue.” A meeting by the Berlin party heads of the USPD, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, and the KPD resulted in the decision to go ahead with the convening of street protests lead by workers and soldiers, though all agreed that “a violent overthrow of the government would lead nowhere.”<sup>28</sup>

What would come to be called “Spartakus Week” began with a series of mass protests by workers in the streets of Berlin on January 5, 1919. Workers numbering in the hundreds of thousands marched en masse towards the police headquarters in Berlin’s Alexanderplatz, cheered on by Liebknecht and the other leaders of the Revolutionary Committee; all this to show their support for Eichhorn.

That night, the leaders of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, USPD and KPD convened at police headquarters and made the fateful decision to oust the SPD-led government. Convinced that they were in the throes of a true, popular uprising with the masses also occupying a number of newspaper buildings, the leaders planned to assume temporary control over the government after completion of the coup. Notably absent from these meetings was Luxemburg. Even in the event that she had attended, it would be unlikely that she could have stopped the impending putsch. Only a small number of those present voted against the decisions.

The conglomeration of leaders from the far left which made up the new Revolutionary

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<sup>28</sup> Emil Eichhorn, *Eichhorn über die Januar-Ereignisse* (Berlin: Verlagsgenossenschaft Freiheit, 1919), 7-28, quoted by Waldman, 169.

Committee “distinguished itself by incredible incompetence and lack of initiative.”<sup>29</sup> The actual accomplishments of the committee were few, and included such insignificant measures as issuing proclamations and creating other commissions that did just as little. From the start, they were a disunified and confusing force that only served to dull the effect of the mass protests. Consumed with revolutionary fervor, they were unable to see the inevitable failure that lied ahead for them and the revolution.

While the masses continued to march in the streets, and in great numbers, the leadership sat in secret and talked about what to do. On January 8<sup>th</sup>, the committee released a pamphlet encouraging the workers to arm themselves and on the 9<sup>th</sup>, it held one last pointless meeting before effectively giving up. The “revolution” was again in the hands of the masses, now caught in the middle of a government overthrow that they had not even advocated. With most of the German army still far from Berlin on the Eastern Front, the SPD was forced to rely on the aid of the Guard-Calvary-Rifle-Division, a Free Corps element under the command of Colonel Reinhardt, to attempt to put down the uprising. The Free Corps and the SPD also issued their own leaflets<sup>30</sup> asking for the help of their constituents. They were able to mobilize thousands of workers in addition to the Free Corps in their attempt to combat what had begun as over 200,000 workers in protest of the Eichhorn firing.

The government’s military standing from there continued to improve drastically. Although negotiations were attempted by left wing workers’ councils and members of the

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<sup>29</sup> Waldman, 175.

<sup>30</sup> 5. Brigade Rheinhard and Freikorps leaflets, box 1, “Rudolf Franz Collection,” The Hoover Institution, Stanford.

government, no agreements could be made. On January 8<sup>th</sup>, the government initiated its attack on the revolution. On January 11<sup>th</sup>, SPD military leader Gustav Noske easily led a group of 3,000 volunteers into the city, showing that the uprising was nearly over. On January 13<sup>th</sup>, the fighting had officially ended and the leaders of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards and the USPD asked the workers to give up and return to their jobs.

The chaotic failure of the events of “Spartacus Week” had little actual relation to Rosa Luxemburg. She was initially opposed to its action and joined primarily to express solidarity with the workers and in opposition to “the counterrevolution.” Still, as a member and leader of the party which the SPD government felt was responsible for the attempted revolution, she would ultimately suffer the consequences of its failure.

Immediately following the crushing of the uprising, Noske and the Free Corps began a manhunt targeting the leaders of the Spartacus League, offering large rewards for their capture. While most were apprehended and jailed, Liebknecht and Luxemburg were taken to the Guard-Calvary-Rifle-Division’s headquarters, questioned, tortured and then murdered. Luxemburg’s body was thrown into a river and remained unfound until months later. The papers announced that the two had been “shot while attempting to escape,” a euphemism for what would “become the conventional manner of dealing with political opponents east of the Rhine.”<sup>31</sup> Rosa Luxemburg was gone.

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<sup>31</sup> Sebastian Haffner, *Defying Hitler* (New York: Picador, 2000), 33.

### III. Theory of the Mass Strike

Although Rosa Luxemburg's actual participation in the events of Spartacus Week was minimal--she was not a member of the Revolutionary Committee and did not participate in any of the street demonstrations or speeches made to the masses of protesters--her theoretical contributions to the movement were invaluable. Her background as one of the leading theorists and educators in the SPD was extremely influential to the Spartacists in their movement away from the increasingly moderate party.

Over the series of essays and books she published before the advent of the First World War and the November Revolution, she established a concrete definition for the revolution and its place within both the socialist party and the international proletariat. In *Reform or Revolution?* she attacked the SPD's increasing tendency towards parliamentary reform and distancing from revolution against the capitalist system.<sup>32</sup> Moreover In *The Mass Strike: the Political Party & the Trade Unions*,<sup>33</sup> she defined the revolution, explained its ties to the mass strike and established how she felt a socialist party fit into the scheme of revolution and the

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<sup>32</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution* (Bombay: Modern India Publications, 1951).

<sup>33</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike: The Political Party and the Trade Unions and the Junius Pamphlet* (New York: Harper and Row).

general strike.

Luxemburg saw the revolution as a living experience, one which took time. After a series of failures and successes would be another series of failures and successes. The revolution was not a singular event in history upon which revolutionaries met all of their aims in one fell swoop. The revolution must continuously be fought and nurtured, and most importantly, it must come in the form of a popular mass uprising, from “below,” with the inevitable end being the dictatorship of the proletariat.

In *The Mass Strike*, Luxemburg used as her example the events of the First Russian Revolution, which occurred in 1904 and 1905. This revolution was, at the time of her writing (1906), still incomplete. The gains from this revolution, however, were massive. Workers across the Russian empire made various strides, from increases in pay, to the establishment of shorter work days.<sup>34</sup> All of this was done without the assistance or leadership of a significant labor party or movement. The people rose up of their own accord and demanded their rights. And all of this in the still-autocratic Russian empire!

Luxemburg continually stressed that the revolution must come from below. She attacked the “Anarchistic assumption that the mass strike is a purely technical means of struggle which can be ‘decided’ at pleasure and strictly according to conscience, or ‘forbidden’--a kind of pocketknife which can be kept in the pocket clasped ‘ready for any emergency.’”<sup>35</sup> Or, more simply, the mass strike is not to be considered a tool of the social democracy; it is not a planned

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<sup>34</sup> Luxemburg, *Mass Strike*, 33-35.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

movement which the party can insist upon and use to achieve its means. “It is just as impossible to ‘propagate’ the mass strike as an abstract means of struggle as it is to propagate the ‘revolution’” Luxemburg insists.<sup>36</sup>

To Luxemburg, “the mass strike is inseparable from the revolution.” Both must exist as “organic” movements of the people, each feeding off of the other and working outside of the power of socialist theorists and party leaders. The relationship between economic and political conditions which are borne by the members of the working class lead from one to the other:

The revolution first creates the social conditions in which this sudden change of the economic struggle into the political and of the political struggle into the economic is possible, a change which finds its expression in the mass strike.<sup>37</sup>

When Luxemburg speaks further of a “real *people’s movement*,” she means that it must move beyond merely the members of the trade unions or supporters of the socialist party. For the revolution to be effective, “the widest sections of the proletariat must be drawn into the fight.”<sup>38</sup> Rather than drawing on the supporters of one party or ideology, the effective mass strike attracts all members of society whose economic and political situation must be improved. With a broader base, the strike can blossom from a small protest into a full-scale revolution.

So how does this theory justify Rosa Luxemburg’s approval and backing of the events of Spartacus Week in Berlin? At first glance, it appears that all of her theorization was “thrown out of the window” upon the beginning of the uprising. Here, it is important to remember, however,

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

that Luxemburg did not approve of or agitate for the beginning of this strike. Upon its outbreak and the decisions of the Revolutionary Committee, of which she was not a part, she did not condone it, but reluctantly embraced it, accepting her fate and tying it to the workers who were in the streets.

Looking again at *The Mass Strike*, there is an explanation for her actions. Luxemburg thought that “The Social Democrats are the most enlightened, most class-conscious vanguard of the proletariat.”\* She continued:

They cannot and dare not wait, in a fatalist fashion, with folded arms for the advent of the “revolutionary situation,” to wait for that which in every spontaneous peoples’ movement, falls from the clouds. On the contrary, they must now, as always hasten the development of things and endeavor to accelerate events. This they cannot do, however, by suddenly issuing the “slogan” for a mass strike at random at any odd moment, but first and foremost, by making clear to the widest layers of the proletariat the *inevitable advent* of this revolutionary period, the inner *social factors* making for it and the *political consequences* of it. If the widest proletarian layer should be won for a political mass action of the Social Democrats, and if vice versa, the Social Democrats should seize and maintain the real leadership of a mass movement, should they become, in a *political sense*, the rulers of the whole movement, then they must, with the utmost clearness, consistency and resoluteness, inform the German proletariat of their tactics and aims in the period of coming struggle.<sup>39</sup>

What Luxemburg describes here is also an explanation for her actions during the Spartacist Uprising. While she did not initiate it, she would not sit idly by while the revolution took place. If, then, it had succeeded, she would have betrayed her principles, as she had always been a

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\* At the time of writing, Luxemburg was still a member of the SPD.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-69.

proponent of a continued revolution.

While the Revolutionary Committee was a complete failure in terms of leadership and in essentially everything it attempted, it did seek to lead the uprising by the same rules which Luxemburg had laid out in the Mass Strike. The real problem then was that the Committee could not agree on anything, and only held useless meetings. While Luxemburg insisted “the task of Social Democracy will... be to regulate [the proletariat’s] tactics, not by the most backward phases of development but by the most advanced,”<sup>40</sup> the Revolutionary Committee was incapable of this, and she would ultimately pay the price for their misapplication of the power of the mass strike.

When the Spartacists failed in creating a socialist state from the fallen German monarchy in November of 1918, they saw the revolution as only beginning. When the SPD succeeded in taking control of the government and passed legislation approving the creation of a national assembly (as opposed to the Spartacists’ desired control by the workers’ and soldiers’ councils), they set about consolidating their power, assuming the revolution was complete.

But Luxemburg and the Spartacists pressed on. As she had insisted in *The Mass Strike* twelve years prior, “the task cannot be completed at one stroke, but must similarly be accomplished during a long period of gigantic social struggles.” She would accept no less than “the last historical necessary goal... the *dictatorship of the proletariat*.”<sup>41</sup> Her daily *Rote Fahne* articles and the Spartacists’ propaganda leaflets throughout the “post-revolutionary” period,

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

show that she had not given up this goal. “The dictatorship of the proletariat is alive!” they claimed,<sup>42</sup> but they were sadly wrong.

Rosa Luxemburg believed that “once the ball is set rolling then Social Democracy, whether it wills it or not, can never again bring it to a standstill.”<sup>43</sup> When the November Revolution occurred in Germany, she saw that ball, that beginning of the socialist revolution and had to see it out to completion, likely knowing that she would die before seeing results. Of the revolution party, she said:

Whether they stand aside or endeavor to resist the movement, the result of the attitude will only be that... [the party leaders] will simply be swept aside by the rush of events, and the economic and the political struggles of the masses will be fought without them.<sup>44</sup>

There was the hope that “revolution advancing irresistibly to victory [would] bury the mistakes of the revolutionary party under the ruins of the society it overthrows,”<sup>45</sup> but the mistakes of the Revolutionary Committee which sought to lead the The Spartacist Uprising would be too great, the situation too hostile, the revolution too confined to one area, for it to be a true popular revolt.

Still, when given the choice to “stand aside” or participate, Luxemburg knew that there was no question. The revolution must continue and it is the duty of the revolutionary party to be

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<sup>42</sup> 6. Spartacist propaganda leaflet, box 1, “Rudolf Franz Collection,” The Hoover Institution, Stanford.

<sup>43</sup> Luxemburg, *Mass Strike*, 76.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>45</sup> Paul Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg: Her Life and Work*, trans. Edward Fitzgerald (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1940).

there alongside the workers, offering whatever support they can, at least in word if not in deed.

#### IV. Influence From Within

Upon Rosa Luxemburg's release from prison at the start of the November Revolution, she plunged into an immediate flurry of activity that did not stop until her death only two months later. The toll which prison had taken on her, both mentally and physically, was visible to all who knew her. Her hair had gone from black to white and she was very sick, "but her eyes shone with the old fire and energy."<sup>46</sup> She proceeded straight from the prison to the streets of Breslau where she spoke to gathering crowds. She departed from there immediately for Berlin where she single-handedly took on the writing of the party's literary body, *Die Rote Fahne*. "Without a thought for her own health or safety, she strained every effort,"<sup>47</sup> and every effort she made was dedicated to the revolution.

The revolution, as she knew, could not be achieved by one person, or even one party, but by everyone working in concert towards one common goal. Many of those who had been close to her before "now felt that she had lost all sense of proportion and reality; that she was rushing forward regardless of all obstacles,"<sup>48</sup> and while the latter was certainly true, the former could

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<sup>46</sup> Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg*, 288.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

not be farther from actuality.

Some around her also felt that Luxemburg was being drawn into a situation in which she had no control, that she was being strong-armed against her will by the more forceful voice of Karl Liebknecht. In a letter to fellow Spartacist leader Clara Zetkin, Luxemburg's secretary and friend, Mathilde Jacob expressed her rage towards Liebknecht only a few weeks after his and Luxemburg's death:

A long time back I ceased to value Karl... My hatred for Karl [Liebknecht] is well-founded. It is an emotional thing with me, but despite my political immaturity my emotions have never betrayed me. Our best people hate him.<sup>49</sup>

In her memoir, *Rosa Luxemburg and Her Friends in War and Revolution 1914-1919*, Jacob neglects to mention any of the feelings expressed in this letter. Perhaps out of respect for the dead, or for some other reason which can only be guessed at.

Jacob's letter is the only candid mention of Liebknecht as the cause of Luxemburg's death, and while Liebknecht was known for his inflammatory rhetoric, he had agreed with Luxemburg, at least during the first part of the revolution, to confine their work to agitation and propaganda. In speeches he decried the reputation Spartacists had received as advocates of terror and purveyors of a civil war.

The problem with his statements was, while they may have been true of the Spartacist leadership, many of the group's rank and file members were actually in favor of a more putschist

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<sup>49</sup> Jacob, *R.L. an Intimate Portrait*, 128.

program from the start. The decisions to occupy the *Berlin Lokal-Anzeiger* and *Vorwärts* buildings before and during the Spartacus Week, were not handed down from the top. Herein lies the problem of the Spartacists working from a purely agitational standpoint: by constantly advocating revolution and the overthrow of the ruling government, could they honestly say they were surprised at the results?

Before the Spartacists would become an established political party as the KPD, the way in which the organization functioned allowed for “doubtful elements” within the ultra-left to be included. These members, never mentioned by name, were subject to the will of Liebknecht, Luxemburg and the other Marxist-oriented leaders of the party; however, they personally advocated using terror as a revolutionary tool. While they “failed to gain the upper hand in the Spartacist League... they succeeded at times in causing local ‘revolutionary actions’ which did not receive the approval of Spartacist Leaders.”<sup>50</sup> These kind of actions were at least partially responsible for the reputation the Spartacists acquired as a far-left criminal element, although the small membership of the party and the infrequency with which these “revolutionary actions” occurred point to SPD and bourgeois propaganda as the real source for this unsavory standing.

When the Revolutionary Committee was formed of the leadership of the KPD, USPD and Revolutionary Shop Stewards, Luxemburg’s absence from the meetings limited her voice in the proceedings of Spartacus Week. As mentioned before, Luxemburg could not have succeeded in swaying the committee, and the decision to move forward with the overthrow of the government was made without her consent. While she backed it out of dedication to the other members of

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<sup>50</sup> Waldman, 99.

the committee and the workers in the streets, it was not in line with her preferred methods for revolution.

Luxemburg was not alone within the KPD's Central Committee in her feelings on the putsch. She reproached Liebknecht for his decision to go ahead with the program without first consulting the rest of KPD's leadership. She and the rest of the Central Committee were faced with a difficult decision:

It could not accept the object of the movement--the overthrow of the government--as its own, but at the same time it could not let itself be separated from the masses who had joined the movement. Despite the difference of opinion the party had to remain with the masses in order to strengthen them in their struggle against the counter-revolution.<sup>51</sup>

During the events of that week, Liebknecht was out of contact with the party leadership, either conferring with the Revolutionary Committee or in the streets with the fighting workers. His choice to participate at this level in the insurgency without the backing of the other KPD leaders would lead to their collective downfall. In light of this, it is hard not side with Mathilde Jacob when she holds him accountable for Luxemburg's death.

Although there were also elements within the Spartacist leadership that adhered more closely to Luxemburg's goals and strategies--most notably her former lover and constant comrade, Leo Jogiches, and Clara Zetkin, another former member of the SPD--none of them were present at the meetings of the Revolutionary Committee, so none of them could have stopped Liebknecht from rushing headlong into the plans for government overthrow. Had the

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<sup>51</sup> Clara Zetkin, *Um Rosa Luxemburgs Stellung zur russischen Revolution*, quoted by Frölich, 324.

KPD not backed the Revolutionary Shop Stewards and USPD within the Committee, the uprising would likely still have occurred, though it would be unclear whether or not the Spartacists would still be held responsible. Their standing as constant agitators for revolution and desire to remove the SPD government made them targets, which could have led to Luxemburg's death for some other reason unrelated to the events of Spartacus Week.

## **V. Impact of the Russian Revolution**

November 1917: With the whole of Europe still in the midst of the First World War, the Bolshevik Red Guard stormed the Russian capital of Petrograd, and initiated the beginning of the Soviet Union. The October Revolution (so named because of Russia's then use of the Julian calendar) was a continuation of revolutionary actions which had gripped the Empire for the last year. Earlier in 1917, angry at the state's seemingly endless participation in World War I and the conditions it created on the home front, the people of Russia rose up, deposing Czar Nicholas II, and installed in his place the Provisional Government. This government, a confederation of liberal and socialist politicians, would not last long.

Rather than seeking to conclude Russia's involvement in World War I, the Provisional Government wished to see the fighting through to victory. Many of the Russian people were, unsurprisingly, very upset at this prospect. With Lenin returned from exile to lead the Bolsheviks, the continuation of the revolution was inevitable.

The Bolshevik Revolution, like the Spartacist Uprising just over a year later, was the continuation of an "incomplete" bourgeois revolution. Both sought to bring about a new socialist state, one that could initiate the spread of socialism to the rest of Europe, and later, to the working classes of the entire world.

Writing from prison in Breslau, Luxemburg called the Russian Revolution “the mightiest event of the World War.”<sup>52</sup> Whether she agreed with Lenin’s policies was not the issue here. They had clashed before on the topic of the self-determination of nations<sup>53</sup> and would continue to disagree over how the revolution should continue, especially following the Russian peace negotiated at Brest-Litovsk<sup>54</sup> and Lenin’s concepts of dictatorship by the revolutionary party.<sup>55</sup> For Luxemburg, what was now important was that the Germans continue the international revolution.

Luxemburg castigated even her close friend Karl Kautsky, as well as other German socialists and Russian Mensheviks, who claimed that Russia was not ready for a socialist revolution. “It is not Russia’s unripeness which has been proved by the events of the war and the Russian Revolution, but the unripeness of the German proletariat for the fulfillment of its historic tasks.”<sup>56</sup> In a letter from prison to Karl’s wife Luise, Luxemburg further defended the Bolsheviks, though she admitted she was not happy with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk:

Yes, the Bolsheviks! Of course they don’t please me either with their peace-fanaticism. But after all--*they* are not to blame. They are in a straitjacket, and have merely the choice between two beatings and choosing the lesser. Others are responsible

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<sup>52</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*, 1.

<sup>53</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *The National Question*, trans. Horace B. Davis (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1976).

<sup>54</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, “The Russian Tragedy,” trans. Dario Romeo and Brian Baggins, *Spartacus*, No. 11 (1918): <http://marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/09/11.htm>

<sup>55</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*, 44-48.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

for the fact that the devil profits by the Russian revolution... Therefore let us sweep before our own doors. On the whole events there are glorious and will have incalculable results.<sup>57</sup>

Here Luxemburg partially excused the Bolsheviks, although she felt their actions “meant an enormous strengthening of the imperialist Pan-German policy and thus a lessening of the chances for a revolutionary rising in Germany.”<sup>58</sup> She believed that Lenin’s decision was based on “the unshakable faith in the European revolution of the proletariat as the sole way out;” now it would be up to the German workers and socialist party members to see the revolution through in order for it to succeed not only in Russia, but in Germany as well.

At the time that Luxemburg wrote “The Russian Tragedy,” the German Revolution had not yet come. *The Russian Revolution*, which she also composed in prison would not be released until after her death. Following German’s overthrow of the Kaiser, however, her opinion was still much the same, one of “enthusiasm... combined with the critical spirit.” While criticizing the Bolsheviks’ use of terror as a “fundamental weakness,” she blamed it on “the continuation of capitalism outside Russia” and again turned the lens toward Germany and the European proletariat, insisting:

If the European revolution takes place, the Russian counterrevolutionaries will not only lose [the support of their views from abroad], but--more importantly--their courage as well. In short, the terror in Russia is above all an expression of the

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<sup>57</sup> Rosa Luxemburg to Luise Kautsky, December 19, 1917, *Rosa Luxemburg Letters to Karl and Luise Kautsky from 1896 to 1918*, ed. Luise Kautsky, trans. Louis P. Lochner (New York: Robert M. McBride & Co.), 214-215.

<sup>58</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, “The Russian Tragedy.”

weakness of the European proletariat... [this] can only be healed by the European revolution. And this is coming!<sup>59</sup>

Though Luxemburg had previously opposed violent actions, here she was watering down the significance of the Bolsheviks use of terror in systematically eliminating their opponents. While it is not likely that she could have known during her imprisonment of the severity with which the terror was being implemented around the Russian countryside, it does not seem likely that this worried her. In her further analysis of the events in Russia, she mentions the events of the French Revolution and defends the Jacobins use of terror for the purpose of “saving the conquests of the revolution.”<sup>60</sup>

In looking at Luxemburg’s writings, the Russian Revolution’s connections to her changes in tactics and the push for an overthrow of the SPD government in Germany become apparent. Although she had no say in the KPD’s decision to call for violent government takeover during the events of Spartacus Week, her agreement to back them was couched in the idea that she must not only support the working class of Germany, but the international proletariat as well.

A parallel can be drawn from Luxemburg’s views of the November Revolution in Germany and the February Revolution in Russia, one which points to the incompleteness of these revolutions and the inevitability that each needed to continue further down the road to socialism.

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<sup>59</sup> Rosa Luxemburg to Adolf Warski, November-December 1918, *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*, ed. Stephen Eric Bronner (Boulder: Westview Press, 1978), 258.

<sup>60</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*, 13.

Luxemburg's critique of the Germans, both before and after November of 1918, was much harsher than that which she made of the Bolsheviks. Although the Bolsheviks were using violent means to seize power and to attempt to consolidate it, the Germans had stopped at the announcement of elections to a national assembly. If she abhorred the violence, she saw it as better than inaction. Additionally, in her apologetics of the Bolsheviks, she blamed their need to resort to these means on this German inactivity.

There is a dichotomy here which comes greatly into play in justifying her backing of the Spartacist Uprising. Even if she did not approve of its beginnings or the actions of Liebknecht--who here could be compared to Lenin in his quickness to act and fiery revolutionary speeches--she still preferred bloodshed to idleness. In her mind, the workers fighting in the streets were coming to the aid of their Russian proletarian brothers, though it is, at best, highly questionable that the German workers had even an inkling of this.

In the end it would come down to leadership. Liebknecht was no Lenin. The cry "Down with Ebert-Scheidemann regime!" offered an end to a moderate government, not the promise of better days found in "Peace, land and bread." The uphill battle which the Spartacists faced would be steeper than that of the Bolsheviks in Russia. Where the Provisional Government had succeeded in nothing, not even an end to the Russians' participation in World War I, the SPD in Germany had toppled the monarchy, ended the war, and set a date for national elections with universal suffrage. Popular support was key, and the Spartacists, with their limited membership, could not effectively lead the German people. As shown by the Revolutionary Committee's bungling of Spartacus Week, they could not effectively do anything.

While the Russian Revolution offered Luxemburg hope and appeared to be the beginning of a “glorious” future for socialism, for the time being, it would remain contained to Russia. Only later, at the end of World War II would the “revolution” spread, and by then, it was not a revolution, but a communist empire born from the very dictatorship of the party which Luxemburg had warned of.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*, 44-48.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Throughout the body of this text, I have sought to explain the situations which led to the Spartacist Uprising and the situations which took place during its short duration and to put both into the context of the life and work of Rosa Luxemburg. By trying to explain the reasons for her participation, the complex life of a social revolutionary and theorist is shown to be full of contradictions.

Luxemburg's life was in this way just like the life of anyone else, only lived out in the public eye and at the center of one of the most tumultuous times in modern history. The failure of the socialist revolution in Germany would give way to the authoritarian regimes of both the Nazis and the Soviets which would dominate German life for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The effect of this is still felt by the entire world, even today.

Through my research I hoped to discover what drove Luxemburg, a principled, thoughtful revolutionary to choose the path which she did. Was it a singular event that changed her attitude, or a series of them? Did her attitude actually change? The results I uncovered answered this question in three ways.

The first is Rosa Luxemburg's theory regarding the mass strike and its importance to the development and spread of the socialist revolution. In her essay "The Mass Strike," Luxemburg

discussed the importance of spontaneous popular uprising, with the First Russian Revolution as a case study. Taking place in 1905, Russia's first revolution led to the creation of a parliamentary body, which, for the first time in Russian history, limited the czar's autocracy. Although its power would prove to be extremely limited, this development was an important step for the Russian people, because it showed that they had the power to change their government.

Without the leadership of a revolutionary party, or any kind of coordination among insurgents, spontaneous strikes broke out across the Russian empire in an almost organic pattern. When the Spartacist Uprising began as a popular protest by German workers, Rosa Luxemburg saw it is a popular move from below which she must support to increase its chances of success. Throughout *The Mass Strike*, she highlighted the imperative that revolutionary uprisings must be popular, that is, of the people, and not a tool of the socialist party as many had come to accept it.

Second was the influence of other Spartacist leaders and membership. Even when the uprising began, Luxemburg disagreed with Karl Liebknecht and other Spartacists' idea that it should escalate into a full-scale revolution against the German government. What began as a protest against the government's firing of police chief Emil Eichhorn could have concluded more peacefully, or at least less brutally for the Spartacist leaders.

As recently as November of 1918, however, Spartacist League co-founder Karl Liebknecht had expressed his desire to refashion Germany as a socialist state. He declared it to be so at the beginning of the revolution, while at the same time the more powerful SPD had announced Germany a republic. Liebknecht's plans failed then, as they would during the Spartacist Uprising, because they did not have sufficient popular support. Because of the size

and scope of the protests against Eichhorn's firing, however, Luxemburg's dedication to the proletariat forced her to back the fighting, at least through words of encouragement if not actual revolutionary deeds.

The third explanation for Luxemburg's participation in the Spartacist Uprising was the success of the Bolsheviks during Russia's second and ultimate revolution of 1917. Where Luxemburg had previously been a critic of Lenin's tactics, especially the use of terror to consolidate power, she did show signs of a change of opinion following Germany's November revolution.

Bolshevik revolutionary achievements were the motivating factor for Luxemburg's change of heart. Because, according to Marx, the socialist revolution must be an international one, Luxemburg knew that the Germans and Soviets would have to work together to insure its success. If this meant a temporary change of tactics to ensure later revolutionary benefit, Luxemburg's work would be justified. While she may not have agreed with Lenin's tactics or the way in which the Bolshevik revolution had taken place, she could not say that they had not taken action. And while she may not have agreed with the beginnings of the Spartacist Uprising, at the very least, she could be assured that the German workers had finally made a move to continue the revolution instead of waiting for reform.

Without the discovery of new evidence which definitively explains Luxemburg's actions during the Spartacus Uprising, it is impossible to know her true feelings during this time or what ultimately led her to support what effectively became her death sentence. And while it may be interesting to guess about what *could* have happened in Germany—or Russia, for that matter—

had she survived, such theorization does not change the course of history. Considering Luxemburg's ill health upon her release from prison, it is even possible she could have died shortly after the Uprising, dulling her importance as a martyr to the socialist cause.

No, conjecture about what *could have been* is not an effective use of the analysis of this situation. Rather than wasting time creating a fictive version of events, we must take what we have learned and apply it to our lives and understanding of the world as it is today. And what is Luxemburg's place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What can be learned from her failure, and did she fail, or actually succeed in her ultimate aim? It depends on who you ask. The life and deeds of a socialist leader will be judged according to one's own personal political beliefs. But for a lifelong socialist who staked everything on the revolution, Luxemburg could not have asked for anything more than death at the hands of the opposition.

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