

*Contributi/6*

## *The Freedom to Think Differently*

### **Rosa Luxemburg's Democratic Critique of Leninism\***

Michele Fiorillo

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The search for a form of 'true democracy' – where the governors can potentially coincide with the governed – seems to be the central point of the political research and struggle of Rosa Luxemburg, as it was for Antonio Gramsci. Both of them co-founders of communist parties, in Germany and Italy respectively, they exercised their own strong critical view, in different moments, on the degeneration of the Soviet experience. Both practiced and theorized a 'counciliar' model of democracy, imagining it as a finally full participation of the people to the government of the 'common'. Luxemburg criticized particularly the idea of Lenin and Bolsheviks about the supremacy of a strongly centralized revolutionary party, claiming at the contrary for a well understood 'dictatorship of proletariat' conceived as a self-government of the working masses. Moreover, in the controversial manuscript on *The Russian Revolution* she was opposed to the dissolution of the Constituent assembly and to the limitation of civil rights perpetrated by the Bolsheviks. Conversely, in Luxemburg's opinion complete freedom was essential for a full emancipation and for the flourishing of people's power.

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#### **Prologue**

«Freedom is also the freedom of those who think differently». This statement by Rosa Luxemburg was shown as a slogan in East Berlin during a demonstration in January 1988 for the commemoration of her and Karl Liebknecht's murders<sup>1</sup>. The rediscovery of the Jewish-Polish leader of the German Spartacist League –

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<sup>1</sup> See T. Judt, *Postwar. A History of Europe Since 1945*, New York 2005, p. 612. More than hundreds of demonstrators were imprisoned or expelled.

together with Antonio Gramsci and György Lucács – was used by the New Left in the 1960s to criticize the old Russian ‘soviet’ regime<sup>2</sup>.

Similarly to Gramsci, Luxemburg was the co-founder of a communist party, after a long active membership in the social democracy<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, neither of them exercised power on a State level, nor was part of any totalitarian/dictatorial regime: both were exercising their own strong critical view, in different moments, on the Soviet/Bolshevik experience and its degeneration.

The phrase used by the demonstrators in Berlin came precisely from the essay *The Russian Revolution*, where the original wording was even stronger: «Freedom is *always and exclusively* freedom for the one who thinks differently»<sup>4</sup>.

A radical freedom, without any compromise with power.

### 1. Critique of revolutionary reason

*The Russian Revolution*, it is worth noting, was a reflection on the destiny of «the mightiest event of the World War»<sup>5</sup>, almost one year after its outbreak. This unfinished manuscript, written in prison in September/October 1918, was then published posthumously in early 1922 by her friend Paul Levi, right after the expulsion from the German Communist Party (KPD)<sup>6</sup>, whose he was the leader since March 1919. Naturally, Levi used this edition somehow as an instrument against his antagonists in the party, stressing the critiques addressed by Luxemburg towards Lenin’s and Trotsky’s policy after the Revolution<sup>7</sup> more or less paradoxically, because they were the same critiques that he opposed in the

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<sup>2</sup> «All of them had at one time disagreed with Leninist practices (in Luxemburg’s case even before the Bolsheviks took power); and all three, like so many others, had fallen into long neglect under the shadow of official Communist theory and practice» (ivi, p. 403).

<sup>3</sup> Established in November 1918, the *Spartakusbund* (Spartacist League) became the core of KPD (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*), which was founded at the end of December 1918. The League – whose leadership was shared between Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht – was the evolution of the *Spartakusgruppe*: organized by her, Franz Mehring and Clara Zetkin around the new magazine *Die Internationale* since 1914, after the approval of the war credits by the SPD (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*) in the Reichstag. The League left the party and joined for a while – until the creation of KPD – the USPD (*Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*: Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany), which had been established in April 1917 within the split of the German Social Democracy over the question of war and peace.

<sup>4</sup> R. Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*, in *Rosa Luxemburg or: The Price of Freedom*, ed. by J. Schütrumpf, Berlin 2008, p. 87. Italics added.

<sup>5</sup> Ivi, p. 59.

<sup>6</sup> This happened due to his denunciation of the uprising in Central Germany (March 1921) as a *coup* orchestrated by Russian advocates from the Communist International.

<sup>7</sup> «I believe that it is absolutely timely to analyze ideologically the true roots of the Russians’ errors. In my opinion, this will demonstrate their origin in a Leninist position such as the one Rosa Luxemburg was fighting twenty years ago», he wrote on 23 September 1921 to Clara Zetkin who had tried to stop the publication, following Lenin’s desire. Quoted in *Rosa Luxemburg or: The Price of Freedom*, cit., p. 58.

autumn of 1918. On the contrary, she never changed her mind<sup>8</sup>: not even at the start of German Revolution – of which she was the intellectual and political leader together with Liebknecht<sup>9</sup> – unlike some comrades of the Spartacist League, like Clara Zetkins or Franz Mehring, who tried to convey that she eventually defended the Bolshevik strategy<sup>10</sup>. They acted in this way especially under Lenin's pressure, who reduced Levi's determination of «re-publishing exactly those works of Rosa Luxemburg where she erred»<sup>11</sup> to an effort to find favour in bourgeoisie's eyes. In fact, it was Luxemburg herself who prepared the 'Spartacus programme' at the beginning of December 1918, which was adopted as one of KPD at the moment of the foundation at the end of the year. It was there that she rejected «any kind of socialist minority government and the practice of suppression and terror»<sup>12</sup> and maintained her ideas about «the majority principle in a socialist democracy with broad *active participation* of the proletarian masses»<sup>13</sup>.

However, in the manuscript the general tonality is one of 'critical solidarity' towards the Russian 'comrades' rather than hostility: the Bolshevik revolution is analyzed as the «very first experiment in proletarian dictatorship in world history»<sup>14</sup>. Here, Rosa Luxemburg's perspective is internationalist, as always: the mistakes of Bolsheviks would be potentially corrected by a revolution throughout Europe – and in this same perspective she was against the premature constitution of the Communist International (established in March 1919), taking into account the lack of communist mass organizations in Europe.

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<sup>8</sup> «Someone with a comprehensive world view such as Rosa just happens to be the same always: whether she produces the Spartakus manifesto or whether she criticizes the Bolsheviks, whether she writes articles or books, gives speeches or makes tactical decisions. Someone like that is always the same person, and it is precisely the existence of such people that is comforting», *ibid.*, in the same letter by Levi to Zetkin.

<sup>9</sup> «In January 1919, I attended a KPD meeting where Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were speaking. I gathered the impression that they were the intellectual leaders of the revolution, and I decided to have them killed. Following my orders, they were captured. One has to decide to break the rule of law»: so stated Captain Waldemar Pabst in 1962 concerning the murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht perpetrated on 15 January 1919 in Berlin. Quoted in *Rosa Luxemburg or: The Price of Freedom*, cit., p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> A persuasive confutation of these 'rumors' on a Luxemburg's 'retraction' is given by O. Luban, *Rosa Luxemburg's Critique of Lenin's Ultra Centralistic Party Concept and of the Bolshevik Revolution*, «Critique. Journal of Socialist Theory», XL, August 2012, 3, pp. 357-365.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in *Rosa Luxemburg or: The Price of Freedom*, cit., p. 57. But at the same time Lenin expressed his unchanged esteem in an article written in 1922, firstly published in «Pravda» on 16 April 1924: «But in spite of her mistakes she was — and remains for us — an eagle. And not only will Communists all over the world cherish her memory, but her biography and her complete works (the publication of which the German Communists are inordinately delaying, which can only be partly excused by the tremendous losses they are suffering in their severe struggle) will serve as useful manuals for training many generations of Communists all over the world» (V.I. Lenin, *Notes of a Publicist*, in Id., *Collected Works*, vol. 33, Moscow 1973, p. 210).

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in O. Luban, *Rosa Luxemburg's Critique of Lenin's Ultra Centralistic Party Concept and of the Bolshevik Revolution*, cit., p. 363: more precisely, with a concession to violence following the French Revolution paradigm, «proletarian terror should be used only as a strictly defensive weapon against counter-revolutionary attacks» (!).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, italics added.

<sup>14</sup> R. Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*, cit., p. 61.

## 2. Self-organization versus bureaucratization

A proper dictatorship of the proletariat, in the critic view of Luxemburg, had to be shaped as

the work of the class and not of a little leading minority in the name of the class – that is, it must proceed step by step out of the active participation of the masses; it must be under their direct influence, subjected to the control of complete public activity; it must arise out of the growing political training of the mass of the people<sup>15</sup>.

The potentiality of a self-organization of the masses was already stressed in her ‘instant-book’ on *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions* (1906), after having experienced the first Russian revolution in Warsaw, back then under Tsarist rule. She returned there in December 1905 from Berlin to join the comrades of the SDKPiL – the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania, which she co-founded in 1893. She had a main role in the clandestine propaganda and engaged in the struggle along with the workers united in a series of mass strikes, until an impressive general strike, which ended up in a bloody confrontation with soldiers.

In the pamphlet the relation between political leadership and spontaneity of the people is at stake: «The *element of spontaneity*, as we have seen, plays a great part in all Russian mass strikes without exception, be it as a driving force or as a restraining influence»<sup>16</sup>, and it has this role «not because the Russian proletariat is ‘uneducated’, but because revolutions do not allow anyone to play the schoolmaster with them»<sup>17</sup>.

The lack of a structured mass socialist party left a vacuum which was filled by a deep and speeded up ‘auto-education’ of the working class<sup>18</sup>. The eight-hour day – one of the main historical goals of socialist movement- was conquered in the revolutionary struggle, imposing it *de facto*, far away from the ineffective proclaims of the German social-democratic party (and trade unions) bureaucrats and «the stagnant waters of their *all-suffering parliamentarism*»<sup>19</sup>. The achievement was the result of a «grandiose *experiment*»<sup>20</sup>, based on the solidarity of all the workers leaving their place of work after eight hours. That

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<sup>15</sup> Ivi, p. 91.

<sup>16</sup> R. Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*, in *The Essential Rosa Luxemburg*, ed. by H. Scott, Chicago 2008, p. 148. Italics added.

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

<sup>18</sup> «The most precious, because lasting, thing in this rapid ebb and flow of the wave is its mental sediment: the *intellectual, cultural growth of the proletariat*, which proceeds by fits and starts, and which offers an inviolable guarantee of their further irresistible progress in the economic as in the political struggle» (*ibid.*, italics added).

<sup>19</sup> Ivi, p. 134, italics added.

<sup>20</sup> Ivi, p. 137, italics added.

was possible thanks to a collective decision taken in Saint Petersburg in October 1905 within the *general council of workers' delegates* (Soviet), the new democratic institution created by the autonomous experience of the masses<sup>21</sup>.

Moreover, an important heritage for the future was that «the principle of the capitalist 'mastery of the house'»<sup>22</sup> was overcome by the self-organization of workmen in committees, flourished during the struggles of 1905: «In the larger factories of all important industrial centers the *establishment of workers' committees* has, *as if by itself*, taken place, with which alone the employer negotiates and which decide all disputes»<sup>23</sup>. The sincere participation to this new process of democratization emerges also in a letter she sent to Karl Kautsky – good friend and still political ally within the SPD – and his wife Luise on February 5, 1906:

Workers everywhere are, *by themselves*, reaching agreements [...] The feeling of solidarity and brotherhood with the Russian workers is so strongly developed that you can't help but be amazed even though *you have personally worked for its development*. And then too, an interesting result of the revolution: in all factories, *committees, elected by the workers*, have arisen 'on their own', which *decide on all matters* relating to working conditions, hirings and firings of workers, etc.<sup>24</sup>.

However, it has to be underlined that in this description of the revolutionary events' development, the stress on spontaneity is somehow reduced by the use of inverted commas («'on their own'») or an hypothetical limitation («as if by itself»). In fact, mobilization and organization were somehow supported and stimulated («you have personally worked for its development») by the commitment of the party, even in the case of a small party turned to a mass organization 'overnight' thanks to a diffuse and intense activity.

In Luxemburg's opinion, the general rule that has finally to be learned is that the party has the role to drive forward the agitation initiated by the spontaneity of the people, without which there is no revolutionary possibility, as she expressed with an incisive theatrical metaphor:

it is high time for the working masses of social democracy to learn how to express their *capacity for decision and action*, and therewith to demonstrate their ripeness for that time of great struggles and great tasks in which they, *the masses, will be the actual chorus* and the *directing bodies will merely act the 'speaking parts'*, that is, will only be the interpreters of the will of the masses<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> At the same time, a bottom-up creation of new trade unions took place: «The workers threw *themselves* with fiery zeal into *the waves of political freedom* in order to use it forthwith for the purpose of the work of organization. Besides daily political meetings, debates, and the formation of clubs, the development of trade unionism was immediately taken in hand» (ivi, p. 136, italics added).

<sup>22</sup> Ivi, p.134.

<sup>23</sup> Ivi, italics added.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in H. Scott (ed.), *The Essential Rosa Luxemburg. Reform and Revolution & The Mass Strike*, cit., p. 105, italics added.

<sup>25</sup> R. Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike*, cit., p. 181. Italics added.

### 3. Against organizational centralism

The pamphlet was written in Kuokkala (Finland), in the hideaway where she had also the occasion to share her ideas on mass strike and revolution directly with Lenin. The interaction between economical and political struggle and the connected organizational problems became the terrain of their confrontation.

If they shared the critic against the immobility of SPD's parliamentary strategy<sup>26</sup>, stressing the potentiality of the mass strike and the novelty of the Soviets, they disagreed on the way to shape a socialist party.

Luxemburg had already criticized Lenin in the essay *Organizational Questions of Russian Social Democracy* (1904), due to his vision of a Central Committee as the true active core of the party, reducing the remaining structures to passive instruments of directives' implementation<sup>27</sup>. In opposition, she valorized the living subjectivity of the proletarian masses: «The social democratic movement is the first movement in the history of class societies to be premised in its every aspect and in its whole development on the *organization* and the *independent direct action of the masses*»<sup>28</sup>.

This was not a 'spontaneist' or 'anarchist' position, even though she was often blamed for it also within the SPD. In her opinion, an effective organization of the working class was obviously necessary in order to strengthen its potentiality. Conversely, Lenin's vision on that was to be considered ultra-centralistic, without a «positive creative spirit, but with the sterile spirit of the *night-watchman state*»<sup>29</sup>, i.e. exactly the type of State to be abolished according to one of the main goals put forward by the Marxist theories<sup>30</sup>. Actually, that was the eventual outcome of the Bolshevik revolution: the structure of the party was already including the shape of the further new State, dominated by an élite of 'revolutionary' orthodoxy's guardians. Probably aware of that kind of risks, Luxemburg was suggesting a more experimental approach, avoiding the pretension of having been illuminated by the truth: «the *mistakes* that are

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. *ivi*, p. 160: «A year of revolution has therefore given the Russian proletariat that 'training' that thirty years of parliamentary and trade-union struggle cannot artificially give to the German proletariat».

<sup>27</sup> «His line of thought is concerned principally with the control of party activity and not with its fertilization, with *narrowing* and not with *broadening*, with *tying the movement up* and not with *drawing it together*» (P. Hudis and K. B. Anderson (eds.), *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, New York 2004, p. 256) .

<sup>28</sup> *Ivi*, p. 251, italics added.

<sup>29</sup> *Ivi*, cit., p. 256.

<sup>30</sup> Particularly, the expression 'night-watchman State' comes from the first President of the General German Workers' Association, Ferdinand Lassalle, whose writings were read and appreciated by Luxemburg: «The bourgeoisie conceives the moral object of the state to consist solely and exclusively in the protection of the personal freedom and property of the individual. This is a nightwatchman's idea ... because it represents the state to itself from the point of view of a nightwatchman (*eine Nachtwächteridee*) whose whole function consists in preventing robbery and burglary» (F. Lassalle, *Arbeiter-Programm*, 1862, quoted in D. Forgacs (ed.), *The Gramsci Reader. Selected Writings 1916-1935*, introduction by E. J. Hobsbawm, New York 2000, p. 412).

made by a truly revolutionary workers' movement are, historically speaking, immeasurably more *fruitful* and more valuable than the infallibility of the best possible 'Central Committee'»<sup>31</sup>.

She deepened these critics in the manuscript *Credo: On the State of Russian Social Democracy* (1911), struggling for the unity of the Russian Social Democratic Party – whose her SDKPiL was connected – against the division between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, and particularly «against the *organizational centralism* of Lenin and his friends, because they wanted to secure a revolutionary direction for the proletarian movement by swaddling the party, in a purely mechanistic fashion, with an *intellectual dictator* from the central party Executive»<sup>32</sup>.

With the outbreak of World War I, and having been accused of high treason because of her propaganda for peace through the Spartacist magazine *Die Internationale*, Luxemburg was eventually imprisoned. During her captivity, she wrote *Die Krise der Sozialdemokratie* («The Crisis of Social Democracy», 1915), which became famous as *The Junius Pamphlet* due to the 'republican' penname she chose for the publication.<sup>33</sup> Here, she addressed her criticism about the hierarchic conception of politics within the debate on the SPD's betrayal and on the hypothesis of a revolutionary mass strike against the war that should have been organized by the party: «Revolutions are not 'made' and great movements of the people are not produced according to *technical recipes* that repose *in the pockets of the party leaders*»<sup>34</sup>.

#### 4. Into the party's pockets

The argument of the 'pockets', returns in the Rosa Luxemburg's definitive attack on the Bolsheviks doctrine, *The Russian Revolution*:

The tacit assumption underlying the Lenin-Trotsky theory of dictatorship is this: that the socialist transformation is something for which a *ready-made formula* lies completed *in the pocket of the revolutionary party*, which needs only to be carried out energetically in practice<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> P. Hudis and K. B. Anderson (eds.), *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, cit., p. 265, italics added.

<sup>32</sup> Ivi, p. 271, italics added.

<sup>33</sup> The pseudonym *Junius* – taken probably from Lucius Junius Brutus, the founder of the ancient Roman Republic – was the one used by an anonymous citizen to sign a series of public critical letters against the corruption of England under King George III, published between 1769 and 1772 in the London newspaper «Public Adviser».

<sup>34</sup> P. Hudis and K. B. Anderson (eds.), *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, cit., p. 148. Italics added. More precisely, «the existing degree of tension between the classes, the degree of intelligence of the masses and the degree or ripeness of their spirit of resistance - all these factors, which are incalculable, are premises that cannot be artificially created by any party» (*ibid.*). At the contrary, «the great historical hour itself creates the forms that will carry the revolutionary movements to a successful outcome» (*ibid.*): what can do the party is to prepare a general political platform and to clear slogans, towards a mass action which «will break out 'of its own accord' and 'at the right time'» (ivi, p. 149, italics added).

<sup>35</sup> R. Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*, in *Rosa Luxemburg or: The Price of Freedom*, cit., p. 87, italics added.

Using the Marxian metaphor on the necessary reversal of Hegel's dialectic, she also underlines as Lenin's *State and Revolution* described the socialist State as an equivalent of the capitalist one but standing on its own head, being somehow the State an instrument of domination of a class over the other. Against this simplified vision, Luxemburg brings out a fundamental difference: even though the bourgeois class was more or less already formed to rule, the working class needs a «political training and education of the entire mass of people»<sup>36</sup>. This training – something that she pointed out very often in her writings, as previously mentioned – was «the life element, the very air»<sup>37</sup> essential for the existence itself of a true dictatorship of the proletariat, which is in fact interpreted as «the rule of the broad masses of the people»<sup>38</sup>.

Moreover, she presents a strong defence of representative institutions, therefore criticizing Trotsky's arguments in *From October to Brest-Litovsk*, which justified the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly carried out by Lenin: among many, he blamed «the cumbersome mechanism of democratic institutions»<sup>39</sup>, which with regards to the electoral results were ultimately not able to keep the pace of the working masses' direct struggle. If in Trotsky's theory – as for many critical voices towards the classic parliamentary system – «a democratic body is the reflection of the masses at the end of the electoral period»<sup>40</sup>, Luxemburg recalls that historical experience demonstrated the opposite, given that «the *living fluid of the popular mood* continuously flows around the representative bodies, penetrates them, guides them»<sup>41</sup>. In her opinion, the main flaw of the Red Army's leader was avoid to consider «any *living mental connection* between the representatives, once they have been elected, and the electorate, any *permanent interaction* between one and the other»<sup>42</sup>. Here, it is incumbent to emphasize the

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<sup>36</sup>Ivi, p. 86. Antonio Gramsci had a similar concern when he wrote his famous *Noterelle on Machiavelli* [Notes on Machiavelli] in prison later on, presenting the necessity of a new collective Prince (the mass political party) as an instrument to elevate the people to the art of government, something earlier reserved exclusively to the ruling class.

<sup>37</sup>R. Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*, cit., p. 86.

<sup>38</sup>Ivi, p. 85.

<sup>39</sup>Trotsky statement quoted in ivi, p. 81.

<sup>40</sup>Ivi, pp. 81-82. More precisely: «every elected assembly reflects once and for all only the mental composition, political maturity and mood of its electorate just at the moment when the latter goes to the polling place» (ivi, p. 81).

<sup>41</sup>Ivi, p. 82, italics added. That happens even more during revolutionary times, when «the waves of popular feeling, the pulse of popular life, work on the representative bodies in most wonderful fashion» (*ibid.*).

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.* It is to be underlined that the qualification 'cumbersome' is rendered in a less harsh way within an 'authorized' American translation from the Russian version: «Marx called revolutions 'the locomotives of history'. Owing to the open and direct struggle for power, the working people acquire much political experience in a short time and pass rapidly from one stage to the next in their development. The *ponderous machinery of democratic institutions* lags behind this evolution all the more, the bigger the country and the less perfect its technical apparatus» (L. Trotsky, *From October to Brest-Litovsk*, New York 1919, p. 80, italics added).



vitalistic jargon used by Luxemburg when expressing the dynamics of democracy, as in the case of mass strike.

Vitality and creation appear to be the key of any emancipation. She points it out using expressions that could sometimes even seem to bring back John Stuart Mill's essay *On Liberty*:

Only experience is capable of correcting and opening new ways. Only unobstructed, *effervescing life* falls into a thousand new forms and improvisations, brings to light *creative new force, corrects itself all mistaken attempts*. The public life of countries with limited freedom is so poverty-stricken, so miserable, so rigid, so unfruitful, precisely because, through *the exclusion of democracy, it cuts off the living sources* of all spiritual riches and progress<sup>43</sup>.

## 5. Councils beyond representation?

All these positions were absorbed in the 'Spartacus Programme', directly drawn up by Rosa Luxemburg, published at first in the spartacist journal *Die Rote Fahne* on 14 December 1918 and finally adopted on 1 January 1919 by the KPD on the occasion of its founding Congress.

The envisaged goal to achieve is a society without the exploited and the exploiters, in which the forms of work should have shifted from the wage system to a cooperative one, and the means of production should have moved away from the monopoly of a class towards a *common property of all*. The steps for this radical transformation «can only be taken in hand and carried through *by the mass of the people themselves*»<sup>44</sup>: it cannot be an institutional process «decreed by any official body, commission or parliament», neither – unlike all previous revolutions – a struggle «led by a small minority of the people, who used the masses merely as an instrument»<sup>45</sup>. Could this last sentence be read as an allusion not only to the French Revolution, but also to the Bolshevik one, which repeated the 'Jacobin' model of insurrection inclusive of the subsequent Terror? What appears clear beyond any doubt is that the socialist revolution would be:

the first revolution which can only attain victory in the interest of the great majority of the population, and *through the actions of the great majority* of the population, and through the great majority of working people. The essence of socialist society consists in this, that the great mass of working people *cease to be ruled by others* and instead leave their political and economic life for themselves and direct it in conscious, *free self-determination*<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> R. Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*, cit., p. 88, italics added. In *On Liberty* (1859) Mill argued about «a quality of the human mind, the source of everything respectable in man either as an intellectual or as a moral being, namely, that his errors are corrigible. He is capable of *rectifying his mistakes, by discussion and experience*.» (J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, London 1864, p. 38).

<sup>44</sup> B. Fowkes (ed.), *The German Left and the Weimar Republic: A Selection of Documents*, Leiden 2014, p. 282, italics added.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, italics added.

But how could this 'auto-ruling' concretely work? Luxemburg believes that the solution lies in the institution of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, through which «from the topmost summit of the state to the tiniest local council the proletarian mass must replace the outmoded organs of bourgeois class rule»<sup>47</sup>.

This applies both to the political field and to the economical one, where «the workers can achieve control over the production and finally take over its actual direction»<sup>48</sup> through a process perpetrated by a *proletarian mass action* in the struggle against capital.

At this point, Luxemburg puts forward what seems to be a sharpened critic of the ongoing development in Russia, by using a powerful evangelical language:

The bare decrees of the supreme revolutionary authorities are in themselves empty words. Only the working class can make the word become flesh with its own deed<sup>49</sup>.

In short, the *autonomy* is the eventual key for any democratic progress promoted by the proletariat: «The emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself»<sup>50</sup>.

Nevertheless, there are some contradictions in the evolution of Spartacists' program, due to the compromise with the different components which were establishing the new German Communist Party. For instance, the representative structures, which in the writing on *The Russian Revolution* were considered as essential for democracy, are here in the program substituted completely by the Soviet system, with an abolition of parliamentary bodies and their substitution by Worker's and Soldier's Councils<sup>51</sup>.

However, the general inspiration towards a fulfillment of the democratic ideal – intended as the power by the whole people – remains here implied, as an unfinished promise of democratic socialism: «The dictatorship of the proletariat is a way of arming the compact mass of the working people with the *whole of political power* for the task of revolution, and it is therefore *true democracy*»<sup>52</sup>.

But, again, the precise meaning and concrete practice of 'dictatorship' (and 'dictatorship of the proletariat') and how that could be connected with a system of Councils is at stake.

In this complex dialectic – or maybe dilemma – what was certain in the mind of Rosa Luxemburg was the necessity to preserve a fundamental condition of *inclusive freedom*, beyond any restriction and privilege:

Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party – however numerous they may be – is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently. Not because of any fanatical

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

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

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Ivi, p. 283.

<sup>52</sup> B. Fowkes (ed.), *The German Left and the Weimar Republic*, cit., p. 283, italics added.

concept of 'justice' but because all that is instructive, wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on this essential characteristic, and its effectiveness vanishes when 'freedom' becomes a special privilege<sup>53</sup>.

Michele Fiorillo, Scuola Normale Superiore  
✉ [michele.fiorillo@coleurope.eu](mailto:michele.fiorillo@coleurope.eu)

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<sup>53</sup>R. Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*, cit., p. 87.