

Karl Marx

Rosa Luxemburg

Translated from German to English by Christian Fuchs

Abstract: Marx died on March 14, 1883. Exactly twenty years later, on March 14, 1903, Rosa Luxemburg's reflections on Karl Marx were published in German in *Vorwärts*, the newspaper of the Social Democratic Party of Germany. *tripleC* publishes an English translation of Luxemburg's essay on the occasion of Marx's bicentenary. Christian Fuchs' postface "Karl Marx and Rosa Luxemburg" asks the question of how we can make sense of Rosa Luxemburg's reading of Marx in 2018. Source of the German original: Luxemburg, Rosa. 1903. Karl Marx. *Vorwärts* 62: 1-2.

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"The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways;
the point is to *change* it"

Marx's 11th thesis on Feuerbach (1845, 5)

Twenty years ago, Marx laid his towering head to rest. And although we only experienced a couple of years ago what in the language of German professors is called 'the crisis of Marxism', it suffices to throw a glance at the masses that today follow socialism alone in Germany and at socialism's importance in all so-called civilised countries, in order to grasp the immensity of the work of Marx's thoughts.

If it mattered to express in few words what Marx did for the contemporary working class, then one could say: Marx has uncovered the modern working class as historical category, that is, as a class with particular historical conditions of existence and laws of motion. A mass of wage-workers, who were led to solidarity by the similarity of their social existence in bourgeois society and looked for a way out of their condition and partly for a bridge to the promised land of socialism, arguably existed in capitalist countries before Marx. Marx was the first who elevated workers to the working *class* by linking them through the specific historical task of conquering political power in the socialist revolution.

Class struggle for conquering political power was the bridge that Marx built between socialism and the proletarian movement that elementarily rises up from the ground of contemporary society.

The bourgeoisie has always shown sure instinct when it followed the proletariat's *political* aspirations with hatred and fear. Already in November 1831, when reporting on the working class' initial impulses on the continent to the French Chamber of Deputies, Casimir Périer¹ said: "Gentlemen, we can be relieved! *Nothing* politically has emerged from Lyon's labour movement". The dominant classes namely considered every political impulse of the proletariat as an early sign of the coming emancipation of the workers from the bourgeoisie's paternalism.

¹ Note [CF]: Casimir Pierre Périer (1777-1832) was a French banker and politician, who served as France's ninth Prime Minister (1831-1832).

It was only Marx who succeeded in putting working class-politics on the foundation of conscious class struggle and to thereby forge it into a deadly weapon directed against existing society's order. The *materialist conception of history* in general and the Marxian *theory of capitalist development* in particular form the foundation of contemporary social democratic labour politics. Only someone to whom the essence of social democratic politics and the essence of Marxism are equally a mystery can think of class conscious labour politics outside of Marxian theory.

In his *Feuerbach*, Engels (1886) formulated the essence of philosophy as the eternal question about the relationship between thought and being, the question of human consciousness in the objective, material world. If we transfer the concepts of *being* and *thought* from the abstract world of nature and individual speculation, whereto professional philosophers stick with iron determination, to the realm of societal life, then the same can in a particular sense be said about *socialism*. Socialism has always been the feeling for and the search for means and ways to bring being into accord with thought, namely to bring the historical forms of existence into accord with societal consciousness.

It was left to Marx and his friend Engels to find the solution to a centuries-old painstaking task. Marx has revealed history's most important driving force by discovering that the history of all hitherto-existing societies is *in the last instance* the history of its relations of production and exchange, whose development manifests itself under the rule of private property in the political and social institutions as class struggle. Thereby we gained an explanation of the necessary disparity between consciousness and being in all hitherto-existing forms of society, between human will and social action, and between intentions and results.

Humanity first uncovered the secret behind its own societal process thanks to Marxian ideas. Furthermore, the discovery of the laws of capitalist development also expounded the way that society took from its natural, unconscious stage, during which history was made in the manner that bees construct their honeycombs, to the stage of conscious, deliberate, true *human* history, wherein for the first time society's will and action come into accord with each other so that the social human will for the first time in millennia do *that* what (s)he *wants* to do.

To speak with Engels (1886/87, 270), this final "leap from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom" that only the socialist revolution will realise for society as a whole, already takes place *within the existing order* – in *social-democratic politics*.² With the Ariadne thread of Marx's theory in its hand, the workers' party is today the only party that *knows* from the historical point of view *what it does* and therefore does *what it desires*. This is the whole secret of social democracy's power.

The bourgeois world has long been puzzled by social democracy's astonishing resilience and steady progress. From time to time there are single senile silly-billies who, blinded by special moral successes of our politics, advise the bourgeoisie to learn a lesson from 'our example' and from social democracy's secret wisdom and idealism. They do not understand that what is a source of life and fountain of youth and energy for the aspiring working class-politics is deadly poison for the bourgeois parties.

² Note [CF]: It should be noted that in 1903, when Luxemburg published this text, no linguistic distinction was drawn between social democracy and communism. Communist parties had not yet been differentiated from social democratic parties. When Luxemburg therefore speaks of social democracy, she means movements and parties that aim at the fundamental transformation of society that brings about the abolition of capitalism.

Because what is it that in fact gives us the inner moral strength to endure and shake off the biggest repression, such as a dozen years of the law against socialists,³ with such laughing courage? Is it for instance the disinherited's keenness to pursue small improvements of their condition? The modern proletariat is unlike the philistine and the petty bourgeois not willing to become a hero for the sake of everyday comforts. The plain, sober bigotry of the world of English trade unions shows how little the pure prospect of small material gains for the working class is capable of creating a moral flight of fancy.

Is it the ascetic stoicism of a sect that as among the original Christians flickers up all the more brightly the more persecution there is? The modern proletarian is, as heir and pupil of bourgeois society, far too much a born materialist and a healthy sensual human of flesh and blood to alone draw love and strength for his ideas from torture in accordance with slave morality.

Is it, finally, the 'justice' of our cause that makes us so impregnable? The causes of the Chartists, the followers of Weitling,⁴ and the utopian socialist schools were no less 'just' than our cause, but nonetheless they all soon succumbed to modern society's resilience.

If the contemporary labour movement victoriously shakes the manes, defying all the acts of violence of the enemy world, then this is especially due to its calm understanding of the lawfulness of the objective historical development, the understanding of the fact that "capitalist production" begets "with the inexorability of a natural process [...] its own negation" (Marx 1867, 929) – namely the expropriation of the expropriators, the socialist revolution. It is this insight, from which the labour movement draws the firm guarantee of its final victory, not just impetuosity, but also the patience, the power to action and the courage to endure.

The first condition of successful politics of struggle is understanding the movements of the opponent. But what is the key to understanding bourgeois politics down to its smallest ramifications and the labyrinths of daily politics so that we are equally protected from surprises and illusions? The key is nothing more than the insight that one must explain all forms of societal consciousness in their inner turmoil from the interests of classes and groups, from the antagonisms of material life and in the last instance from "the conflict existing between the social forces of production and the relations of production" (Marx 1859, 263).

And what gives us the capability to adapt our politics to new appearances of political life, such as for example world politics, and especially to assess it, also without special talent and profundity, with the depth of judgement that gets to the core of the appearance itself, while the most talented bourgeois critics only scratch on its surface or get caught up in hopeless antagonisms at every glance into the depth? Again, nothing else than the overview of historical development based on the law that the "mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life" (Marx 1859, 263).

What is it that provides us above all with a measure for avoiding in the selection of struggles' ways and means aimless experiments and utopian escapades that are a waste of energy? Once the direction of the economic and political process of contemporary society has been understood, this understanding can act as a measure not just

³ Note [CF]: The Chancellor of the German Empire Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898) introduced the "Law against the public danger of Social Democratic endeavours" (better known as *Sozialistengesetz* – anti-socialist law) in 1878. This law was in effect until 1890 and prohibited meetings, publications, unions and associations guided by socialist principles.

⁴ Wilhelm Weitling (1808-1871) was an early communist writer and activist.

of the overall direction of our campaign plan, but also of every detail of our political efforts. Thanks to this guideline the working class has managed for the first time to transform the idea of socialism as the ultimate aim into daily politics' divisional coins and to elevate the everyday political detail work to the big idea's executive tool. There was bourgeois politics led by workers and there was revolutionary socialism before Marx. But only since Marx and through Marx has a *socialist working class-politics* existed that is at the same time and in the fullest meaning of both words *revolutionary Realpolitik*.

If we understand by Realpolitik a politics that only sets itself achievable goals that it pursues to obtain by the most effective means in the shortest time, then the difference between proletarian class-politics that stands in the Marxian spirit and bourgeois politics is that bourgeois politics is real from the standpoint of *material daily politics*, whereas socialist politics is real from the standpoint of the historical *tendency of development*. Exactly the same difference can be found between a vulgar economic theory of value that conceives of value as a thing in appearance from the standpoint of the market stall and Marxian theory that conceives of value as a societal relation in a particular historical epoch.

But proletarian Realpolitik is also revolutionary in that it goes in all the parts of its endeavours beyond the bounds of the existing order in which it operates, by consciously regarding itself only as the preliminary stage of the act that turns proletarian Realpolitik into the politics of the ruling, revolutionary proletariat.

In this manner, Marx's theory penetrates and enlightens everything – the moral power, by which we overcome perils; our tactics of struggle, even its last details; our critique of opponents; our everyday agitation, by which we win the masses; our entire work down to the tips of the fingers. And if we here and there indulge in the illusion that our politics is today with all its inner power independent from Marx's theory, then this only shows that our praxis speaks in Marx's terms although we do not know it, just like Molière's bourgeois spoke in prose.

It suffices that we visualise Marx's achievements in order to understand that bourgeois society made him its deadly enemy because of his concept of the working class's socialist revolution. It became evident to the dominant classes that overcoming the modern labour movement meant overcoming Marx. In the twenty years since Marx's death, we have seen a constant series of attempts to destroy Marx's spirit in the labour movement's theory and praxis.

The labour movement has from the start of its history navigated between the two poles of revolutionary-socialist utopianism and bourgeois Realpolitik. Wholly absolutist or semi-absolutist pre-bourgeois society formed the historical soil of the first. The revolutionary-utopian stage of socialism in Western Europe is by and large concluded by the development of bourgeois class rule, although we can observe single relapses into it until today. The other danger – getting lost in bourgeois Realpolitik's patchwork – has only emerged in the course of the labour movement's strengthening on the floor of parliamentarism.

The idea was that bourgeois parliamentarism would provide weapons for *practically* overcoming the proletariat's revolutionary politics and that the democratic union of the classes and social peace brought about by reforms should replace class struggle.

And what has been achieved? The illusion may have here and there lasted for a while, but the unsuitability of Realpolitik's bourgeois methods for the working class became immediately evident. The fiasco of ministerialism in France⁵, the betrayal by liberalism in Belgium⁶, the breakdown of parliamentarism in Germany⁷ – the short dream of “quiet development” strike by strike broke to pieces. The Marxian law of the tendency of the sharpening of social contrasts as foundation of class struggle asserted itself. And every day brings new signs and wonders. In the Netherlands, 24 hours of the railway strike like an earthquake overnight opened up a yawning gap in the middle of society, from which class struggle blazed out. Holland is on fire.⁸

So in the light of the “march of the worker battalions”, the base of bourgeois democracy and bourgeois legislation breaks down like a thin ice sheet and again and again makes the working class aware that its final goal can *not* be achieved on this base. All of this is the result of the many attempts to ‘practically’ overcome Marx.

Hundreds of industrious apologists have made the *theoretical* overcoming of Marxism their life-task and the springboard of their careers. What have they achieved? They have managed to create in the circles of the faithful intelligentsia the conviction that Marx's works are ‘one-sided’ and ‘exaggerated’. But even those of the bourgeois ideologues, who can be taken serious, such as Stammler⁹, have understood that nothing can be achieved with “‘a bit more or a bit less’ half-truths” against “such a deep and profound theory”. But what can bourgeois academia oppose to Marxian theory *at a whole*?

Since Marx has emphasised the historical standpoint of the working class in the fields of philosophy, history, and economics, bourgeois research in these fields has lost the thread. The classical philosophy of nature has come to an end. The bourgeois philosophy of history has come to an end. Scientific political economy has come to an end. In historical research, as far as there is not the dominance of an unconscious and inconsequent materialism, an eclecticism shimmering in all colours has taken the place of any unified theory. So there is the relinquishment of the unified explanation of the process of history, i.e. of the philosophy of history as such. Economics oscillates between two schools, the ‘historical’ one and the ‘subjective’ one. The one is a protest against the other. And both are a protest against Marx. The first one negates economic theory, i.e. the knowledge in this field, in principle in order to negate Marx, whereas the

⁵ Note [CF]: Luxemburg here alludes to the fact that the socialist Alexandre Millerand participated as Minister of Commerce, Industry, Posts and Telegraphs in the bourgeois French government of Prime Minister Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau from 1899 until 1902.

⁶ Note [CF]: In April 1902, there were wildcat strikes in Belgium that turned into a general strike for the abolishment of the plural voting system that privileged the rich. Under the impression of these working class protests, the leader of the Belgian Labour Party, Emile Vandervelde, introduced a motion for the introduction of universal suffrage to the Belgian Parliament. The motion was defeated. Introducing universal suffrage required another general strike in 1913 and took until 1919. Representatives of the Liberal Party were, just like the Belgian Labour Party, opposed to the absolute majority rule of the Catholic Party under Prime Minister Paul de Smet de Naeyer, but repeatedly opposed electoral reforms.

⁷ Note [CF]: Before the end of the German Monarchy in the November Revolution 1918 and the founding of the Weimar Republic, the German Reichstag did not have full political power. Political decisions were often taken by the government independent of the Reichstag.

⁸ Note [CF]: In 1903, Dutch railroad workers organised a general strike in solidarity with other workers for the right to strike and unionise.

⁹ Note [CF]: Rudolf Stammler (1856-1938) was a legal theorist and the main representative of neo-Kantian legal philosophy in Germany.

other one negates the only – objective – research method that first turned political economy into a science.

Certainly the social science book fair every month brings whole mountains of products that result from bourgeois industriousness to the market. And the thickest volumes written by ambitious, modern professors are put out at large-scale capitalist, machine-like speed. But in such diligent monographs either research buries its head like an ostrich into the sand of small, fragmented phenomena so that it does not have to see broader connections and only works for daily needs. Or research only simulates thoughts and “social theories” that are in the last instance just reflexes of Marx’s thoughts that are hidden under overloaded tinsel ornaments that appeal to the taste associated with commodities of the ‘modern’ bazaar. Autonomous flights of thought, a daring glance into the distance or an invigorating deduction are nowhere to be found.

And if social progress has again created a new series of scientific problems, then again only the *Marxian* method offers ways for solving them.

So it is everywhere just theorylessness, epistemological scepticism, that bourgeois social science is able to oppose to Marxian knowledge. Marxian theory is a child of bourgeois science, but the birth of this child has cost the mother her life.

Therefore, the upturn of the working class has knocked the weapons out of bourgeois society’s hands that the latter wanted to use on the battlefield against Marxian socialism. And today, 20 years after Marx’s death, bourgeois society is all the more powerless against him, but Marx more alive than ever.

Of course, contemporary society has one comfort left. While society struggles in vain to find a means to overcome Marx’s theory, it does not notice that the only real means of doing so are hidden in this theory itself. Because it is through and through historical, Marxian theory only claims temporally limited validity. Because it is through and through dialectical, it carries in itself the definite seeds of its own dissolution.

If we abstract from its unchanging part, namely from the historical method of research, then Marxian theory in its most general outlines consists of insights into the historical way that leads from the last ‘antagonistic’ form of society, i.e. societies that are based on class conflicts, to the communist society that is built on all members’ solidarity of interests.

Marxian theory is especially, just like earlier classical theories of political economy, the mental reflex of a particular period of economic and political development, namely the transition from the capitalist to the socialist phase of history. But it is more than just a reflex. The historical transition that Marx identified can namely not take place without Marxian knowledge having become the knowledge of a particular class in society, the modern proletariat. That Marx’s theory becomes the working class’ form of consciousness and as such an *element* of history is the *precondition* for the realisation of the historical revolution formulated in Marx’s theory.

Marx’s theory proves to be true continuously with every new proletarian who supports class struggle. So Marx’s theory is at the same time part of the historical process and is also itself a process. Social revolution will be *The Communist Manifesto*’s final chapter.

Consequently, the part of Marxian theory that is most dangerous to the existing order of society will sooner or later be ‘overcome’. But only *together* with the existing order of society.

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About the Author

Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919) was a leading socialist politician, Marxist theorist, anti-militarist and proponent of democratic socialism. She opposed the First World War, which led to her and Karl Liebknecht's departure from the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) and their founding of the Spartacus League. Luxemburg opposed war, nationalism and imperialism and wrote on issues such as the relationship of reform and revolution, the mass strike as political strategy, war and peace, the logic and development of capitalism, the Russian Revolution, or theory and praxis. Among her most important publications are *Reform or Revolution* (1899); *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions* (1906); *The National Question* (1908/1909); *Introduction to Political Economy* (1909/1910); *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913); *The Crisis of Social Democracy (The Junius Pamphlet)* (1916); *The Russian Revolution* (1918). On January 15, 1919, right-wing extremist paramilitaries murdered Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. Luxemburg has until today remained a highly influential figure in socialist politics and theory.

Postface: Karl Marx & Rosa Luxemburg

Christian Fuchs

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Karl Marx.

„Die Philosophen haben die Welt nur verschieden interpretiert, es kommt aber darauf an, sie zu verändern.“
11. Theze Marx' über Feuerbach.

Vor zwanzig Jahren hat Marx seinen gewaltigen Kopf zur Ruhe gelegt, und trotzdem wir erst vor wenigen Jahren das erlebt haben, was man in der Sprache der deutschen Professoren „die Krise des Marxismus“ genannt hat, so genügt ein Blick auf die Massen, die heute dem Socialismus allein in Deutschland folgen, auf seine Bedeutung im öffentlichen Leben aller sogenannten Kulturländer, um das Verh. des Marx'schen Gedankens in seiner Tiefenhaftigkeit zu fassen.

sich schon innerhalb der heutigen Ordnung – in der socialdemokratischen Politik. Mit dem Friedesfaden der Marx'schen Lehre in der Hand ist die Arbeiterpartei heute die einzige, die vom historischen Standpunkt weiß, was sie thut, und deshalb thut, was sie will. Darin liegt das ganze Geheimnis der socialdemokratischen Macht.

Die bürgerliche Welt stugt seit langem vor der erstaunlichen Unvernünftigkeit und dem steten Fortschritt der Socialdemokratie. Von Zeit zu Zeit finden sich einzelne greifenhafte Minderheiten, die durch besondere moralische Erfolge unsterblicher Politik geblendet, der Bourgeoisie raten, sich an uns „ein Beispiel“ zu nehmen, von der geheimnisvollen Weisheit und dem Idealismus der Socialdemokratie

Wenn wir nämlich als Realpolitik eine Politik erkennen, die sich nur erreichbare Ziele setzt und sie mit wirksamsten Mitteln auf dem bürgerlichen Wege zu verfolgen weis, so untercheidet sich die proletarische Massenpolitik im Marx'schen Sinne darin von der bürgerlichen Politik, daß die bürgerliche Politik vom Standpunkte der materiellen Tageserfolge real, während die socialistische Politik es vom Standpunkte der geschichtlichen Entwicklungstendenz ist. Es ist genau derselbe Unterschied wie zwischen einer vulgärökonomischen Werttheorie, die den Wert als eine dingliche Eigenschaft vom Standpunkte des Marktes, und der Marx'schen Theorie, die ihn als gesellschaftliches Verhältnis einer bestimmten historischen Epoche auffaßt.

Die Intensions-Gebühr
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Postgenosse: Adresse: „Socialdemokrat Berlin“.

Dead or Alive?

Rosa Luxemburg's reflections on Karl Marx were published in German on March 14, 1903, in *Vorwärts*, the newspaper of the Social Democratic Party of Germany. It is a text about Karl Marx's life and death, the life and death of his ideas and politics, the life and death of socialism, class struggles and alternatives to capitalism. Karl Marx was born on May 5, 1818, and died on May 14, 1883. First published on the occasion of Marx's 20th year of death, *tripleC* publishes the translation of Rosa Luxemburg's tribute to Marx as part of the celebration of his bicentenary. Just like Marx's critical political economic theory and progressive politics were much needed 20 years after his death, they are also needed and remain alive 200 years after his birth and 135 years after his death. Marx is alive as the ghost that keeps on haunting capitalism as long as the latter continues to exist.

Luxemburg stresses that bourgeois ideologues try to declare Marx's ideas and politics dead. They did so in 1903. They do so in 2018. Writing in 1903, she says: "In the twenty years since Marx's death, we have seen a constant series of attempts to destroy Marx's spirit in the labour movement's theory and praxis". 115 years later, the situation is not so different. Much attention is given to Marx on the occasion of his bicentenary. One can discern a bourgeois from a socialist engagement with Marx: bourgeois readings of Marx today argue that he was wrong and his ideas died with him or were already dead while he was alive. What they mean is: "TINA – There is no alternative to capitalism". Socialist readings acknowledge two facts: (a) Marx's ideas and politics continue to be of high relevance for understanding and criticising contemporary capitalism. (b) Marx's thought is dialectical and historical, which means that his basic categories have also evolved with the history of capitalism and the development of Marxian theory. They are not static and fixed, but need to be dialectically developed for today.

There is a dialectic of continuity and change of capitalism that manifests itself in the way that Marxian theory uses Marx's categories to explain capitalism today.

Many of us are today probably less optimistic than Rosa Luxemburg in 1903 about socialism's subjectivity because far-right ideology has in recent years been much more strengthened than left worldviews and politics. But in objective terms, socialist and Marxian analyses and politics remain absolutely vital: Capitalism has since 2008 been in a deep crisis that has evolved from an economic into a political and ideological crisis. It cannot be ruled out that a new World War will be the result of proliferating new nationalisms. Capitalism's crisis and the high levels of inequality, precarious life and precarious labour in the world do not just show how much we need Marx's ideas today. The political-economic situation evidences the need of socialism as an alternative to capitalism and social struggles for democratic socialism and socialist humanism.

Bourgeois Readings of Marx

When the socialist movement became larger and larger at the time of Rosa Luxemburg, bourgeois thinkers' criticisms of Marx proliferated. So for example in 1896, Eugen Böhm-Bawerk published *Karl Marx and the Close of His System*. Böhm-Bawerk came from an aristocratic family (his full family name was Böhm *Ritter von* Bawerk) and was Minister of Finance of the Austrian part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire from 1895 until 1904. At the very start of his essay, Böhm-Bawerk (1949/1896, 3) leaves no doubt that he advances a critique of Marx because the latter had become known to "wide circles of readers". Böhm-Bawerk for example argues that the "fundamental proposition that labour is the sole basis of value" is "dialectical hocus-pocus" (Ibid., 77) and that Marx's theory is "a house of cards" (Ibid., 118). Today, also, criticisms of Marx proliferate together with the wider attention that is given to his works. So for example ideological media such as *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, one of the ideological mouthpieces of German capital, claim that Marx was a "false prophet" and that "his central predictions were quite wrong" (FAZ 2017).

How right Marx's assumption was that a theory of economic value is a theory of time and labour in capitalism, still becomes evident in at least two respects today: a) Capital regularly reacts negatively to demands for the legal reduction in working hours without wage cuts. b) There is a tremendous mismatch between those working overtime on the one hand and those who are unemployed or precariously employed or conduct unremunerated labour on the other hand. Capital tries to maximise the hours worked per year by a single employee and to maximise the average amount of commodities workers produce per unit of time in order to increase profits. "Economy of time, to this all economy ultimately reduces itself" (Marx 1857/58, 173).

The Working Class

Luxemburg stresses that Marx's most important insight was that production, class relations, the exploitation of the working class and class struggles form the heart of modern, capitalist society. Given Luxemburg's stress on the importance of the working class in Marx's works, politics and thought, reading her text today brings up the questions: Who is part of the working class today? What are the prospects for working class struggles?

The composition and qualities of the working class have changed since the times of Marx and Luxemburg. Class theory today needs to account for phenomena such as precarious freelance labour, knowledge and service labour, the transformation of labour by digital media technologies (digital labour), the vast amount of the unemployed, new forms of unremunerated labour, etc. In addition, working-class consciousness

poses a complex problem today whose analysis requires the combination of class analysis and ideology critique. Where is the working class today? Who is part of it? What does its consciousness look like? What are the prospects for the self-emancipation of the working class today? Peter Goodwin (2018) in his contribution to this special issue pinpoints these and other important questions that Marxist theory needs to answer today in respect to the transformation of society's class structure.

Luxemburg speaks of the "immensity of the work of Marx's thought", whereby she points to the fact that Marx was an intellectual worker. He partly worked as a journalist to earn a living, but by and large depended on Engels and other sources of funding for financing his and his family's life. He had to lead a life in poverty. Today, as the general intellect has become an immediate productive force, intellectual work has become generalised. Higher education and as a consequence highly skilled labour has become much more prevalent. Knowledge work has become an important form of labour accounting for a significant share of value-added. We have experienced the rise of mass intellectuality. Mass intellectuality has under capitalist conditions been accompanied by new forms of precarity and exploitation and does not imply that knowledge workers are automatically conscious of their class status.

Praxis

Luxemburg's text shows a somewhat exaggerated historical optimism that considers socialist revolution as highly likely. But these passages should not be mistaken for historical determinism and the automatic breakdown of capitalism. In the paragraph where she refers to the passage from Marx's capital that says that capitalism creates its own negation, Luxemburg uses the conditional form "If the contemporary labour movement [...wins]", which indicates that the "final victory" is all but certain and depends on the unpredictable outcomes of class struggles.

In the context of the First World War, she stressed this openness of the historical process in a pointed manner by arguing that in situations of severe crisis we face the choice between "the reversion to barbarism" and socialism (Luxemburg 1915, 388). "*This world war* means a reversion to barbarism. The triumph of imperialism leads to the destruction of culture [...] Thus we stand today, as Friedrich Engels prophesied more than a generation ago, before the awful proposition: either the triumph of imperialism and the destruction of all culture, and, as in ancient Rome, depopulation, desolation, degeneration, a vast cemetery; or, the victory of socialism, that is, the conscious struggle of the international proletariat against imperialism, against its methods, against war" (Ibid., 388-389). "Socialism will not fall as manna from heaven. It can only be won by a long chain of powerful struggles" (Ibid., 388).

Luxemburg in her essay makes clear that the transition from capitalism to communism can only become a reality if the content of Marx's theory guides political consciousness. The implication is that if ideologies (such as nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-socialism, neoliberal entrepreneurship, etc.) and other developments forestall critical consciousness and critical action, then capitalism will continue to exist (unless society as such breaks down because of nuclear war or other disasters).

Norman Geras writes in his book *The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg* that Luxemburg's Marxism is radically different from "that determinist science of iron economic laws which is the usual foundation of fatalism and spontaneism" (Geras 2015, 19). He argues that passages stressing necessity and chance of social development can be found next to each other in many of Luxemburg's works. Formulations such as the one about "socialism or barbarism" imply that "[t]here is not one direction of development, there are several, and the role of the proletariat under the leadership of its party is not

simply to accelerate the historical process but to decide it. Socialism is not the inevitable product of iron economic laws but an ‘objective possibility’ defined by the socio-economic conditions of capitalism” (Geras 2015, 28). Geras points out that for Luxemburg, barbarism signifies capitalism’s collapse. Every economic crisis is a partial collapse of capitalism. But barbarism also entails fascism, warfare, genocide, nuclear devastation, the ecological crisis, etc., which are all immanent potentials and realities of capitalism. So capitalism itself is barbarism. For Luxemburg, the collapse of capitalism and the creation of socialism are not identical (Ibid., 35). Luxemburg’s interpretation of Marx fuses “objective laws with the revolutionary energy and will, which, on the basis of that theory, attempt actually to change the world” (Ibid., 37).

It should be noted that in the passage from *Capital Volume 1* that Luxemburg discusses, Marx (1867, 929) speaks of a “natural process” and not, as incorrectly translated in the version used in the Marx & Engels Collected-Works, of a “law of Nature” (see Fuchs 2016, 69-70, for a discussion of the translation of this passage from German to English). The difference is that in 19th-century science, laws of nature were considered deterministic, whereas processes in nature always have a certain level of unpredictability. The full passage reads:

“But capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a natural process, its own negation. This is the negation of the negation. It does not re-establish private property, but it does indeed establish individual *property on the* basis of the achievements of the capitalist era: namely co-operation and the possession in common of the land and the means of production produced by labour itself” (Marx 1867, 929).

What Marx says here is that communism is the negation of the negation of capitalism and entails co-operative work based on the common ownership of land and the means of production. Capitalism negates itself in its own development through crises. Communism is capitalism’s negation of the negation. The preceding paragraph ends with Marx’s famous call and demand that the “expropriators are expropriated” (Ibid.). This formulation implies that the process Marx talks about only takes place if there are active subjects who in the course of a revolution take the means of production into common ownership. The question of the revolutionary negation of the negation is for Marx not one of automatic breakdown, but of class struggle and revolution (see Fuchs 2016, 322-324 for a detailed discussion of this passage).

Materialism

Luxemburg stresses Marx’s materialist concept of society. But what does it mean that the production of material life conditions society, including individual and collective consciousness? Matter in society is neither simply the economy nor tangible things we can touch. By matter in society, Marx refers to the process of social production. That consciousness is grounded in material life means that the human individual, its thoughts and language, are not isolated and cannot exist in isolation, but only in and through social relations with other humans that are relations of production, in which they co-produce the economy, political and cultural life: “The ideas which these individuals form are ideas either about their relation to nature or about their mutual relations or about their own nature. It is evident that in all these cases their ideas are the conscious expression – real or illusory – of their real relations and activities, of their production, of their intercourse, of their social and political conduct. [...] Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc., and precisely men conditioned by the mode

of production of their material life, by their material intercourse and its further development in the social and political structure” (Marx and Engels 1845/46, 36). The implication is that ideas, communication, politics, culture, art, science, philosophy, etc. do not form a superstructure detached from an economic base, but are themselves realms of economic production that have at the same time non-economic qualities. Whereas the base/superstructure metaphor is misleading, it is preferable to talk about the material character of society as a dialectic of the economic and the non-economic.

Left Socialism’s Revolutionary Realpolitik

Luxemburg interprets the politics that Marx stands for as revolutionary Realpolitik. She opposes revolutionary Realpolitik to “revolutionary-socialist utopianism” and “bourgeois Realpolitik”. At the time of Luxemburg, the bourgeois Realpolitik of the Left took on the form of revisionist social democracy that stood under the influence of Eduard Bernstein’s doctrine of reformism and society’s mechanical evolutionary development into socialism. Left utopianism took on the form of the anarchist propaganda of the deed.

Isn’t the situation of the Left today quite similarly facing the two dead ends of utopianism and bourgeois Realpolitik? On the one end, we find bourgeoisified social democrats, who advance a purely reformist parliamentary politics that has succumbed to neoliberal ideology. The meaning of social democracy today is as a result completely opposed to the meaning it had at the time of Luxemburg as well as at the time of Marx. On the other end, we find radical social movements, who believe in the power of horizontalism and prefigurative politics. They limit politics to civil society and in an anarchist manner want to change society without taking power. Such movements overlook that the state is itself an important terrain of struggle, that it is a mistake to leave this battleground to bourgeois parties, and that changing society simply cannot start from the outside of society, but requires power and resources that come from the inside of the system and are in a dialectical process of revolutionary sublation turned from the inside out. So whereas contemporary social movement politics is by and large a version of abstract, idealist anarchist romanticism, social democracy has completely adapted to the system. Rosa Luxemburg reminds us that Marx argued for the politics of revolutionary reformism that is based on a dialectic of reform and revolution. Parliament and governments are terrains of struggles that should be strategically appropriated for improving the conditions of struggles. The Left needs both a civil society wing and a party that interact dialectically.

If the Left does not want to leave politics to the forces that dominate today – nationalists, the far-right and neoliberals –, then it needs to reinvent a left socialism that in a similar vein to the political understanding of Marx and Luxemburg is based on dialectics of party/movements, organisation/spontaneity, leadership/masses, reform/revolution. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2017, 278) argue in this context: “The taking of power, by electoral or other means, must serve to open space for autonomous and prefigurative practices on an ever-larger scale and nourish the slow transformation of institutions, which must continue over the long term. Similarly practices of exodus must find ways to complement and further projects of both antagonistic reform and taking power”.

Against Positivism

Rosa Luxemburg in her reflections on Karl Marx also advances a critique of positivist science and positivist social theory. Positivist research is eclectic, fragmented, theoryless, and follows trendy fashions: “Autonomous flights of thought, a daring glance

into the distance or an invigorating deduction are nowhere to be found". Positivism cannot explain society's big problems and questions, the large connections of moments within society. It lacks a focus on society as dialectical totality. The academic war that neoliberal academia and postmodernism have for decades waged against Marxist theory has in contemporary society resulted in an academic landscape that is quite similar to the one that Luxemburg criticises.

There is much talk about interdisciplinarity, but in reality interdisciplinarity lacks critical theory and philosophy and is little more than a fancy catchword that aims at turning the university into a business school and corporation and research via the focus on STE(A)M into corporations' and capitalism's vassal. In the social sciences and humanities, postmodernism has resulted in a focus on small-scale micro-studies (typically studies of micro-phenomenon A in country or city B), a neglect of understanding society as totality, and a neglect of the development of grand social theories. While academia gets ever more uncritical, society's global problems get worse. The rise of computational social science and big data analytics is a typical example of how the focus on positivism (in this case via large-scale data analysis) and the lack of grand theories threaten and destroy the critical potentials of the social sciences and humanities (Fuchs 2017). Marxian theory poses a counter-model. It is a true form of inter- and transdisciplinarity that allows situating specific phenomena in their broadest academic and societal context and aims at producing knowledge that helps advancing human emancipation.

200 years after Marx's birth, his approach is urgently needed in research, theory, politics and society at large. That 'Marx is needed' means nothing more than that the critique of capitalism and class is an urgent theoretical and political task. Only Marxian theory and praxis can advance knowledge and a form of politics that help us to overcome the severe problems posed by nationalism, inequalities, ecological devastation, authoritarianism, wars, genocides, and economic and political crises. We need to repeat Marx today.

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