

Lenin- Rosa Luxemburg debate

Rosa Luxemburg as well as Lenin developed from Social Democracy, in which both played important roles. Their work influenced not only the Russian, Polish and German labour movement, but was of worldwide significance. Their names are inseparably entwined with the re-organization of the labour movement during and after the World War, and both were Marxists to whom theory was at the same time actual practice.

On the National Question

Lenin, believed like that movements for national independence were to be regarded as progressive. In his polemic against Rosa Luxemburg he asserts that the demand for the right of self-determination of nations is revolutionary for the reason that “this demand is a democratic one which is not at all different from the other democratic demands.”

Thus it becomes clear that to Lenin nationalist movements and wars were nothing other than movements and wars for democracy, in which the proletariat is obliged to participate, since to him the struggle for democracy was of course the necessary precondition of the struggle for socialism.

While to Lenin prior to the Russian Revolution national wars and movements for liberation were a part of the general democratic movement, after the revolution they became a part of the proletarian world-revolutionary process.

Lenin’s position, appeared to Rosa Luxemburg as thoroughly false. In her ‘Junius Pamphlet,’ which came out during the War, she states her own standpoint briefly as follows famous ‘right of self-determination of nations’ is nothing but empty petty-bourgeois phraseology.”

Rosa Luxemburg accounts for this false national policy of Lenin’s as a “variety of opportunism” calculated to “bind the many foreign nationalities present in the Russian Empire to the cause of the revolution”; like the opportunism with respect to the peasants, “whose land hunger was satisfied by the liberty to seize the estates of the nobility and who in this way were to be kept loyal to the revolution.”

Even though Rosa Luxemburg, from her familiarity with Russian conditions, was very well able to understand the Leninist policy and to analyze the basis for it as no other Marxist could do, she nevertheless came out with full force against the design to form from this special Russian situation a recipe for the solution of the revolutionary tasks of the workers throughout the world.

The national liberation movements in the colonies and those of the national minorities in the capitalist countries, were supported by the Bolsheviks, because in this way imperialist intervention of the capitalist countries in Russia was weakened.

She said that the adventures of the Communist International in its endeavours to make of itself a worker and peasant international are recognised as blunders; instead of furthering, they disintegrated the revolutionary movement against capitalism

World Socialist Revolution

Hence it was clear to Lenin that the Bolsheviks in Russia had to seize the power, but also that the Russian revolution must be made a European and hence a world revolution if it was to lead to socialism. On the basis of the objective situation resulting from the World War, Lenin was no more able than Luxemburg to conceive that Russia could hold out against the capitalist powers if the revolution failed to spread into Western Europe. Rosa Luxemburg however much she criticized the Bolsheviks from the viewpoint of the needs of the world revolution, and she sought constantly to trace their economic retreats back to the failure on the part of the proletariat of Western Europe to aid them.

Views on communist party

Lenin was a practical politician. It was essentially only as a tactician that he distinguished himself from the theoreticians of the Second International. What they sought to attain along democratic ways, he attempted to win by revolutionary means. Not with speeches in parliament, but with force on the real field of the class struggle, he wanted to realize socialism for the workers. By means of his party, he wanted to make the revolution for the masses, in that the party won the masses to itself. The power had to come into the hands of the Bolsheviks, in order that the exploited of Russia might be liberated. The power had to be in the hands of the Bolsheviks in order that world capitalism might be overcome by revolution. The appropriation of political power through the party was the beginning and end of the Leninist policy a policy which has often been acclaimed as clever and flexible, but in reality was purely opportunistic.

Luxemburg stated that Lenin had declared on the fourth anniversary of the October revolution, and this revolution was carried through with the aid of the peasantry not by the party. The Bolsheviks had power, and they constantly balanced the opposition between peasants and workers in such manner that power could be kept.

In contradistinction to Lenin, for whom, quite in keeping with his general position, organization and the conquest of power for the party was the necessary presupposition for the victory of socialism, Rosa Luxemburg's glance was directed to the class needs of the proletariat. Furthermore, while Lenin's theory and practice were tied up mainly with the backward conditions of Russia, Rosa Luxemburg constantly took as her starting point the more highly developed capitalist countries and hence was incapable of seeing in the 'historical mission' of the working class a party-and-leadership problem. She laid more weight upon the spontaneous mass movements and the self-initiative of the workers than upon the growth of the organization and the quality of the leaders. Thus she differed fundamentally from Lenin in

her appraisal of the factor of spontaneity in history and hence also as regards the role of organisation in the class struggle.

Spontaneity and the Role of Organization

Lenin stated that the weaknesses of organization are to him the weaknesses of the labour movement itself. The struggle must be organized, the organization planned; all depends on that and the correct leadership. According to Lenin, "the only serious principle of organization for our movement is the most absolute secrecy, the strictest selection of members, the forming of professional revolutionists.

Rosa Luxemburg on the other hand stressed on the spontaneity of the workers rather than an organizational framework. With reference to the Russian mass-strike movement of 1905 she says: "There was no predetermined plan, no organized action, because the appeals of the parties could scarcely keep in pace with the spontaneous rising of the masses; the leaders had scarcely time to formulate the watchwords of the on-rushing crowd."

Rosa Luxemburg said even though the self-leadership of the workers should lead to blunders and false steps, Rosa Luxemburg is nevertheless ready to take all this into the bargain, for she is convinced that "even mistakes which a truly revolutionary labour movement commits are, in historical perspective, immeasurably more fruitful and valuable than the infallibility of the very best 'central committee.'

Though Luxemburg and Lenin remained at odds on decisive questions of revolutionary tactics and on many questions of revolutionary principle they had set themselves the same task the revolutionary revival of the labour movement and the overthrow of capitalist society on a world-wide scale.