

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION AND LENINISM OR MARXISM?, by
Rosa Luxemburg, Introduction by Bertram D. Wolfe, U of M Press, 1961

Since I'm concentrating on the question of the Party, I will not summarize her critique of the RR except the last chapter (8) "Democracy and Dictatorship". Whereas she begins comparing Lenin-Trotsky to Kautsky, and even goes further in criticizing Trotsky's "we have never been idle worshippers of formal democracy", to extend it to Cunow, Lensch, and Parvus, she at once turns to the serious Marxist analysis by showing that, of course, they would not be that way, i.e. "throw socialism on the scrap heap all..." which she answered: "Trotsky and Lenin are the living refutation of this answer." and from then on, her criticisms are quite excellent:

1st, in counterposing socialist to bourgeois democracy, the purpose of conquering political power is "to create a socialist democracy to replace bourgeois democracy -- not to eliminate democracy altogether."

2nd, "Socialist democracy begins simultaneously with the description of class rule and of construction of socialism. It begins at the very moment of the seizure of power by the socialist party. It is the same thing as the dictatorship of the proletariat. Yes, dictatorship!"

3rd, she returns to causes and effects and shows that it is damn difficult times; the imperialists are attacking, and the Russians have to work under "devilishly hard conditions". The danger begins only when they make a virtue of necessity and want to freeze into a complete theoretical system, forced upon them by these fatal circumstances, and want to recommend them to the international prol. as a model of socialist tactics."

4th, she then proceeds to show that nobody expects miracles from them. We know exactly how imperialism has strangled and exhausted the country. We know also that "Lenin and Trotsky and their friends were the first, those who went ahead as an example to the prol. of the world; they are still the only ones up to now who can cry with Hutton: 'I have dared!'"

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Her final 2 sentences therefore is the real Marxist critique: "In Russia, the problem could only be posed. It could not be solved in Russia. And, in this sense, the future everywhere belongs to Bolshevism."

Now then, RL's 1904 article, "Organ's Questions of the Social Democracy", which Wolfe has dared title, "because it's more attractive" as ~~YES YES YES YES~~ ~~XXXXXXXX~~ "Leninism or Marxism". This much quoted and misquoted ~~critique~~ critique by RL of Lenin's "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back", has some good points, but stated in ~~too~~ abstract terms. That is to say, she is right in criticizing Lenin's granting altogether too many privileges to the Central Committee, like naming all local committees of the Party, but then she, herself, throws the usual ^{naming of them as} "Blanquist", and does not answer one single concrete question that Lenin raised about who really was the majority and who the minority in the 1903 Congress, and the same applies to the editorship of the paper.

It is here that she gets to be especially sharp in an uncalled for form as if in the previous section she was taking up only general principles and leaving room for having to work illegally in Russia, yet: "However, the military ultra-centralism cried up by Lenin and his friends is not the product of accidental differences of opinion. It is said to be related to a campaign against opportunism which Lenin has carried to the smallest organizational detail."

"First, it is important to point out that the glorification of the supposed genius of proletarians in the matter of socialist organization and a general distrust of intellectuals as such are not necessarily signs of 'revolutionary Marxist' mentality." (p. 96)

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And she shows that people, intellectuals and unMarxists use the very same kind of attack on intellectuals in asking them to go to the people -- like the Narodniks, like Tolstoy -- and bowing down to "calloused hands of labor". And then further shows that Lassalle had founded the General Assn. of German Workers precisely with such extreme centralism as Lenin espouses, and that the Marxist Eiserachists opposed to it autonomy, and whereas they did it in a confused way, "Yet, they contributed vastly more to the awakening of class consciousness of the German masses than the Lassalleans."

She correctly keeps contrasting "the life of a small sect or a private circle" as against a strong historic current.

(p. 105) "Marxist theory offers us a reliable instrument enabling us to recognize and combat typical manifestations of opportunism. But the socialist movement is a mass movement. Its perils are not the product of the insidious machinations of individuals and groups. They arise out of unavoidable social conditions. We cannot secure ourselves in advance against all possibilities of opportunist deviation. Such dangers can be overcome only by the movement itself -- certainly with the aid of Marxist theory but only after the dangers in question have taken tangible form in practice."

(p. 108) "Let us speak plainly. Historically, the errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee."

She goes, i.e. (20) but to (20)

"Cleverness"