

Coyne

December 9, 1980

Dear Hans:

It was great to meet you and, honestly, Holland means a great deal more to me and to Marxists than the fact that that's where parts of Marx's family lived and would not support Marx as a revolutionary. I noticed that recently they finally have got around to producing two biographies of Sneevliet, who was the first one of the Marxists who understood and practiced Marxism in a colonial country. He was the organizer of the first revolutionary nationalist mass movement in Indonesia. He continued to be active in Holland as a Fourth Internationalist and was murdered by the Nazis. Perhaps one day you would be interested in doing some work on that, and I will be glad to help, if so.

As for the concrete I was speaking to you about -- Rosa Luxemburg, by Henriette Roland-Holst -- will you first search the U of M library and see whether they have a copy of the original Dutch; it was probably published soon after the murder of Luxemburg in 1919, but it could have been as late as the late 20s. I don't know the page numbers of the paragraph that an acquaintance translated for me, but it was the war period and somewhere around 1925 this is what appeared: "Rosa Luxemburg also plans to accompany Clara Zetkin to Holland, to help her with the preparation of an International Women's Conference, which is to take place in Bern. So far she hasn't taken much interest in the women's movement, but now she wants to help everywhere where people try to reconnect the torn threads of the web of international connections."

It is this section -- say, one or two pages before and one or two pages after -- that I would wish translated so that I know the quotation within context and not all by itself.

Do let me know whether the Dutch edition of this biography is available in Ann Arbor, or whether it can be obtained on loan from another library. If not, I will write my friend in New York and he may be able to xerox those pages for us. I do hope we'll see you more often in Detroit. Can you come to our Open House on Dec. 25, around 7 PM?

Yours,

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2/4/81 Acknowledged by RD
in hand note

January 26, 1981

Dear Raya,

The book from which you gave me the quotation was published in 1935 and titled: Rosa Luxemburg (Her life and works), by Henriette Roland Holst-van der Schalk. The quotation itself is found on page 182 of the sixth chapter titled: "The Long Martyrdom" (pages 175-234).

I will start my translation at the break on page 179.

(Chapter V ends with the decision of the Social-Democratic Party to go along with the other parties and vote for the war credits on the 4th of August, 1914. Chapter VI begins by recounting Rosa's efforts to unite the working classes against the coming war. It then portrays the despair she must have felt when her own party betrayed the proletariat, seeing as that betrayal signalled the collapse of the International for her. We commence with her climb out of that despair.)

Rosa Luxemburg admonishes herself. She realizes the need to live on in order to help the working class find the way out of unlimited confusion and self-humiliation. One must begin the struggle and conduct it on two fronts: struggle against the government with all [its] satellites, of which it avails itself to mislead the nation: press, church, school, universities, and struggle against one's own party.

To begin the struggle . . . easier said than done. There is nothing left over from all that one attempted to possess as points of support. It is as if an earthquake has wiped them all away. Where have the thousands of young men and women remained on whom one thought to count with certainty? Of the men, many are mobilized: they are with the troops that enter France or defend East Prussia against the invasion of the Russians. Others bow the [their] head during the storm. And the women? Also all too many of the Social-Democratic women let themselves be talked around to the side of the government [literally: women go up the lime stick of the government, which could mean: go to rest with or are ensnared by]: they take an active part in the organization of the defense behind the front . . .

In the first days, one can count the faithful on the fingers of one hand. Now, it doesn't matter: one must close ranks, form a gathering point, devise means to wake the party members out of their infatuation. All this despite the state of siege and the censorship, which hinders every direct contact with the masses or precludes it for those who don't rear along with the national chorus. Also despite the absolute ignorance in which one has intercourse with a view as to what occurs outside of Germany. One finds oneself in a circumstance of complete political isolation.

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One must persevere, because it is one's duty. And because one cannot do otherwise.

Initially there are four who want to free again the road, which lies buried under an avalanche of lies, delusions, tentatious representations: the road of class struggle.

The four of them came together in Rosa's dwelling: Franz Mehring, the demigod of spirit; Clara Zetkin, initially almost broken with grief; Karl Liebknecht, a single and all-consuming desire to make good his short-lived weakness on the 4th of August when he, for the sake of party unity, failed to vote against the war credits in the Reichstag, as he had done in the meeting of the group [faction]. The fourth is Rosa Luxemburg. In what frame of mind they come together, one can hardly guess it. Franz Mehring also saw the bridges collapse upon which his inner life was built. Clara Zetkin, it is said, also thought of suicide in these days. Karl Liebknecht's desperate [despairing] struggle against the thousand armed hydra of party instances, which make his every independent assertion impossible, is well documented in his after the war correspondence concerning these instances. About Rosa Luxemburg's inner and outer life during these first bitter months no letter or single document gives us a decisive answer. The biographer has, as if it were, lost all human contact with her. He knows only that she pines day and night to organize with the collective's other two faithful, rebellion against the official party leadership, which must precede every other action.

It speaks almost of its self that one doesn't find the right road immediately. A few other party members want to join themselves to the small group in the first days, so foremost one doesn't run off the stocks [launch] too fast. . . . The point of departure for all further action must be a protest against the vote of the Social-Democratic faction for the war credits. But, if this protest is to gain significance, then it must be taken up by as many as possible well-known party members. Some of them, of whom it is known that they sharply criticized in private the "politics of the 4th of August," are scattered in all the directions of the wind.¹

But one may let nothing discourage oneself. Rosa herself works day and night. At numerous small, private gatherings she speaks. She prepares the first issue of the Internationale, the new periodical whereof Franz Mehring and she form the editorial board and to which Clara Zetkin, Heinrich Ströbel and A. Thalheimer also contribute. The main article, "The Rebuilding of the International," Rosa wrote. Also, she plans to accompany Clara Zetkin to Holland in order to help with the preparation of an International Women's Conference, which will be called together in Bern. Until now she has never worried herself much about [ever] the women's movement, now, however, she wants to assist everywhere where an attempt is made to attach together again a few torn fibers of the tissue [or fabric] of international relations. . . . But of the journey to Holland, nothing comes.

1.) CLARA ZETKIN IN THE PREFACE TO THE JUNIUS BROCHURE, 68.V.

Completely unexpected, Rosa Luxemburg is arrested early April, 1915. She still has a year's imprisonment coming to which she was sentenced because of her speech in Frankfurt in which she bravely incited treason [against her country]. It has indeed become plain as a pikestaff since then, that the Social-Democracy is not a party of traitors, but of brave patriots. Indeed the gates of the prisons have opened themselves for a number of "common" misdoers, such as thieves, cheats, bankrupts, perjurers, scoundrels [pimps, bullies], and murderers. Also, the doctors who attended Rosa Luxemburg gave the advice to leave her with rest for the time being, because the consequences of a serious illness, which she suffered shortly before, possibly will call forth new disturbances in the prison. But what does all that matter? The authorities are apparently in agreement [of the opinion] that she cannot be let to have so much freedom as still exists in the German state, and it is bitter little, without bringing the state into danger. One will leave her to wage ~~xxxxxxx~~ a struggle which appears for the time being tolerably hopeless [inside the prison]. (I end at the beginning of the first paragraph on page 183, which goes on to describe the prison and Rosa's imprisonment.)

Raya, I'm enclosing Xerox copies of the pages in question. Hopefully you realize that my knowledge of Dutch is limited. As a ten year old, I had never heard of a perjurer, for instance, and had to rely on the dictionary. Likewise, idiomatic expressions offered difficulties. I attempted to keep the sentence structure as close to the Dutch as possible and did not greatly alter the punctuation. Although I have no desire to be a translator, I thank you, nevertheless, for the opportunity to reconnect myself with my native tongue.

Yours,

Hans

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