

Great Accomplishments and Tragedies: Rosa Luxemburg by İdil ÇAKMUT

“Freedom is always, and exclusively, freedom for the one who thinks differently.”

A Polish-born German, Jewish, woman, disabled, political refugee; yet an aspiring, committed fighter: Dr. Rosa Luxemburg.



Rosa Luxemburg, born on March 5th, 1871 in Poland, which was then a part of the massive Russian Empire, was a socialist revolutionary and an agitator, who had played a significant role in history. Since her adolescence, she had adopted a left-wing ideology, which was absolutely seen as peril and had led to her fleeing from Poland to Zurich. After her arrival, she studied political economy and law, then received a doctorate in 1898 at the University of Zurich. In consideration of all the obstacles of that time, being able to gain a doctorate degree, was a tremendous accomplishment for a woman. Afterwards, she moved to Germany and joined the SPD (the Social Democratic Party of Germany). It had not taken too long for her to gain a reputation amongst her colleagues, as well as the society. With her influential rhetoric skills, ambitious activism and pioneering way of thinking, she evolved into a highly crucial figure for the socialist movement. She made such original contributions to socialist ideology. According to Lea Ypi, a Rosa Luxemburg scholar at London School of Economics, three specific areas of her contribution have critical significance: The

political study of socialism, the economic study of capitalism in connection to imperialism, and the relationship to the national question.

In *Sozialreform oder Revolution? (Reform or Revolution)* Luxemburg once again pointed out the necessity of revolution and stated that *the parliament was nothing more than a bourgeois sham*. She also supported *the mass strike as the single most significant tool of the proletariat, in attaining a socialist victory*. She had written *Die Akkumulation des Kapitals (The Accumulation of Capital)* and defined *imperialism as the result of a dynamic capitalism's expansion into underdeveloped areas of the world and charted capitalism's drive to conquer and cannibalize more territory, fueling war and destroying the environment*. Furthermore, she advocated that *nationalism and national independence were regressive concessions to the bourgeoisie*. As she defended socialist internationalism, this thought of hers became one of her major points of disagreement with Vladimir Lenin, since he developed a theory of *national self-determination*.

After a while, disagreements started to appear inside SPD. Some prominent leaders and some from the membership, starring Rosa Luxemburg, had contradicting opinions about the approaches the party adopted. Rosa Luxemburg disagreed with the cooperation with the capital and defended that the party should focus on revolution. She advocated that *whilst*

reforms are important, abandoning revolutionary goals altogether means propping up a system fundamentally geared towards the destruction of life. She thought that real liberation and real socialism had to be grounded in the kind of self-enlightenment and self-education and class consciousness that came from ordinary working people engaging directly in a struggle. Socialism could not come from the top. Socialism had to come from the kind of power that remains with the masses. Moreover, socialism and democracy are fundamentally interconnected and fundamentally inseparable.

Socialism without democracy is just a tyranny by another name and democracy without socialism is just a kind of sham hollow liberation for a tiny, privileged minority.

After in 1914, when the SPD politicians voted in favor of the governmental decision about the upcoming World War and supported the war effort, the ideological disagreements between Rosa Luxemburg and the leadership reached its peak. Luxemburg defined this as *a deep betrayal of the movement* as her ideology was completely against war. During the war, she and her comrade Karl Liebknecht were at the forefront of the peace movement and they made an anti-war agitation. These actions of them, however, ended up in prison.

Later, the two anti-war revolutionists quitted SPD and formed the *Spartakusbund (Spartacus League)*, which evolved into the German Communist Party in the upcoming years. The ultimate goal of this formation was to *end the war through revolution and the establishment of a proletarian government*. Then, the peace movement started to grow as the effects of war became apparent when people started to return to their homes and the economy started to go into recession.

It was then Rosa Luxemburg told people that there was a clear choice laying ahead of humanity:

Either socialism or barbarism.

Movement, strikes, and demonstrations had continued after the war as well. Later, the German Kaiser abdicated the throne and a republic was declared in Germany. Then, the SPD became Europe's first social-democratic government. However, the revolutionary movements were not over. Thus, SPD decided to quell the revolution with military and police forces. Later on, as the situation aggravated, Luxemburg and Liebknecht were forced to hide.

Nonetheless, on January 15th, 1919 members of the *Freikorps (Free Corps)* – *an assemblage of right-wing paramilitaries*, had found Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht and eventually killed them.

After circa a century of her death, Rosa Luxemburg is still remembered by thousands in the streets every year on January 15th and people keep honoring her legacy. Moreover, Klaus Gittinger, the author of *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg*, describes this killing as one of the greatest tragedies in the history of Germany.

There is also one more point we have to mention about Rosa Luxemburg: The "Woman Question": the nature of women's oppression under capitalism. Luxemburg had a much-debated relationship with this question. However, we see that she had a clear approach. She could not bear the feminism of upper-class women as she saw that *as an attempt to elevate themselves to the status of rich white men, whilst leaving their fellow women to rot in factories and die in childbirth*. She defended that *gender justice and sexual liberation had to be undergirded by economic justice and economic equality*.

No matter what type of ideologies people adopt it is nearly impossible for anyone not to admire Rosa Luxemburg. In consideration of how difficult it was to even live as a woman back then, becoming a highly influential and significant political figure is totally aspiring. Her ambition and courage should be appreciated as she had not given up defending what she truly believed although being discriminated against, underestimated, and insulted.

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May her journey become an inspiration to all women in our world who need a bit of courage to pursue their dreams.

Happy Women's Day!