

An Investigation of the Differences between Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin on the Organizational Principles of the Proletarian Party

Yingli Han*

School of Marxism, Zhaoqing University, Zhaoqing, China
hanyingli66@163.com
**corresponding author*

Abstract: Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin were both prominent proletarian revolutionaries and theoreticians of the Second International, and both participated in the creation of proletarian parties and led the European workers' movement as key leaders of the Social Democratic Party, inheriting and developing Marxist theory in revolutionary practice. The difference was that they were in different revolutionary environments in the East and West, which led to different differences in their understanding and application of Marx's theory of proletarian revolution, especially on the issue of the organisational principles of proletarian parties.

Keywords: Rosa Luxemburg; Lenin; Proletarian party; Centralism; Spontaneity; Consciousness

1. Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin were Contemporaries of the Proletarian Revolutionaries

Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin were both prominent proletarian revolutionaries and theoreticians of the Second International, and both participated in the creation of proletarian parties and led the European workers' movement as key leaders of the Social Democratic Party, inheriting and developing Marxist theory in revolutionary practice.

Born on 5 March 1871 in Zamoszcz, a small town on the border with Ukraine in the Lublin province of Poland, Rosa Luxemburg moved with her family to Warsaw in 1873, where she completed her secondary education. During this time, she became involved in the activities of the progressive Shepansky Group and was introduced to scientific socialist ideas and thinking about Polish issues. The year she was about to graduate, she joined the revolutionary activities of the Young Socialist Group under the leadership of the Second Proletarian Party of Poland. In 1889 she moved to Switzerland and enrolled at the University of Zurich, where she applied for a doctorate in economics for her work "On the Industrial Development of Poland". Together with the Polish revolutionaries in exile in Switzerland, including Jogisius, Rosa Luxemburg founded the magazine "Workers' Cause", and in 1894, together with Jogisius and others, she founded the Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland, leading and participating in the workers' movement in Poland and abroad. All of this led to Rosa Luxemburg's rapid growth into a mature Marxist theorist and revolutionary.

Born on 22 April 1870 in Simbirsk, Russia, Lenin entered the law faculty of Kazan University in 1887 and was exiled to Kazan after being arrested for participating in the student movement. He was blessed with a fortune: he lived in the house of his uncle, a learned intellectual who was the government censor of books and had a collection of good books, which Lenin read with a thirst every day, not only to complete his university course, but also to learn other things and Marxism. In 1889 he moved to Samara with his family, where he studied and propagated the works of Marx and Engels with the advanced workers and perused the secret publications of Plekhanov and the Society for Labor Liberation, while on the other hand he set about studying the economic situation in Russia, especially going into the countryside to collect information about the peasantry. It was during this period that Lenin became a committed Marxist and set his course as a professional revolutionary. In 1903, he wrote "What Shall We Do? (The Urgent Tasks of Our Movement)", an important work in which Lenin criticized the errors of the Russian Economists in favor of spontaneity and set out the doctrine of a new type of proletarian party. In 1904, he wrote the book "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back", which comprehensively expounded the doctrine of the proletarian party and laid the theoretical foundation for the building of the Bolshevik Party's organization.

2. The Main Differences between Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin on the Issue of Organisational Principles

At the second congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party in July-August 1903, the Russian Social Democratic Party split into two factions, the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks, with the main difference being over the party's organizational principles. Lenin's side advocated the formation of a party on the principle of "centralism", with a party constitution that made it compulsory for members to participate in the activities of a single organization, while Martov's side advocated a loose organization based on the principle of "spontaneity". Lenin pointed out that "the proletariat has become and will inevitably become an invincible force because the ideological unity he forms on Marxist principles is consolidated by the material unity of the organization which unites millions of working people into a great army of the working class [1]." It shows that organization is the most important weapon of the proletariat in the struggle to seize power, and that only a high degree of organization can guarantee the unity of will, thought and action of all party members. Thus, under the historical conditions of the time, the emphasis on centralization was necessary both to build the party in a state of secrecy and to overcome the state of disorganization and group habits, to stop Menshevik splinter activities and to guarantee the party's fighting strength. In his book "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back (The Crisis in Our Party)", Lenin elaborated on the organizational principles of the proletarian party, arguing that centralization was the guarantee of the party's strong combat power and that only by applying a highly centralized and unified organizational principle could the consolidation and development of the party be ensured.

In response to Lenin's ideas on party building, Luxemburg, at the request of the Russian Social-Democratic Party's organ, the newspaper Mars, wrote an article on the organization of the Russian Social-Democratic Party, which was published on 10 July 1904 in No. 69 of Mars, the central organ of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party, which was in fact controlled by the Mensheviks. In the article, Luxemburg affirms the centralist character of the Social Democratic Party, stating that "there is no doubt that a strong centralist character is generally speaking inherent in the Social Democratic Party. The Social Democratic Party grew up on the economic basis of a capitalism that tended towards centralism [2]." Luxemburg began by affirming the specificity of the Russian revolution, arguing that in an absolutist country like Russia, which had not undergone a full capitalist stage of development, without discipline and centralization, the working-class party would not be able to fight well enough. "The Russian Social-Democratic Party took on a special and unprecedented task in the history of socialism, which was to develop a social-democratic strategy appropriate to the class struggle of the proletariat in an authoritarian state [3]." On the question of creating a centralized and united working-class party in Russia, Luxemburg's attitude was clear. She writes: "In this respect it is beyond doubt for the Russian Social-Democratic Party, past or present, that it cannot build a federal grouping of many national and provincial independent organizations united, but must build a unified and closely-knit workers' party in Russia [4]." However, the question of how and to what extent to concentrate was a key point of contemplation for Luxemburg, and a key point of disagreement with Lenin's views.

Faced with Rosa Luxemburg's criticism of Lenin's organizational question of the Russian Social Democratic Party, Lenin wrote a rebuttal in September 1904 in the article "One step forward, two steps back (N. Lenin's reply to Rosa Luxemburg)". He saw Luxemburg's ideas as a vulgarization of Marxism and a distortion of Marx's dialectic. Lenin wrote: "Rosa Luxemburg then went on to say, 'According to him [Lenin], the Central Committee has the right to organize the various local committees of the Party.' This is not in fact the case. My opinion on this question can be proved conclusively by the draft statute of the party organization which I have proposed. This draft makes no mention whatsoever of the right to organize local committees." The "Central Committee is the only active nucleus of the Party" was proposed by the Russian Social-Democratic minority; the "insistence on the active role of factory education" was spoken not by Lenin but by his opponents [5]. Moreover, Lenin considered that Luxemburg had ignored the concrete facts of the struggle within the party, namely the division of the party into a majority and a minority after the second congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, the opposition of a part of the party to the principle of centralization, the lack of interest in the normal work of the party, the loss of prestige of the Social Democratic Party and the demoralization of the party. At such a time, the urgent task was to achieve party unity, which was not achieved due to the opposition of some sections to centralization. By opposing "extreme centralism", the mechanical subordination of parts to the whole, and blind obedience, Luxemburg was in fact supporting the position of those within the party who opposed centralization. Thus, Lenin pointed out that a careful study of the causes of the struggle within the Russian Social-Democratic Party would have made it easy

to see that the disagreement was not over "the degree of concentration" but over whether the Central Committee and the Central Organ should adhere to the majority approach of the Party Congress.

3. Analysis of the Reasons for the Disagreement between Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin on the Issue of Organisational Principles

The disagreement between Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin on the question of organizational principles arose for two main reasons.

On the one hand, although both men were Marxist theorists, the specific circumstances of the proletarian revolution they led were very different. Rosa Luxemburg was in a western European society with a developed capitalist economy, and the German Social Democratic Party and workers' movement she led was conducted under relatively free and democratic loose political conditions, while Lenin was in an eastern society with a relatively backward political, economic and cultural situation, and in order to transform the scattered, independent revolutionary groups and local organizations in different places into a nationwide mass organization for unified action, it was only natural that the principle of centralism was introduced. Analyzed from this perspective, the differences between them were rooted in the fact that there were differences in the paths and strategies of proletarian revolutions that took place in the different contexts of Eastern and Western societies. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with the globalization of capitalism, Marxism began to expand beyond its origins in Western Europe to the rest of the world. It was during this period that Marxism began to spread and be accepted in Russia. But at the time, Russia was still in the traditional rural commune system and its politics, economy and culture were far from the level of the developed capitalist countries of Western Europe. This historical situation confronted Russian Marxists with a double task: to transform the traditional system of rural communes and bring about a change in the capitalist mode of production; and to carry out a critique of capitalism and bring about a proletarian revolution. Whereas in Western Europe these two tasks took place in the period of the transformation of feudalism into capitalism and in the period of capitalist industrialization, and were undertaken by two subjects, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, respectively, in Russia they took place in the same historical period and had to be carried out by one subject, the proletariat.

On the other hand, the difference between Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin on the question of organization lied in their different understanding of the role of the Social Democratic Party in leading the proletarian revolutionary movement, and was rooted in their different understanding of spontaneity and self-consciousness. In "What is to be done?" in which Lenin clearly states that "the proletariat has no other weapon in the struggle for power than organization [6]." The 1895 "Draft Programme of the Social Democratic Party and its Explanatory Notes" wrote: "The big factories, in their extreme intensification of capital's oppression of labor, have created a special class of workers which has the possibility of fighting capital The workers began to struggle against the capitalists, and there arose among them a strong desire to unite." In order to unite the disorganized workers in a proletarian revolution, Lenin and others began to prepare for the formation of the Russian Social Democratic Party (RSDP), which was announced at the first congress of the RSDP in March 1898, but in fact no unified party programme or constitution was drawn up and no unified leadership was formed. This question became the main task of the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party. In the course of preparing for this congress, Lenin made a great deal of preparatory work for the formulation of the party constitution, the party programme and other party-building issues. In particular, he criticized in depth the opportunist ideological faction of the "economic wing", which believed in economic struggle and advocated the spontaneity of the workers' movement and opposed the inculcation of revolutionary consciousness in the workers' movement.

Lenin began by exposing the fact that the freedom criticized by economism was in essence the freedom of opportunism in the Social Democratic Party, the freedom to instill bourgeois ideas into the proletarian revolutionary movement. This so-called "freedom of criticism" was not the replacement of one theory by another, but the abandonment of a complete and thorough theory, a kind of "eclecticism and unprincipledness". It is clearly stated that "only a party guided by advanced theory can realize the role of an advanced fighter [7]," pointing out the important role of the proletarian party in leading the proletarian revolution. He also argued this point by citing the world significance of Russian literature and the comments made by Herzen, Chernyshevsky and other prominent revolutionaries of the 1970s, as well as Engels, when he spoke of the significance of the theory for the social-democratic movement in 1874. On this basis, Lenin further elaborated the relationship between spontaneity and self-consciousness and argued for the importance of a centralized and unified Marxist party for the

Russian revolution. Lenin pointed out that the essence of the Workers' Business Journal's polemic with "Mars" and "Dawn" could be attributed to "a different estimate of the significance of the spontaneous factor as compared with the consciously planned factor". Lenin criticized the opportunist cult of spontaneity, stating that "any cult of the spontaneity of the workers' movement, any belittling of the role of the 'conscious factor', i.e., the role of the social-democratic party, whether the belittler himself wants it or not, is to strengthen the influence of bourgeois ideology on the workers. All those who say things like 'exaggerating the role of ideology', exaggerating the role of the self-conscious factor, etc., assume that the workers can create, and will certainly create, if they can 'take back their destiny from the leaders', the pure workers' movement itself, an independent ideology. But this is a great mistake [8]." Lenin wrote that "the strength of the modern movement lies in the awakening of the masses (mainly the industrial proletariat), while its weakness lies in the lack of consciousness and initiative on the part of the revolutionaries who are its leaders." "The 'spontaneous element' is in essence the very germ of self-consciousness." This shows that Lenin did not deny and underestimate the spontaneity of the masses. Lenin argued that in such a particular historical situation, only such an organization of revolutionaries could put an end to the ideological divisions and organizational chaos in the revolutionary ranks and lead the Russian proletariat in its revolutionary struggle, thus arguing the importance of a strong and credible leadership of the proletarian revolutionary party, the core of which was urgently needed. Lenin stated that "our first and most urgent practical task is to build an organization of revolutionaries that will give strength, stability and succession to the political struggle [9]." "The spontaneous struggle of the proletariat cannot be a real 'class struggle' of the proletariat without the leadership of a strong organization of revolutionaries [10]." Lenin's emphasized on top-down centralized leadership and on the role of secret work and professional revolutionaries in this period occurred in response to the particular historical conditions in Russia, which were devoid of freedom and democracy at the time.

Rosa Luxemburg, on the other hand, was convinced of the inevitability of the objective laws of history and stressed the spontaneity of mass movements. A study of Luxemburg's series of texts reveals that an important feature of his political philosophy is his conviction in the objectivity of the laws of history. In "Karl Marx" wrote: "If the workers' movement today, in spite of all the repressive actions of the enemy, continues to shake his mane invincibly, it is above all because it is calmly aware of the regularity of objective historical development, of the fact that 'capitalist production, by virtue of the inevitability of natural processes, causes the negation of itself'. It also results in the exploitation of the exploiters - the socialist revolution [11]." Out of her conviction of the laws of capitalist economic development as revealed by Marx, Luxemburg drew on the strength of action, the courage to persevere, and the recognition that ultimate victory was guaranteed. She saw revolution as a reaction of the masses to the particular historical circumstances and conditions of the times, not as something manufactured by political parties through top-down opinion propaganda, and that "revolutions are not learned by lecturing". Luxemburg here emphasizes the spontaneity of the mass movement, but Luxemburg does not deny the importance of the conscious leadership of the Social Democratic Party. In Luxemburg's view, it is right to affirm the self-consciousness and originality of the Social Democratic Party in leading mass movements, but this self-consciousness and originality was not "conceived" or "invented" by the party leaders, but was based on the spontaneity of the mass movements and their active guidance.

4. Conclusions

The disagreement between Lenin and Luxemburg was not fundamentally a question of which was right or wrong; it concerned a fundamental question that had plagued Marxists at the beginning of the 20th century: the relationship between the proletarian party and the masses. Examined from a theoretical perspective, the argument about the role of spontaneity and self-consciousness involves the question of the theoretical basis for the relationship between the party and the class. Lenin and Luxemburg were both practitioners of the proletarian revolution and both theorists who reflected on revolution in revolution. The world history of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was marked by a contest and conflict between the forces of capital and the forces of revolution. However, when we look at the longer history, and in particular at the development of the Soviet Union after its foundation, we cannot help but admire the astonishing foresight of Luxemburg's criticism at the time. From the theories of her idealist political philosophy, Luxemburg reveals to us an important truth, namely that a party which fails to properly manage the relationship between centralization and democracy in the course of the revolution will also fail to manage this relationship in the period of construction. In other words, the over-centralization of the political life of the Russian Social

Democratic Labor Party in the course of the revolution was in no way accidental or temporary, but was a prelude to the whole political tragedy of the subsequent construction period.

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