

**Rosa  
Luxemburg**  
(1871-1919)

**A socialist revolutionary,  
an activist and a political  
theoretician**

**“I want to affect people like a clap of thunder, to inflame their minds not by speechifying but with the breadth of my vision, the strength of my conviction and power of my expression.”**

**- Rosa Luxemburg in her letter to Leo Jogiches on 19 April 1899**

# BIOGRAPHY

- Born in 1871 in Poland, died in 1919 in Berlin
- Became involved in political underground activities when still in high school
- Studied law and political economy in Zürich, received a doctorate in 1898
  - Took part in developing the young Polish Social Democratic Party
- Moved to Berlin and started to work with the Social Democratic Party of Germany



# The Russian revolution of 1905

- An important experience in Luxemburg's life
- Traveled to Warsaw and participated in the revolutionary struggles
- Was imprisoned → her experiences in prison lead her to write *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions* (1906)
  - → a theory of revolutionary mass action
  - “The mass strike is the first natural, impulsive form of every great revolutionary struggle of the proletariat” (Luxemburg 1906)

# World War I

“You know I really hope  
to die at my post, in a  
street fight or in prison.”  
- Luxemburg in a letter  
for her friend Sophie  
Liebknecht

Disappointed with the Social Democratic Party of Germany supporting the war, she was forming the Spartacus League with co-radicals

She was imprisoned and when released, she participated in the founding of the German Communist party

On January 1919, she was killed by soldiers because of her central role in the communist uprising

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# WORKS AND POLITICAL VIEWS

- Published many articles and books about socialism, class struggle, proletariat and revolution
- Marx as an inspirer
  - *Accumulation of Capital* (1913): capitalist powers found a way to continue expansion in the colonies → consequence of this is colonialism
- Revolution as the ultimate goal
- Luxemburg: Socialism should be accomplished peacefully, without violence

# Revolution

- *Reform or Revolution* (1900)
  - A protest against reformist views according to which trade-union activity and parliamentary politics were the means to achieve socialism → Luxemburg disagreed strongly with this
  - She defends Marxist theory and revolution as a means to achieve socialism
  - Trade unions as a means to educate masses about the importance of class struggle



# International socialism



- For Luxemburg, internationalism was an essential part of socialism
  - She saw nationalism and national independence as concessions to the bourgeoisie
    - Nationalism became the central thing she disagreed on with Lenin
  - Was supporter of democracy, was against strong hierarchies
    - This was another issue of disagreement with Lenin
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# (Working-class) women's rights

Women's Suffrage and Class Struggle  
(1912)

Women's lack of rights one of the  
most important tool of ruling for the  
capitalist class

→ Equal rights for women were  
important in the struggle towards  
socialism

Never considered herself feminist  
(Tamboukou 2014)



# Sacrifices and challenges

- Sacrifices
  - Private life: Family?
  - Her own life?
- Challenges
  - Anti-semitism
  - Criticism from older veterans of the movement
  - Violence and prison
  - Didn't bring up her own gender, focused on class struggle

# Sources

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