

Rosa Luxemburg: War and the Working Class (January 1916)

Abstract

In late 1914, Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919) and other radical socialists broke with the Social Democrats over the war, which she characterized as an imperialist war among the capitalist powers. She called for the world's working classes to unite in revolution against the nationalistic bourgeoisie.

Source

Berlin, January 1, 1916

[...] 12. In view of the betrayal of the aims and interests of the working class by the official representatives of socialist parties in the belligerent countries, in view of their forsaking the principles of the proletarian International for the principles of bourgeois imperialism, it is a vital necessity for socialism to create a new workers' International, which will assume the leadership and consolidation of the revolutionary class struggle against imperialism in all countries.

In order to fulfill its historic task, this new International must rest upon the following principles:

1. The struggle against the ruling classes within the bourgeois states and the international solidarity of the proletariat of all countries are the working class' two inseparable maxims in its historic struggle for liberation. There can be no socialism divorced from international proletarian solidarity, and there can be no socialism divorced from class struggle. The socialist proletariat cannot dispense with class struggle and international solidarity, either in war or peace, without destroying itself.
2. In peace as in war, the class action of the proletariat in all countries must be directed at the principal goal of combating imperialism and preventing wars. Parliamentary action, trade union action, like all activities of the labor movement, must be subordinated to mobilizing the proletariat in each country as aggressively as possible against the national bourgeoisie, to emphasizing at every step the antagonism between the two classes, and, at the same time, to highlighting and affirming the international solidarity of the proletariat in all countries.
3. The core of the proletariat's organization as a class lies in the International. In peacetime, the International decides the tactics to be employed by the national sections in questions of militarism, colonial policy, trade policy, [and] May Day celebrations, as well as in all tactics to be employed in wartime.
4. The obligation to execute the resolutions of the International takes precedence over all other organizational obligations. National sections that violate these resolutions forfeit membership in the International.
5. In the struggles against imperialism and war, decisive power can be deployed only by the compact masses of the proletariat in all countries. The chief tactical concern of the national sections shall thus be directed at honing the broad masses' capacity for taking political action and resolute initiative, at securing international coordination of mass action, and at building up political and trade-union organizations in such a way that their coordination guarantees speedy and energetic cooperation among all sections, and hence that the will of the International is translated into the action of the broadest

working masses.

6. The immediate task of socialism is the intellectual liberation of the proletariat from the tutelage of the bourgeoisie, as this manifests itself in the influence of nationalist ideology. The national sections must gear their agitation in parliament and the press towards denouncing the traditional slogans of nationalism as an instrument of bourgeois rule. The sole defense of all genuine national liberty today is the revolutionary class struggle against imperialism. The fatherland of the proletariat, whose defense must take precedence over all else, is the socialist International.

Source: Rosa Luxemburg, “Die Aufgaben der internationalen Sozialdemokratie”, in Ernst Meyer, ed., *Spartakus im Krieg: Die illegalen Flugblätter des Spartakusbundes im Krieg*. Berlin, 1927, pp. 111–12; reprinted in Wolfdieter Bihl, *Deutsche Quellen zur Geschichte des Ersten Weltkrieges*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1991, pp. 176–77.

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