

Gilbert Badia, Rosa Luxemburg: Journaliste, Polemiste, Revolutionnaire, Paris: Editions Sociales, 1975.

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This massive work of 822 pp., plus 107pp. of appendices, notes and bibliography, is considered by many European historians to be the latest "definitive" work on Rosa Luxemburg. Of the 822 pp., the last 300 roughly are devoted to Badia's analysis of RL's political vocabulary, including 50 pp. on the formal analysis of "terms" used in her writing, complete with charts, (it is all a question of structures which determine the effect on the reader or listener); and her "writing, speaking and personality" (230 pp.) which takes up RL as a journalist, especially on writing techniques, polemicist, orator, writer, epistolarian... finally ending with the chapter entitled "Materials for a Portrait": personality; human relations; "ways of being, ways of living" (this last turns out to have three sub-sections "the woman"; "her day"; and "the cook"). I read some of these, especially on personality, but they are not summarized here. The section on "the woman" for example, is so offensive in its psychologizing and assessing "was she beautiful?" that unless you want this, I figured you would find it a waste of time. I hope it is clear that there is nothing by RL in this book. It is solely a critical biography by Badia, with many paragraph-sized or smaller quotes from RL in the text (usually only a sentence).

What I will try to do here is to summarize/extract the Introduction and the Conclusion; cite whatever Badia offers on the 1907 London Congress; try to extract his attacks on Nettl; and summarize the analysis of the break with KK as related to RL's works on Morocco and militarism.

Introduction, pp. 7-25

Badia opens with: "Born Polish, RL was a great German writer. She was without doubt also the most remarkable polemicist that Germany knew in the first 20 years of this century." The introduction is divided into 6 parts, the first is "A Misjudged Writer". Readers were shocked when her letters from prison were published a few months after her murder. Saw a "sensitive woman" behind the Red Rosa, the "petroleuse". These first 24 letters had sufficed to reveal a writer. Since then, many more letters published, but still RL is misunderstood. "RL's friends themselves did her a disservice. All the works devoted to her have studied in the main-- and often exclusively-- and one can't deplore it-- her thought, her political ideas, without really being interested much in the formal expression of ideas." The opposition between RL's "human warmth" and her as "political militant" is what has obscured full study to now. "Importance and Todayness of her Ideas": Multiplication of RL publications and works on her in last decade. Most important is Nettl. Great attraction for youth of '68 is todayness of problems she writes about. Guerin underlines this "todayness". Cliff even speaks of her "prophecy" on the Russian Revolution. Much use of RL against Lenin. Flechtheim shows how RL is made to represent the "humanist-democratic-libertarian aspects of socialism" vs. Lenin. In EE and Russia, historians noted the errors already seen by Lenin, but also see her as first foe of revisionism, anti-imperialism and founder of German CP. They have written on the use of her work "by bourgeois historians, anti-communists and Trotskyists offer errors to struggle against M-Lism." This isn't only the EE view. The editor of the French ed. of Letters to Jogiches has written against the "abuse by the extreme Left" of her legacy. Therefore, our first concern has been to "return to the texts, published or still unpublished. The first task is a minute, complete, attentive readingx

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Reading

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reading of the German work of RL. The primary objective is not to interpret, but to read and understand." (Ridiculous in the light of what follows--m.)
"New Sources": Dismisses first two biographies-- Roland Holst and Froelich. They were old, in exile, had poor memory, etc. Nettl's work is the best biography today. Nevertheless, Nettl devotes little sustained attention to RL's qualities as a polemicist and a writer, or to her literary and artistic tastes. And even after the publication of Nettl's work, large areas of shadow remain on the theories and political action of RL, which we have tried to clear up here. Nettl recognizes himself that he hasn't treated seriously the relationship between the thought of Marx and that of RL.... Finally, ~~unknown~~ certain archival sources remained inaccessible or unknown to him. For others, he went through them too rapidly. These are the reasons we have to ~~not~~ contest a great number of his interpretations." (In a footnote, Badia claims that while Nettl mentions the letters to M. Jakob at Buttinger and Hoover, he "seems not to have read them.") "The Historic Role of RL": she was the only one to know directly and profoundly the workers parties of both East and West. She knew German, Russian, Polish and French. It is critical to examine not only her theories, but the results of her practical political action within the GSD. There she was the leader of the left-wing. And we want to know: how much did the masses follow her words of action?... Last section is entitled "Journalist and Polemicist par excellence": (Actually not the last, but it reveals much and seems like conclusion) The art of the writer, of the journalist is inseparable from the content of the pamphlets. This is what allows the ideas of the theoretician to touch the hearts and minds. This role of agitator, of propagandist characterizes well the activity of RL, while also marking its limits. It is in that that she differs from a Marx or a Lenin. All three studied the society in which they lived and which they tried all their lives to transform. Marx wasn't only an economist and a philosopher. From his beginnings as editor in chief of NRZ, he was also head of the party, the principal force in the Communist League... For posterity, however, it is the theoretical works of Marx that are crucial, not the numerous journalistic articles. The mass of work of RL, on the contrary, thrusts itself into daily politics, and tends to a short-term use... Lenin's activity allies itself more with RL's... (But there, where he often had a small circle of militants, she addressed thousands of listeners or readers. Lenin was not only the most eminent leader of the Bolshevik party, he was also in the October Revolution and founder of the USSR. RL was ~~not~~ neither head of state nor party. The situation of perpetual opposition explains, at least in part, the essentially critical character of her work...) The actual last section of Badia's introduction is "Delimitation of the Subject": RL's relevance today is not reducible to the purely historic dimension. How she posed questions, decided what is important. This prescience, this sense of the important, this modern fashion of expressing problems, also makes RL original. "That probably comes from her sense of the human. This woman, whose life was devoted to politics, never forgot what was made by and for men. All her life she insisted-- much more than certain Marxists of her time, Kautsky for example-- on the importance of subjective factors, of moral determinations-- she called that "idealism"-- which in a given historic situation, pushed men to act or to remain passive." Badia goes on to explain why he will concentrate on Germany, not Poland (her positions were more developed there), and to explain how the book will be set in the context of the political economy of Germany in these years.

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On the London Congress, 1907: There are scattered references to the London Congress within the chapter on the 1905 Russian Revolution and its Lessons, p. 85-- Summing up RL's position on 1905 and the proletariat, Badia says: "Because Russia is today a capitalist country with developed industry, a numerous and educated working class, the revolution has changed character. The grand bourgeoisie become conservative; the working class is the only bearer of the revolutionary movement. It has, as allies, only the petit bourgeoisie in the rural areas, and in the cities, the intellectuals. Nevertheless, at the London Congress of ~~the~~ RSDLP in 1907, RL would consider the "small peasantry" perhaps as the "natural ally" of the working class." (C)

Footnote here: In her discourse, RL had (against Plekhanov, whom she accused of narrowness and scholasticism), affirmed that "in Germany the ~~peasants~~ joining the GSD are more and more numerous, not only the rural proletariat, but also the small peasantry"-- and an affirmation perhaps excessive in its formulation in this epoch, even if the conclusion that RL held seems evident to us: one can't consider the peasantry as "a closed and homogeneous class", "reactionary" (RL went on to declare that in Russia "the important strata of the peasantry are not only our temporary political allies, but our natural comrades in the future as well." Such declarations are the more remarkable in that they are rare in RL. One knows in fact that she hardly interested herself in the peasant problem.

pp. 86-88-- On RL's differences with Lenin on armed insurrection: It is true that, speaking in London in May, 1907, at the Congress of the RSDLP, RL, as a delegate of SDKPiL, and probably following the decision of her party, had modified her judgement on Moscow uprising, Dec. 1906, and declared, "On the question of armed uprising... my Polish comrades and I do not share the point of view of our Bolshevik comrades." However, Badia precedes this by saying that when the 1906 rising took place, she considered the Bolshevik action as "a phase of the revolutionary movement"; it was for her a decisive phase... (P)

P. 104-- Again on the proletariat and the peasantry: RL had seen the important role played by the peasantry in the Russian Revolution (1905). But she thought that the only truly revolutionary class remained the industrial proletariat. At London, 1907, she opposed the formulation of Lenin: "alliance of the proletariat and the poor peasantry", ~~she~~ with her idea that the conscious proletariat "must set the direction" of revolutionary action, even if she retorted to Plekhanov that the peasantry is "an objectively revolutionary element in the present ~~revolution~~ revolution." The peasants are the allies of the proletariat, but they are not called to direct the revolution with them.

Badia does title the section in which the above is found "An appreciation of the revolution very close to that of Lenin", and expresses the quote on p. 104 in the section entitled "Some Divergences". There is an interesting section on how RL went over to the Bolsheviks during 1906, which includes the following: "In August, during her stay in Kuokkala she met the Menshevik leaders (Pavel Axelrod, etc.): 'The general impression of ... disorganization, but especially of confusion in ideas and tactics leaves me totally disgusted. By God, the revolution is great and beautiful, on the condition that the social democracy doesn't come to mess it all up.'"-- from Letters to K and LK. (R)

One other point on London 1907. There are a number of references to the extremely bad relations with LJ at the time, and the hint is that she was faced with a situation so upsetting here that she may not have been at her best then. For example, Badia "reveals" that this is exactly when LJ intercepts RL's letter to Kostin Zetkin, and becomes enraged. (By the way, because of Badia's "structural" approach, things are found in the wierdest places. The point on

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Zetkin is in the ~~xxx~~ chapter on "The Break with KK and its Background"! Whether this is the reason for such sparse reporting of the London conference, I don't know, but that's all there is.

On the Break with Jogiches: Incredibly, there is no analysis of the break given in the book, despite its permeating psychologizing. This is true both in the historic (chronological) section and in the section entitled "Her relations with Jogiches".

pp. 154-- "The reasons are still poorly known-- Jogiches' infidelity in Poland-- for which RL broke with LJ in 1906 or 1907." Footnote ~~thaxx~~ here refers reader to Netti, then cautions "given RL's taste for secrecy, even her closest friends are ill-informed."

When you look in the actual section on the relations with Jogiches (pp. 784-791), you first find a lot of how RL felt a "great need for emotion, for tenderness, for dreams." And how, when she was with LJ, she cried often.

Badia sees a change in their relations first with ~~the~~ Reform or Revolution: p. 785-- "It is striking that when posed in Feb. 1899 with the dilemma to go to rejoin Leo in Munich or to finish the article against Bernstein, she chooses the second solution and concludes: "I console myself that if I have written a good article we will both, despite all, have a certain personal satisfaction."

But Badia goes on to offer his analysis on their relations from 1900 to the break and concludes that "he was no longer lord and master, no longer the superior being that she admired; she had taken the measure of his limits, even his pettynesses, but it was for her like an exterior projection of herself, a sort of fixed point from which she could judge herself..."

After this Badia skips to the period ~~after~~ after the break, on how LJ continued to try to use the apartment until a letter from RL finally stopped it. He makes a big point of his dating of the letter vs. ~~Nazim's~~ Tych's dating. For the record, Badia says Sept. 1908, Tych says Sept. 1909.

ON the Break with Kautsky, 1910: Here too, I can't imagine anything will be of much interest, because there is frankly very little serious written here on the ~~actual~~ actual events of that period-- (the Morocco crisis, militarism-- as it is seen in the writings of RL. To some extent it is because Badia "analyses" her writings in a different section of the book (Part III, Theories and Vocabulary). Yet there are certainly many pages devoted to "The Break with Kautsky and its Background" (pp. 127-178), and to "The Struggle Against Militarism" (pp. 179-216). Badia begins by tracing the political economy of Germany from 1870-1910 and its relation to the break in the GSD. Then inserted before the section which actually takes up "The Rupture KK-RL", is one entitled "New Loves", where Badia again attacks Netti and "reveals" the background to the break-- the affair with Kostia Zetkin. "This episode doesn't figure in any biography of RL. Netti makes only a brief allusion to it, and commits several errors."--P. 154.

Badia goes on to say that he thinks all previous writers on RL have misunderstood the political situation before the break. (p. 156): "It is completely imprecise to write as Netti did, that in 1910 'RL was alone'. On the essential questions like the mass strike, she had the whole Left of the party at her side, and a not negligible fraction of supporters." Then comes ~~the~~ what follows from this: RL and KK had diverged some years before the break was made public in 1910. The question should be posed: "Why in 1910 did RL judge the moment opportune to affirm her positions, to make clear her differences with the direction of the party and with KK?"

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For Badia, the break with Kautsky was not based on Morocco since it is 1911, and therefore is treated as though the two were separate, nor is the question of militarism directly related to the 1910 break. p. 161-- "The two principal themes on which the discussion turned were the propaganda for the Republic and the mass strike." There is here some description of the mass workers' meetings in the Spring of 1910, and the struggle with KK to publish Was Weiter? But nothing of a serious nature in taking up the writings themselves.

All is centered on answering the question he has posed-- "why did RL judge 1910 as the opportune moment?" And the conclusion he comes to -- I think-- is that RL was probably too hasty in judging the revolutionary will of the masses. They were so fired up by her own oratory, which was great, that she took that for the consciousness in general. By p. 177 ~~she~~ Badia does say that RL thought that it was a pre-revolutionary moment, and therefore broke, but couldn't gain control of the party.

"The Struggle Against Militarism" is separated into the next chapter, which does take up the Moroccan Affair at least somewhat, but by the end of the whole discussion of anti-militarism, there is neither a sustained discussion of any of RL's writings nor any extensive quotations. ~~Badia~~ He does say that the "failure of the masses" was as much to blame for the path to 1914 as the "treason of the leaders"-- in other words, it was objective. This is supposed to be based on Lenin's Imperialism (1).

Dear Raya, I imagine I've told you little and too much of Badia. But I will include some extracts from the Conclusion, because he makes me so mad, and maybe you'd want to say something against it.

Conclusion pp. 819-822:

"The attempt-- not rare today-- to make of RL the "Revolutionary" par excellence, a completely pure figure, a haloed martyr, that one opposes to all the political leaders who have been confronted with the responsibilities of power, is easily explained. (Footnote here: The plan is simple, they oppose the pure Rosa to the "machievellian" Lenin... and go on to oppose the Spartacist movement to its "perverted" son, the German CP. This is the essence of Guerin, etc.) We have underlined how RL, in the heart of the GSD, finds herself most of the time in opposition; the necessities of the polemic and even the nature of her adversaries led her to put the accent on her intransigence. If she was never found at the head of a state, one forgets a bit quickly some months of the revolution in Germany during which RL had practical responsibilities, and where, like all responsible politicals in similar situations, she hesitated in front of such and such vicissitudes of revolutionary combat, where she condemned "in private" the capture of Vorwärts and urged the Spartacists to participate in the elections...

"This attempt can also be founded on an actual reading-- but rapid and incomplete-- of the work of RL. It is possible-- and sometimes seductive-- to see in RL the apostle of Freedom, of Revolution and of Socialism. Precisely because she constructed a simplified world-- one part the bourgeoisie, the other the proletariat; the one side capitalism, the other socialism-- a part of the youth, in its impatience, is perhaps today seduced by this explanatory sketch. This conception of the world, if one doesn't look at it too closely... permits the denial of the hard daily reality, the forgetting of the long and patient struggle of the workers' movement... in order to only hold on to the explosion, the Revolution: miracle-solution to all the difficulties, realized one beautiful day by the sole will of a relatively restricted group of fighters full of courage.

"Never did RL present in that way the struggle for socialism. But it is necessary to recognize that certain of her formulations-- especially if isolated from the

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general historical context-- seem ~~to~~ to go in this direction..." "With this preaching in favor of the mass strike, RL herself had a tendency to believe, or to let herself believe in an organic development of the revolution, and to ignore, or at the very least to pass almost in silence the ideological pressure exerted by the bourgeoisie on the peasants, the artisans, the cadres, and a part of the proletariat...."

"With the majority of Second Int'l theoreticians, RL had a tendency to reduce Marxism to the economic antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat. She didn't study the social ~~relations~~ relations, analyzing neither their content nor their development, relatively autonomous, any more in Algeria ~~in~~ in the Germany of William II, and the question poses itself whether the ~~vehemence~~ vehemence of her anti-imperialism could "compensate" for the absence or weakness of this ~~unhappy~~ social analysis."

"More than many other social democrats, she reaffirmed or safeguarded a certain ethic; she exemplified the reasoned involvement of the revolutionary. She showed also that politics, that is to say, struggle for this ideal, socialism... is not accompanied by an impoverishment of the personality. Her example merits contemplation as much as her work. We understand less than her tragic end, her life itself and the conception of existence ~~in~~ that she strived to make prevail..."

Raya, to me every aspect of this work by Badia is an attempt to re-write Rosa's heritage from the point that Nettl had reached, and which spurred some interest in RL today. Far from the 800 plus pages making an attempt at serious understanding of RL as theoretician, all is directed to showing her as journalist, polemicist... As though her achievements were "preachings" rather than a philosophy of revolution. And there is such mean-spirited partyness of the fully Stalinist variety, even if he is a Eurocommunist. Everything gets re-wroked for the immediate goal of combatting the youth who were using RL vs. the French CP, etc.

And when all this is combined with Althusserian structuralism, and French obsession with style and psychology, there is hardly anything recognizable left of RL. I just don't --or can't-- believe that the state of Left "scholarship" is so low that this miserable book is considered by so many as the definitive work on RL today. If ever there were a proof that P&R is needed by France, and now!

Mike

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