

How Rosa Luxembourgn Look On Marxism and Socialism

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Rosa Luxembourgn (1871-1919) was a Marxism theorist with profound knowledge and special ability of critical and independent thinking. Her study and exploration of a series of fundamental issues associated with scientific socialism, particularly her descriptions of how to understand and look at the vitality of Marxism and socialism scientifically, are still profoundly influencing the younger generations.

It is amazing that some of Luxembourgn's theories are still of powerful influence and long-lasting vitality to people in the 21st century, several decades apart from her era. This is because her theories possess scientific characters and, more importantly, a power of criticizing and foreseeing or, in another word, a historical discernment. As early as in the early 20th century, Luxembourgn wrote a series of articles advocating and supporting Marxism, such as "*Stagnation and Progression of Marxism*" and "*Karl Marx*", in which she thoroughly discussed how to understand and look at the vitality of Marxism and socialism scientifically. Her ideas are still enlightening younger generations in the present time.

Socialism is a "virgin land" that can only be explored, created and developed by people in their own practice without an existing unchangeable model to copy.

Almost no great theorists have ever tried to define the blue prints and detailed characteristics of the future society. Marx and Engels established the theory of scientific socialism, emphasized the interior contradictions of capitalism as well as its inevitable fate. Out of precise scientific attitudes they didn't give a detailed description of the future ideal society. To them the more detailed description of such new regime, the more fancied of it,¹ which is also the difference between fancied socialism and scientific socialism. Even Marx, when he analyzed the capitalist society, he only outlined what a future society would look like, and pointed out the directions where the society would go. Socialism can only be established on the relics of capitalism by dumb millions who fully explore their initiatives, enthusiasm and creativity in their practice. Luxembourgn believed that socialism was like a "virgin land" in human society where there was no transcendent model. In her opinion, socialism was an economic, social and lawful system which was a very vague event of the future and what we have in the creed are only a few grand policies that indicate on which directions the specific measures should be sought.² What are the specific measures that Socialist system should take? There were no descriptions in any socialist Party's Guiding Principles and socialist textbooks before October Revolution in Russia. Luxembourgn didn't think of it as a weakness, instead she regarded it as the superiority of scientific socialism to fancied socialism. From her point of view, socialist system can only be a historical product and history produces both practical social need and the means to satisfy the need.³ Thus Luxembourgn provided later generations with the theoretical basis for liberating their ideology and extricating themselves from the constraint of a given "Socialism Model". As a matter of fact, Luxembourgn fully elaborated the idea of Engels in his later years, who ever pointed out that so-called socialist society is not invariable, but changeable and reformatory.⁴ In this regard, both Lu and Engels converged from different paths. However, the economic, politics and cultural system established by Soviet Union in the 1930s was a fixed and rigescent model, which was sanctified and regarded as unchangeable. Other socialist countries were forced to

blindly copy it without any analysis. This is the fundamental reason of the upheaval of Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Such disastrous consequences resulted from the dogmatic attitudes held by people on the matter.

Marxism does not exist in a rigid, boring and disposable form. Instead, it has been continuously pursuing new views of the world and employing self-criticism as a weapon, thus maintaining its exceptionally superior vitality in the dynamically changing history.

As stated in the article, *Karl Marx*, published by Luxembourge in 1903, if today's labor movement is invincible, that is because it calmly realized historical development discipline and the following fact: capitalist production caused negation of itself, that is socialist revolution, because of the inevitability of natural process.⁵ The movement saw the absolute guarantee of the final triumph by such knowledge and gained passion, patience, vigor and persistence.⁶ However, just as pointed out by Luxembourge, people cannot only rely on their optimistic beliefs that the establishment of the socialism would be inevitably successful and transplant Marxism theories mechanically, but should seriously summarize historic experience and learn lessons from such experience, which is an important prerequisite for a continuous progression of the proletariat revolutionary movement. In the 1880s when American labor movement was in the ascendant, some German people attempted to apply a set of theories and practices suitable in Germany to America. Engels wrote in the letters to his friends that there is no single doctrine that can save the whole world, so it is impossible for the Americans to understand absolutely from the very beginning the theory set up by the old industrial countries.⁷ Engels also said that German people should take part in the local labor movement and gradually upgrade the movement to theoretical height. The less the theory was imposed on them from outside and the more it was experienced by themselves, the more the theory was acceptable.⁸ Luxembourge agreed with that and left later generations with her wise, farsighted, precise and thoughtful descriptions on the fundamental issue of how to understand Marxism and socialism correctly as well as how to scientifically summarize historic experience. In 1915 she pointed out in her article, *Anti Criticism*, that Marxism does not exist in a rigid, boring and disposable form; instead, it has been continuously pursuing new views of the world and employing self-criticism as a weapon, thus maintaining its exceptionally superior vitality in the dynamically changing history.⁹ However, some people "uphold" Marxism, when encountering important practical issues, in a rigid way by which they ignore the dynamic changes and development in the historic background and social environment in a given time and situation, ignore the emotions and demands of the public, ignore historic experience and lessons, and just find solutions in the classical works of Marxism and claim themselves as genuine Marxists. As pointed out by Luxembourge, actually they do not regard Marxism as a means of seeking new world views continuously, instead they always consider the pre-existing socialist model as a "programmed ever-lasting format" and are not willing to summarize the historic experience and lessons, thus resulting in failures in the socialism movement from time to time.

As far as the new issues occurred in the course of social progression are concerned, only Marxist means can be utilized as a solution. It is a long journey for socialism to replace capitalism, during which it is of pivotal importance to be good at summarizing experience and learning lessons from the experience.

Engels once remarked that the best way to obtain truth is to learn from its own mistakes.¹⁰ In Luxembourge's opinion, Marxism should be regarded as a dynamic and scientific

truth-seeking process instead of a static and rigid model; it can be continuously modified and enriched by the general public in their practice. She pointed out that there is no pre-stipulated and ever-lasting formula; there are no mistake-free leaders who can direct an inescapable path that the proletariat has to take; the historic experience is the only instructor for the proletariat and the self-liberation course for the proletariat is full of not only limitless sufferings but also numerous mistakes.¹¹ Only the proletariat, whose liberation depends on whether or not it can learn from its own mistakes, can face directly the truth and its own mistakes. Self-criticism, ruthless and profound self-criticism, is the air and sunshine which are essential for the proletariat to maintain its life. The above inferences not only manifested the broad mind and imposing attitude of Luxembourg as an outstanding Marxist theorist, but more importantly raised issues on how to look at the Marxism, how to look at the failures and mistakes during the course of the Socialist movement and what attitudes to be taken to make the Marxism and socialism movement move forward. Luxembourg believed that the whole liberation course of the proletariat consisted of a series of failures and successes. In her book, *Reform or Revolution*, Luxembourg pointed out that it was unavoidable that the proletariat would “necessarily” and “immaturely” seize the political power, not mentioning other mistakes and failures. It is a long journey for socialism to replace the capitalism, during which it is of pivotal importance to be good at summarizing experience and learning lessons from the experience. In her book, *On Russian Revolution*, written in prison in 1918, Luxembourg emphasized once again that only experience can correct mistakes and open up new paths and only a turbulent life can prompt people to think about thousands of new forms and ideas, to maintain their creativity and to correct their mistakes.¹² On January 13, 1919 German Revolution was about to fail, Luxembourg summarized again the discipline of socialist revolution movement in her last article, *Orderly Berlin*, before death, that is, revolution is a unique form of ‘fighting’ (i.e. a special rule for the revolution to survive and succeed) in which a series of ‘failures’ pave the way to the ultimate success. History made its way to triumph step by step, which cannot be held back! People can absorb historical experience, knowledge; power and idealism form such failures.¹³ It is in this article that Luxembourg claimed in her high spirits and passions that the revolution would be never-ending unless the working class was freed. In the meantime, Luxembourg predicted with a great institution and foresight that on the way to the revolutionary victory the proletariat would experience numerous sufferings, failures and mistakes and must have the courage to constantly summarize the historic experience as well as learning lessons from its own mistakes. Only in this way can Marxism and socialism move forward. The above statements that Luxembourg repeatedly emphasized in her life are still invaluable up to date, greatly enlightening and benefiting the younger generations.

Summary

Marxism is anything but the theory which is not in progress. Both dogmatic attitude towards Marxism and the attitude attempting to break away from Marxism are wrong. When people complained about the lacking of persons with ability to develop Marxism theory, Luxembourg argued that every era would definitely mold such persons to satisfy the need, which is very incisive. Practice testified that Lenin is such a person who creatively applied and developed Marxism in Russia during the proletariat revolutions era.

Reviewing the history of the International Communism Movement in the last few decades, particularly the detours and failures in some socialist countries, we agree that there are numerous and complicated reasons for these detours and failures, both objective and subjective.

However, success and failure of international labor movement and rise and fall of socialism career are linked closely with whether or not Marxism can be understood and applied correctly and scientifically. The attitudes towards Marxism is always associated with the destiny of Marxism and socialism, thus constitutes the criterion to differentiate the genuine from the false Marxists. Time after time Luxembourge acutely proposed the fundamental theme of how to look on Marxism and socialism, which is one of her greatest historic contributions. Failures and frustrations are the tutors, impartial and incorruptible, yet pure-hearted. If evildoings can be turned into good ones, that is what they bring to us. We must learn from such vigilance and hints to avoid further faults. In this sense, we have to admire her ability to envision over the history regarding the fundamental issue of how to look on Marxism and socialism.

Notes:

¹ *Collections of Marx and Engels works*, Vol.3, People's Publishing Company, 1995, p.724.

² *Research Materials on International Communism Movement(Luxembourg Special)*, People's Publishing Company, 1982, p.87.

³ Quoted from a secondary source: Dai Haidong, *On Luxembourge's Contributions to Scientific Socialism Theory*, Exploration, 1998, No.3, p.62.

⁴ *Collections of Marx and Engels works*, Vol.4, People's Publishing Company, 1995, p.693.

⁵ *Collected Edition of Marx and Engels works*, Vol.23, People's Publishing Company, 1965, p.832.

⁶ *Luxembourg Collectanea(I)*, People's Publishing Company, 1984, p.481.

⁷ *Collections of Marx and Engels works*, Vol.4, People's Publishing Company, 1995, p.680.

⁸ *Collections of Marx and Engels works*, Vol.4, People's Publishing Company, 1995, p.680-681.

⁹ *Luxembourg Collectanea(German Version)*, Vol.5, ed. by German Marxism and Leninism Academe, 1975, p.523.

¹⁰ *Collections of Marx and Engels works*, Vol.4, People's Publishing Company, 1995, p.679.

¹¹ Quoted from a secondary source: Cheng Renqian, *Rosa Luxembourge's Life Story and Thoughts*, People's Publishing Company, 1994, p.241.

¹² *Research Materials on International Communism Movement(Luxembourg Special)*, People's Publishing Company, 1982, p.88.

¹³ *Luxembourg Collectanea(II)*, People's Publishing Company, 1990, p.578.