

Mehring Books features classic biography of Rosa Luxemburg

By Shannon Jones
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Mehring Books is proud to feature the classic biography of Marxist revolutionary leader Rosa Luxemburg by Paul Fröhlich. A comrade of Rosa Luxemburg in the German Social Democracy and a founding member of the German Communist Party, Fröhlich brings to life the struggles of this remarkable woman.

Out of the experience of the horrors of the First World War, Rosa Luxemburg posed the alternative to the working class in her famous aphorism “socialism or barbarism.” She, along with her comrade Karl Liebknecht, was among the few leaders of the socialist movement in Germany who stood fast in their internationalist principles at the outbreak of World War I and opposed support for the imperialist bloodbath.

While not a Trotskyist, Fröhlich is able to develop a compelling picture of Luxemburg, from her early days in the Polish socialist movement to her emergence as one of the great Marxist leaders and theoreticians of international socialism. He discusses not just her political accomplishments, but also her personal conflicts and struggles, including her complex relationship with Polish socialist Leo Jogiches.

She was among the first to take up the struggle against the revisionist theories of Eduard Bernstein inside the German Social Democracy. Her polemic *Reform or Revolution* remains a classic of Marxism. Her revolutionary views put her in direct conflict with the right-wing trade union functionaries within the German Social Democracy, who banned her from their congresses.

Luxemburg later entered into struggle against Karl Kautsky’s increasing adaptation to the rightward-moving German social democratic leadership, which anticipated Kautsky’s later betrayal of Marxism. In the period prior to the outbreak of

World War I, her clashes with Kautsky had convinced Luxemburg of his political backsliding and his rejection of a revolutionary and internationalist approach.

Among the most compelling sections of the biography is its account of the fateful days leading up to the outbreak of World War I and the historic betrayal by the German Social Democratic Party leadership, which voted for war credits in violation of all Marxist principles. The book conveys the sense of deep foreboding Luxemburg experienced on the eve of the political catastrophe. Fröhlich’s account of the great anti-war rally in Brussels just prior to the outbreak of war is unforgettable.

He ably recounts the tumultuous events following the German Revolution of November 1918, leading up to Luxemburg’s assassination at the hands of the German Social Democratic leaders in January 1919. The murder of Liebknecht as well as Luxemburg was the conscious response of the bourgeoisie to the mortal danger it faced. After the 1917 October Revolution in Russia, the bourgeoisie determined that it had to prevent the development of revolutionary leadership in the working class or exterminate that leadership where it came forward.

In her theoretical work, Luxemburg evinced great foresight and a profound understanding of the problems of the development of the international workers movement. A study of her writings is critical to revolutionaries and students of Marxism today.

Fröhlich’s biography illuminates one of the critical periods and one of the greatest figures in the history of the Marxist movement.

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