

The Rosa Luxemburg Reader, edited by Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson.
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The words of the great internationalist revolutionary, Rosa Luxemburg — her opposition to war, her thoughts on imperialism, and her critiques of reformism — clearly speak to our time. Of course, Luxemburg’s political writings have been collected in the past; Hudis and Anderson’s *Reader* is a significant addition to existing resources.

Hudis and Anderson clearly see Luxemburg’s contributions within the framework of the new imperial century, and they set forth two major goals for their collection. First, their *Reader* “aims to provide a resource for those trying to rethink the problems of radical social transformation today” (8). A glance at the various sub-sections in the collection bears out this claim: the five sections focus on a variety of topics, including political economy; imperialism and its impact on non-western societies; the politics of revolution; writings on women; anti-militarism; and the actuality of revolution. The political immediacy of Luxemburg’s writings is evident in each section. A comment from Luxemburg’s 1915 anti-war *The Junius Pamphlet: The Crisis in*

German Social Democracy, for instance, could well be an observation on our own imperial world: "So long as capitalist states exist, *i.e.*, so long as imperialistic world policies determine and regulate the inner and the outer life of a nation, there can be no 'national self-determination' either in war or in peace" (325). A second claim by Hudis and Anderson, that their *Reader* "shows the full range of Luxemburg's contributions by including for the first time in one volume substantial extracts from both her economic and political writings" (8), is certainly accurate, especially given the substantial extract from the classic *The Accumulation of Capital*, a selection from the incomplete manuscript *An Introduction to Political Economy*, and the inclusion of the recently discovered piece "Slavery," translated in part by Kevin Anderson.

However, there are some rather surprising omissions. The most startling absence is Luxemburg's writing on nationalism. During 1908 and 1909, Luxemburg, a committed internationalist, published a series of articles on nationalism loosely titled, "The Problem of Nationality and Autonomy." This series included the well-known piece, "The Rights of Nations to Self-Determination," in which she criticized the "hopes of solving all nationality questions within the capitalist framework by insuring to all nations, races, and ethnic groups the possibility of 'self-determination,'" calling such a possibility "a complete utopia." This sentiment echoes Luxemburg's reflections in an earlier piece, "The Polish Question at the International Congress in London" (1896). Even at this early stage of her involvement in revolutionary politics, Luxemburg sounded a warning on the dangers of arguing along nationalist lines for the liberation of Poland. Writing almost 20 years before millions of Europe's proletariat died in the trenches wearing their national uniforms, she argues that "instead of a coherent political struggle of the proletariat in every country," a move toward national self-determination would lead to a disintegration of the proletariat "through a series of fruitless national struggles." In our times, as we are confronted with the increasing fragmentation of nations and the rise of nationalism, Luxemburg's opposition to Marxists' embracing national self-determination deserves a more serious consideration than this reader offers. Luxemburg's critical writings on nationalism are particularly important not only because they offer us invaluable insights on the ongoing debates in Marxist theory about the nation state and nationalism, but also because they offer us a window into an independent Marxist mind who differed with Marx and Lenin on important questions of the nation.

The missing pieces on nationalism would thus have served as provocative accompaniments to her writing on non-western societies. Indeed, Hudis and Anderson point out that few "Marxists of her era matched her depth of concern over and knowledge of the Western destruction of noncapitalist

social relations" (17). Here again, it may have helped to include writings such as "Concerning Morocco," an inspired call for action against "militaristic colonial adventure." Nevertheless, their attention to the anti-colonial elements of her work is laudatory, since she is almost entirely absent from the corpus of current postcolonial theory. Luxemburg's understanding of imperialism as inseparable from capitalist relations and her fierce and principled anti-colonialism could serve as an important guide to those theorists who are attempting to negotiate the complex politics of the new imperialism. Indeed, a little known fact, as Raya Dunayevskya pointed out, is that even before Hobson coined the word "imperialism," Luxemburg had recognized the global significance of Japan's attack on China in 1895, and in 1911, reflecting on "Peace Utopias," she pointed out the hypocrisy of bourgeois calls for peace, since in advocating a cessation of hostilities, imperial nations would have to enact the "exact contrary of the present politics that a capitalist class state demands."

The complexity, range, and passion of Rosa Luxemburg's writings are captured effectively in Hudis and Anderson's *Reader*. The editors' thoughtful introduction, albeit a somewhat brief 23 pages, is also an excellent guide for those unfamiliar with her work. A longer introduction might have considered some of the dialectical tensions in her work — between spontaneity and organization, between capital accumulation and capital's need for non-capitalist organizations, between her belief in the inevitable fall of capitalism and her commitment to mass action — in greater detail, but in general the editors capture the key moments in her life and work. They provide important biographical details, while highlighting dominant tendencies in her political thought. By paying close attention both to her disputes with Lenin and to her forceful and resounding critiques of Eduard Bernstein and Karl Kautsky, the editors recognize her understanding of the legacy of Marx's work, her independent spirit, and her consistent commitment to a socialism rooted in mass action. The value of the *Reader* lies in its serving as an exciting introduction to Luxemburg's ideas, and the accompanying 34 pages of excellent notes make it a valuable classroom resource.

However, this *Reader* should not be limited to the classroom; it should also be read by activists engaging directly in struggles against imperialism in its many guises. As Hudis and Anderson put it, "in spite of the historical and conceptual limitations of the time in which she lived, Rosa Luxemburg developed a concept of revolution and of freedom that speaks to us today, despite our radically different circumstances" (30). Trotsky, in his essay "Hands Off Rosa Luxemburg," asks that we "pass on this truly beautiful, heroic and tragic image to the young generations of the proletariat in all its

grandeur and inspirational force." Hudis and Anderson's *Reader*, despite its limitations, may well make that image live.

KANISHKA CHOWDHURY

*Department of English
University of St. Thomas
2115 Summit Avenue, JRC 333
St. Paul, Minnesota 55105
k9chowdhury@stthomas.edu*