The dialectical connection that RosaLuxemburg established between Marxism and the processes by which social movements are brought about, developed or impeded is founded on a principle that she does not seem to clearly explain in her reasoning. Nonetheless, it can be deduced from her wider conception of the relationship between revolutionary theory and the workers’ movement. Such a principle recognises that the form Marxism takes as revolutionary theory is the result of its connection with the real revolutionary movement; to put it another way, closer to her own meaning, it can be said that it is the theoretical expression (with all the ambiguity that word entails) of the very process of constitution of the real revolutionary movement. Theoretical forms and the morphology of the movement or the class do not ‘express one another’, but rather constitute elements or perspectives for overturning the actually-existing society. The Marxist theory of class-struggle is itself class-struggle, or, as Karl Korsch would say, ‘Marx’s “proletarian” dialectic as just that form in which the revolutionary class movement of the proletariat finds its appropriate theoretical expression’. Theory, then, while at certain moments and in particular circumstances appearing to be indispensable to providing social upheavals a revolutionary orientation as well as a site for the revolutionary coherence of its political practice to be tested, it is in fact nothing but a means of elaborating theoretically what the real, historical movement of the proletarian class has brought about in practice.
The materialist science of Marx, in its role as the critical and revolutionary science of the proletariat, can by no means constitute a closed theoretical system. This is not because Marx did not have enough time to finish it, but because the very idea of ‘closing’ (and of a ‘system’) is foreign to the struggle of the proletarian class and thus to Marx’s scientific agenda. This was, rather, in Rosa Luxemburg’s words, ‘a method of investigation, as a few inspired leading thoughts, which offer us glimpses into the entirely new world, which open us to endless perspectives of independent activity, which wing our spirit for bold flights into unexplored regions’.

In consequence, just as each stage of social transformation (the specific morphology of composition and recomposition of the working class in a capitalist mode of production, subject to an incessant process of reproduction and transformation) makes its own human material, the practice of the class-struggle sets the field for the theoretical needs of the movement and the possibility of its resolution. This explains why the process of taking up and developing this or that Marxian perspective takes place insofar as the movement reaches new and different stages or ‘periods’ and is thus faced with novel practical questions. As such, one should be wary of the theoreticist sin of believing in the possibility of confronting (and resolving) given questions of Marxist theory without these actually having brought into play, one way or another, by social struggles themselves. ‘[I]n the romantic period of struggles’, Gramsci writes in analysing precisely this article by Luxemburg:

the period of popular Sturm und Drang, all interest is focussed on the most immediate weapons and on tactical problems in the political field and on minor cultural problems in the philosophical field. But from the moment in which a subaltern group becomes really autonomous and hegemonic, thus bringing into being a new form of State, we experience the concrete birth of a need to construct a new intellectual and moral order, that is, a new type of state, and hence the need to develop more universal concepts and more refined and decisive ideological weapons.¹

To the economico-corporate phase, to the phase of struggle for hegemony in civil society and to the phase of State power there correspond specific intellectual activities which cannot be arbitrarily improvised or anticipated. In the phase of struggle for hegemony it is the science of politics which is developed: in the State phase all the superstructures must be developed, if one is not to risk the dissolution of the State.²

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