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## Practising Marxism: Towards a Dialogue between Luxemburg and Gramsci

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## Practising Marxism: Towards a Dialogue between Luxemburg and Gramsci

### Abstract

This is a review by Yohann Douet of the volume *Rosa Luxemburg, Antonio Gramsci actuels* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2018) edited by Marie-Claire Caloz-Tschopp, Antoine Chollet and Romain Felli and published in honour of the late André Tosel, distinguished philosopher and Gramsci scholar.

### Keywords

Gramsci, Luxemburg, capitalist transformation, party, spontaneity

# *Practising Marxism : Towards a Dialogue between Luxemburg and Gramsci*

Yohann Douet

Rosa Luxemburg and Antonio Gramsci have much in common.<sup>1</sup> Historically, they are both tutelary figures of the communist movements in their countries, particularly because of their heroic lives, and of their deaths caused by bourgeois and fascist repression. Theoretically, they both represent an open and creative Marxism. Nonetheless, their writings are intrinsically linked to class struggle, and as such must be distinguished from what Perry Anderson calls “Western Marxism”,<sup>2</sup> which is separated from political *praxis*. It is precisely because they have so much in common that it is particularly interesting to compare them, and to clearly understand their differences.

Marie-Claire Caloz-Tschopp, Antoine Chollet and Romain Felli have edited a collection of essays dedicated to Luxemburg and Gramsci, published in French in 2018.<sup>3</sup> It is conceived as a homage to André Tsel, one of the most prominent Gramsci researchers in France and an important and creative Marxist philosopher in his own right, who left us in March 2017, at the age of 75.<sup>4</sup> The book is based on a seminar directed by M-C. Caloz-Tschopp and A. Tsel. As such, it is made up of a large number of texts, somewhat different between them; it is not possible to summarize all of them,<sup>5</sup> nor is it possible to study exhaustively here what Gramsci

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Ulysse Lojkin for important suggestions and critics.

<sup>2</sup> Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, London: New Left Books, 1976.

<sup>3</sup> M-C. Caloz-Tschopp, Antoine Chollet and Romain Felli (eds), *Rosa Luxemburg, Antonio Gramsci actuels*, Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2018, pp. 391.

<sup>4</sup> The year before his death, André Tsel published his main work on Gramsci : *Étudier Gramsci. Pour une critique continue de la révolution passive capitaliste* (Paris, Kimé, 2016). It is the outcome of nearly fifty years of reflection on the thoughts and struggles of the Italian revolutionary. Sadly, it is not translated in English yet. On André Tsel’s work on Gramsci, see Antony Crézégut “Pour Tsel, un *Aufklärer* dans les *Holzwege* gramsciens”, *International Gramsci Journal*, 2(3), 2017, 372-403.

<sup>5</sup> The volume is constituted of more than twenty papers. Two of them deal with the thought and work of André Tsel: the preface by Étienne Balibar, and a review of *Étudier Gramsci* by Isabelle Garo (“André Tsel, lecteur de Gramsci et penseur du présent”); a number of papers dealing with both Gramsci and Luxemburg (Umberto Bandiera, Jean-Numa Ducange, Frigga

and Luxemburg have in common, and what differentiates them.<sup>6</sup> I will, rather, expound and discuss in this review paper three main issues concerning the comparison between Luxemburg and Gramsci that are addressed by the participants in this volume.

1. *On the history of capitalism: imperialism and assimilation*

André Tosel speaks of the “discovery” made by Luxemburg, and of the “gem” one finds in Gramsci.<sup>7</sup> Luxemburg did indeed discover, especially in her economic masterpiece, *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913), that the reproduction of capitalism is possible only if “capitalism finds outside of itself non-capitalist societies, which can enter in the circuit” of accumulation (p. 72). Capitalism requires non-capitalist raw material sources, labour force and external demand and, for this reason, imperialism is a necessary consequence of capitalism. In order to reproduce, it has to expand, that is to push its own borders further and further by appropriating new territories and new populations. But once the whole world is subsumed by capitalist logic, a devastating crisis is to be expected.<sup>8</sup> Then, imperialist violence will also be unleashed even in the metropolises of the capitalist centre.

That is what M-C. Caloz Tschopp names the “boomerang effect”.<sup>9</sup> For this reason, the world, in all its parts, will be subjected

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Haug, Federico Oliveri, and one of the two essays by André Tosel), others dealing mainly with Luxemburg (Marie-Claire Caloz-Tschopp, Zaïd Ben Saïd Cherni, Bob Jessop, Ilaria Possenti, Claudie Weil) and yet others mainly on Gramsci (Younès Ahouga, Andrea Egli, Fabio Frosini, Francesca Izzo, Stefan Kipfer, Pierre Musso, Raphaël Ramuz, Jean Robelin, and the second essay of André Tosel's). Finally, we find a review of Saul Benjamin's book (*Gramsci en Argentine, théoricien politique argentin*) by Andrea Egli. I give the table of contents of the book in *Annex of Appendix* to this paper.

<sup>6</sup> For such studies, see: Luciano Amodio, “Rosa Luxemburg e Gramsci. Continuità e differenze”, *Il Politico*, 1986, vol. 51 (1), p. 83-94; Sevgi Doğan, “On the Intellectual Movement in Turkey Through Gramsci and Luxemburg”, *Las Torres de Lucca*, 2017, vol. 6 (11), p. 155-189; Daniel Egan, “Rosa Luxemburg and the Mass Strike: Rethinking Gramsci's Critique”, *Socialism and Democracy*, 2019, vol. 33 (2), p. 46-66; Guido Liguori, “Luxemburg e Gramsci: convergenze e divergenze di due pensatori rivoluzionari”, *Critica Marxista*, 2020/1, p. 29-40; Joel Wainwright, “Capital and Social Difference in Gramsci and Luxemburg”, *Rethinking Marxism*, 2019, vol. 31 (1), p. 20-41.

<sup>7</sup> André Tosel, “Rosa Luxemburg, Antonio Gramsci: face aux promesses et ambiguïtés de la démocratie”.

<sup>8</sup> Even if the terms of “breakdown” (or “collapse”) is often used to describe Luxemburg's conception, this conception would be mainly developed after her death, notably by Henryk Grossman, *The Law of Accumulation and Breakdown of the Capitalist System* (1929).

<sup>9</sup> Marie-Claire Caloz-Tschopp, “Rosa Luxemburg: la découverte de l'effet boomerang de l'impérialisme et la liberté”.

to barbarism, unless revolutionaries prevail. Luxemburg formulated clearly this idea in 1915 with her famous phrase: “socialism or regression into barbarism”,<sup>10</sup> but she had already expressed a similar idea at the end of the 1890’s.<sup>11</sup> It must be noted that his “boomerang effect” is not just a historical forecast : it was already active at the time when Luxemburg was writing, insofar as the catastrophe of imperialism was already present everywhere, as World War I clearly shows.<sup>12</sup> And in fact, as M-C. Caloz-Tschopp recalls, for Luxemburg “catastrophe” is the “mode of existence” of capitalism (p. 115). A long quote from Luxemburg is of the greatest interest on this matter:

What distinguishes imperialism as the last struggle for capitalist world domination is not simply the remarkable energy and universality of expansion but – and this is the specific sign that the circle of development is beginning to close – the return of the decisive struggle for expansion from those areas which are being fought over back to its home countries. In this way, imperialism brings catastrophe as a mode of existence back from the periphery of capitalist development to its point of departure. The expansion of capital which, for four centuries, had given the existence and civilization of all non-capitalist peoples in Asia, Africa, America and Australia over to ceaseless convulsions and general and complete decline, is now plunging the civilized peoples of Europe itself into a series of catastrophes whose final result can only be the decline of civilization or the transition to the socialist mode of production.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See *The Crisis of Social Democracy*, written in prison in 1915 and published in 1916 under the pseudonym “Junius” (*Selected Political Writings*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1971, p. 334). Michael Löwy writes in the volume that “the expression “socialism or barbarism” marks a turning-point in the history of Marxist thought” (p. 239) insofar as it refers to an epochal alternative, and suggests a partially contingent view of history. It is also a turning-point in Luxemburg’s thought, since before World War I, “parallel to her activist voluntarism, the determinist (economic) optimism of the theory of *Zusammenbruch*, the collapse of capitalism, victim of its contradictions”, was still present in her writings (*idem.*).

<sup>11</sup> For example, in “Verschiebungen in der Weltpolitik (Displacements in World Policy)” (*Leipziger Volkszeitung*, n° 59, March 13, 1899, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1/1, p. 361–365). In this article, she wrote explicitly that imperialism was about to reach its limitations. See Guillaume Fondu and Ulysse Lojkine, “Impérialisme et accumulation du capital. L’apport de Rosa Luxemburg”, <https://www.contretemps.eu/imperialisme-accumulation-luxemburg/>.

<sup>12</sup> On the matter of imperialist barbarism, see also Ilaria Possenti, “Rosa Luxemburg lue par Hannah Arendt”.

<sup>13</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital – Anti-Critique* (February 1915), in Nikolai Bukharin and Rosa Luxemburg, *Imperialism and the Accumulation of Capital*, London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1972, p. 147.

The “gem” found in Gramsci deals also with the historical transformations of capitalism, but in very different terms. Tsel calls this gem “the principle of assimilation” (p. 72). This principle defines modernity as such: the dynamics of class struggle has been able, inside a given society and only up to a point, to destroy the rigid and traditional social logic that was established. The previous dominant classes were “conservative” and viewed themselves as “closed castes”. In contrast, in the early days of its dominance and hegemony (especially after 1789, since Gramsci views the French Revolution as a “the pivot” of modern history, as Tsel writes p. 73), “the bourgeois class poses itself as an organism in continuous movement, capable of absorbing the entire society, assimilating it to its own cultural and economic level”. But, at some time (probably around 1871), “this process comes to a halt”, because “the bourgeois class is ‘saturated’: it not only does not expand – it starts to disintegrate; it not only does not assimilate new elements, it loses part of itself”.<sup>14</sup> Subaltern classes and groups keep pushing towards more participation and activity, but dominant classes and groups cannot accept this. For this reason, they have to use State force to repress subaltern struggles for emancipation, or they have to create new “forms of assimilation”, that is to say forms of a “false” or “perverse” assimilation insofar as its aim is to make subalterns passive (p. 76). Of course, they can, and they do most of the time, combine these two strategies. The new way taken by the bourgeoisie in order to reproduce its dominance, or in other words the new hegemonic modality, is therefore different from the Jacobin-style mobilization of popular forces. It corresponds, in Gramsci’s terms, to a “passive revolution”: the dominant class maintains the masses in passivity and undertakes itself (some of) the social transformations required by the historical situation (required in particular so that it can maintain its domination).

Thus, the discovery of Luxemburg and the gem of Gramsci give two very different insights into the history of modern capitalist societies. Keeping this in mind, we can now turn our attention to organizational and strategic issues, which each of our two authors has dealt with in an original and specific way.

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<sup>14</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *QdC*, Q8§2, p. 937 (*Selections from the Prison Notebooks* [henceforth *SPN*], London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1971, p. 260; cf. also *Prison Notebooks* [PN], Vol. 3, p. 234).

## 2. On revolutionary strategy: the masses and the party

First of all, some irrelevant debates can be avoided by recalling an obvious fact: Rosa Luxemburg and Antonio Gramsci were both Marxist revolutionary thinkers and working class leaders. Even though this is sometimes misunderstood, Jean-Numa Ducange recalls that the party was for Luxemburg, “the unsurpassable horizon of her time” (p. 141) as it was for Gramsci.<sup>15</sup> She was, of course, in conflict with the leadership of the SPD, in the name of the activity of the masses (for example when she defended the strategy of the mass strike during the debate following the Russian Revolution of 1905<sup>16</sup>), and in the name of internationalism before and during World War I. Gramsci too was deeply critical of the reformist leadership of the PSI, of which he was a member before the foundation of the PCI in January 1921 and which he saw as the cause of the defeat of Turin workers’ councils movement during the *biennio rosso* (1919-1920); and, later, from 1926 onwards, he questioned the sectarian line of the Third International insofar as it constituted an obstacle to any authentic antifascist mass politics.

On account of their similar critical commitments in working class parties and their anti-dogmatic, living and open Marxisms, Frigga Haug, taking up an expression from Peter Weiss, speaks of a “Luxemburg-Gramsci Line”, and takes it as a *leitmotiv* in her study of the two authors.<sup>17</sup> And their shared concern for the activity of the subaltern masses explains why Michael Löwy can write that they both developed a “philosophy of praxis”, even though only Gramsci explicitly used the term – the category of praxis referring here to the “dialectical unity between the objective and the subjective, the mediation by which the class in itself becomes the class for itself” (p. 237).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Jean-Numa Ducange, “Portrait croisé de deux traditions marxistes”.

<sup>16</sup> See Rosa Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions* [1906]. In the volume, see in particular Umberto Bandiera, “Syndicat et action politique chez Rosa Luxemburg et Antonio Gramsci”.

<sup>17</sup> Frigga Haug, “La ligne Luxemburg-Gramsci”. For similar interpretations, see *Die “Linie Luxemburg – Gramsci”: Zur Aktualität und Historizität marxistischen Denkens*, Argument-Sonderband AS 159, Berlin/Hamburg, 1989; and Jan Rehmann, “Philosophy of Praxis, Ideology-Critique, and the Relevance of a ‘Luxemburg-Gramsci Line’”, *Historical Materialism*, 2014, 22 (2), pp. 99-116.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Löwy, “L’étincelle s’allume dans l’action. La philosophie de la praxis dans la pensée de Rosa Luxemburg”.

Löwy notes that, whereas for Lenin, “editor of the newspaper *Iskra* [*The Spark*]”, the revolutionary spark is brought by the organized political vanguard, from the outside towards the interior of the spontaneous struggles of the proletariat”, for Luxemburg “the spark of consciousness and revolutionary will ignite the struggle”, even if the party prepares and plays a part in such a process (p. 236). She explains her dialectical conception of the development of class consciousness in her polemical response to *What Is To Be Done ?* :

The proletarian army is recruited and becomes aware of its objectives in the course of the struggle itself. The activity of the party organization, the growth of the proletarians’ awareness of the objectives of the struggle and the struggle itself, are not different things separated chronologically and mechanically. They are only different aspects of the same struggle.<sup>19</sup>

The class educates itself through many struggles; in this sense, she also frequently uses the concept of self-activation (*Selbstbetätigung*).

If we were to place Gramsci – at least the Gramsci of the *Prison Notebooks* – in this alternative, he would be closer to Lenin than to Luxemburg. Luxemburg views the party mainly as a fairly organic expression of the self-educating class, Gramsci, like Lenin, highlights the specificity of the party as a *form* of organization.<sup>20</sup> He conceives the party as the “Modern Prince” that is to be formed in order to lead the revolutionary process, and as a problem which revolutionaries must consciously solve so that it may be possible for the revolution to triumph.<sup>21</sup> Of course, Gramsci breaks new ground compared to Lenin in a number of ways, particularly as he emphasizes the importance of the cultural front. As Tosel argues in his second essay,<sup>22</sup> Gramsci seeks to establish a virtuous “circle”, a circle of reciprocal pedagogy, between the spontaneity and the

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<sup>19</sup> *Organisational Questions of the Russian Social Democracy* [1904], in Rosa Luxemburg, *Selected Political Writings*, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

<sup>20</sup> On the notion of form, Raphaël Ramuz, “Gramsci, la forme-valeur et le parti”.

<sup>21</sup> For a conception of the revolutionary party in Gramsci as a practical problem to be solved, I allow myself to refer to Yohann Douet, “Gramsci et le problème du parti”, <https://www.contretemps.eu/gramsci-probleme-parti/>. To put it in a few words, the problem of the party is to establish dialectical relations, on the one hand, between the leadership of the leadership party and its base, and on the one hand, between the party as a whole and the masses; in other words, it is to properly combine democracy and discipline.

<sup>22</sup> André Tosel, “Qu’est-ce qui m’a attiré vers Gramsci ?”.

“feeling” of the masses, and the collective intellectuality of the party, “interpreter of social relations” (pp. 100-101). But, even though Gramsci goes much further than Lenin in the theorization of the dialectics of spontaneity and conscious direction, he focuses, just like him, on the leading role of the party. That is why his *Notebooks* offer us some precious insights on revolutionary organizations and strategies, but may not sufficiently develop fundamental questions such as political liberties and socialist democracy, contrary to Luxemburg. This being said, one must not forget that the young Gramsci, at the time of *L'Ordine Nuovo*, had given deep thought to the forms of self-organization and concrete democracy such as workers' councils, just as Luxemburg did with the Soviets following the Russian Revolution of 1917.<sup>23</sup>

### 3. On theoretical method : abstractions and mediations

The analytic and strategic differences between Luxemburg and Gramsci described above are linked to the differences between their theoretical methods. As Guido Liguori writes in the article I quoted earlier, one can discern in Luxemburg an *abstract* way of thinking, that is *immediacy* aimed at the general – at the principles or at the fundamental level of reality.<sup>24</sup> On the contrary, Gramsci is more concerned with *mediations*, and with *concrete* socio-historical situations.

While Luxemburg “discovers” the *economic* logic of capitalo-imperialism at work at a *global* level, the conceptual “gem” of Gramsci (the principal of assimilation linked to the notions of hegemony and passive revolution) implies first of all a *politico-ideological* analysis at the *national* level, even if he does acknowledge the fundamental weight of the economic structure. Thus, on the question of the scale of political analysis and action, Gramsci is explicit : “the line of development is towards internationalism, but the point of departure is “national” – and it is from the point of departure that one must begin. Yet the perspective is international and cannot be otherwise”.<sup>25</sup> In other words, the international

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<sup>23</sup> See Federico Oliveri, “Pour un modèle critique de la révolution. Gramsci, Luxemburg et l'expérience des conseils”.

<sup>24</sup> Guido Liguori, “Luxemburg e Gramsci...”, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>25</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *QdC*, Q14§68, p. 1729; *SPN*, p. 240.

character of the proletariat cannot be expressed immediately but requires, in a dialectical manner, national mediations. That is the reason why Gramsci's thinking is probably less useful than Luxemburg's to grasp imperialist logic in all its purity, but more relevant to understand complex concrete phenomena like nation and nationalism,<sup>26</sup> racism<sup>27</sup> or spatiality.<sup>28</sup>

The opposition between Luxemburg's political strategy and Gramsci's is also related to this issue of mediations. Even if Gramsci is too severe towards Luxemburg and does not do justice to the subtlety of her thought, he clearly saw this point. He writes that "Rosa", due to "a certain "economistic" and spontaneist prejudice", "disregarded the "voluntary" and organizational elements" in her analysis of 1905. According to him, her book, *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*, is a memorable theorization of the "war of manoeuvre":

the immediate economic element (crises, etc.) is seen as the field artillery which in war opens a breach in the enemy's defences – a breach sufficient for one's own troops to rush in and obtain a definitive (strategic) victory, or at least an important victory in the context of the strategic line.<sup>29</sup>

In Gramsci's eyes, Luxemburg conceives political events as expressing fairly directly economic factors. For him, it is not the case, especially in "the West", that is in advanced capitalist countries. One must be aware of all the mediations required: revolutionaries must wage a war of position, strive to build mass

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<sup>26</sup> See Fabio Frosini, "Nation-peuple-rhétorique, les dilemmes du fascisme et la question de la démocratie dans les *Cahiers de prison*".

<sup>27</sup> See Stefan Kipfer, "Quel Gramsci décolonial ? Plaidoyer pour une piste Gramsci-Fanon".

<sup>28</sup> See Bob Jessop, "La socio-spatialité dans les écrits de Gramsci", and Younès Ahouga, "L'analyse spatiale de Gramsci et les contradictions inhérentes au capitalisme mondialisé".

<sup>29</sup> Gramsci follows by expounding Luxemburg's argument more in detail: "Naturally the effects of immediate economic factors in historical science are held to be far more complex than the effects of heavy artillery in a war of manoeuvre, since they are conceived of as having a double effect: 1. they breach the enemy's defences, after throwing him into disarray and causing him to lose faith in himself, his forces, and his future ; 2. in a flash they organize one's own troops and create the necessary cadres – or at least in a flash they put the existing cadres (formed, until that moment, by the general historical process) in positions which enable them to encadre one's scattered forces ; 3. in a flash they bring about the necessary ideological concentration on the common objective to be achieved. This view was a form of iron economistic determinism, with the aggravating factor that it was conceived of as operating with lightning speed in time and in space. It was thus out and out historical mysticism, the awaiting of a sort of miraculous illumination" (Antonio Gramsci, QdC, Q13§24, p. 1614: *SPN*, p. 233, translation modified to read "economistic" in line with Gramsci's original).

organizations and parties (the party being the mediation *par excellence*) and take up the ideologico-cultural struggle, in order to gain hegemony. Of course, Gramsci's appreciation of Luxemburg on the questions of economicism, spontaneity and mass strike are too one-sided and reductive.<sup>30</sup> But we could say that he has justly highlighted the fact that she does not give enough importance to political mediations, and even to politics as such – if we define politics following Daniel Bensaïd as the “art of mediations”.

Gramsci is the obvious place to look for theoretical resources that help to grasp the ideologico-cultural dimensions of socio-historical reality. His conceptuality can allow us understand the transformation of intellectuality and, as a result, of subjectivity, linked to contemporary capitalism.<sup>31</sup> Tosel also uses the notion of “passive revolution” in order to analyze neoliberalism (p. 77): by continuously implementing technical and organizational “innovations”, and by instrumentalizing the autonomy claims of subordinates, neoliberalism renews their passivity. For this reason, subaltern groups need an “anti-passive revolution”, through which they could become active.<sup>32</sup> The exact form of this process has yet to be worked out, but we know that building mass organizations linked to subaltern masses by a “virtuous circle” is a part of it; and we know that such an “expanded party” (p. 101), able to wage an “expanded class struggle” (p. 55) including intellectual emancipation and political democratization alongside economic objectives, has to be different from the authoritarian Stalinist parties of the twentieth century.

Gramsci's focus on mediations explains his relevance for our time. But Luxemburg's more abstract way of thinking can also be an asset in this respect. She was thus able to put in all its edge an epochal alternative such as “socialism or barbarism” that is still relevant to us. She saw precisely the imperialist contradictions of global capitalism, and the possibility of unforeseen, non-linear and spontaneous political expressions of these contradictions. For this

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<sup>30</sup> On these points, see Daniel Egan, “Rosa Luxemburg and the Mass Strike: Rethinking Gramsci's Critique”, *art. cit.*, and Alex Levant, “Rethinking Spontaneity beyond Classical Marxism: Re-Reading Luxemburg through Benjamin, Gramsci and Thompson”, *Critique*, 2012, 40 (3), pp. 367-387.

<sup>31</sup> See Pierre Musso, “Actualité des concepts gramsciens pour une critique du néo-industrialisme”, and Jean Robelin, “Qui sont aujourd'hui les intellectuels organiques?”.

<sup>32</sup> On this point, see Isabelle Garo, “André Tosel, lecteur de Gramsci et penseur du présent”.

reason, her thinking can help us understand unexpected outbreaks of class struggle such as the Arab Spring<sup>33</sup> or, more recently, the Yellow vests movement in France (2018-2019), which can be understood as cases of war of manoeuvre.

Finally, Luxemburg's concern with principles has led her to clearly articulate the adequate and essential relation between democracy and socialism.<sup>34</sup> While welcoming the October Revolution as a valuable step forward in the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat, she criticized the authoritarianism of the measures taken by the Bolsheviks because they constituted an obstacle to the realization of a genuine dictatorship of the proletariat. In March 1918, while discussing these measures, she writes, in a passage that deserves to be quoted in full:

Socialism in life demands a complete spiritual transformation in the masses degraded by centuries of bourgeois rule. Social instincts in place of egotistical ones, mass initiative in place of inertia, idealism which conquers all suffering, etc., etc. No one knows this better, describes it more penetratingly; repeats it more stubbornly than Lenin. But he is completely mistaken in the means he employs. Decree, dictatorial force of the factory overseer, draconian penalties, rule by terror – all these things are but palliatives. The only way to a rebirth is the school of public life itself, the most unlimited, the broadest democracy and public opinion. It is rule by terror which demoralizes. When all this is eliminated, what really remains? In place of the representative bodies created by general, popular elections, Lenin and Trotsky have laid down the soviets as the only true representation of political life in the land as a whole, life in the soviets must also become more and more crippled. Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinion, life dies out in every public institution, becomes a mere semblance of life, in which only the bureaucracy remains as the active element. Public life gradually falls asleep, a few dozen party leaders of inexhaustible energy and boundless experience direct and rule. Among them, in reality only a dozen outstanding heads do the leading and an elite of the working class is invited from time to time to meetings where they are to applaud the speeches of the leaders, and to approve proposed resolutions unanimously – at bottom, then, a clique affair – a dictatorship, to be sure, not the dictatorship of the proletariat but only the dictatorship of a handful of politicians, that is a dictatorship in the bourgeois sense, in the sense of the rule of the Jacobins.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> See Zaïd Ben Saïd Cherni, "L'actualité de la pensée de Rosa Luxemburg au prisme de la révolution tunisienne de 2011".

<sup>34</sup> See Antoine Chollet, "Rosa Luxemburg, démocrate parce que socialiste" and, in a more indirect way, Claudie Weil, "Rosa Luxemburg féministe?".

<sup>35</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*, in *The Russian Revolution and Leninism or Marxism ?*, University of Michigan Press, 1961, p. 71-2.

#### 4. Conclusion

This collection of essays therefore offers us a wide range of studies on the thoughts of Luxemburg and Gramsci and on the relations that can be established between them. As we saw, this book is the result of a seminar, and each paper explores its own theme according to its own problematic. This implies necessarily some repetitions and a certain lack of unity in the volume. Nevertheless, every study is rigorous and informative in its own right. Since the topicality of Gramsci's and Luxemburg's works is beyond doubt, one can only hope that the effort to confront them will be taken over, by the authors of this volume or by others, and perhaps in a more systematic way.

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