

Rosa Luxemburg

Our Program and the Political Situation

Spoken: December 31, 1918

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Translated: (from the German) Dick Howard

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This is the text of a speech to the Founding Congress of the Communist Party of Germany (Spartacus League), made on December 31, 1918. Notations of audience response are from H. Weber, *Der Grundungsparteitag der KPD*, pp. 172-201.

Comrades! Our task today is to discuss and adopt a program. In undertaking this task we are not motivated solely by the formal consideration that yesterday we founded a new independent party and that a new party must formulate an official program. Great historical movements have been the determining causes of today's deliberations. The time has tome when the entire Social Democratic socialist program of the proletariat has to be placed on a new foundation. Comrades! In so doing, we connect ourselves to the threads which Marx and Engels spun precisely seventy years ago in the *Communist Manifesto*. As you know, the *Communist Manifesto* dealt with socialism, with the realization of the ultimate goals of socialism as the immediate task of the proletarian revolution. This was the conception advocated by Marx and Engels in the Revolution of 1848; and it was what they conceived as the basis for international proletarian action as well. In common with all the leading spirits in the proletarian movement, both Marx and Engels then believed that the immediate task was the introduction of socialism. All that was necessary, they thought, was to bring about a political revolution, to seize the political power of the state in order to make socialism immediately enter the realm of flesh and blood. Subsequently, as you are aware, Marx and Engels undertook a thoroughgoing revision of this standpoint. In their joint Preface to the republication of the (Communist Manifesto) in 1872, they say:

No special stress is to be laid on the revolutionary measures proposed at the end of section II. That passage would, in many respects, be differently worded today. In view of the gigantic strides of modern industry during the last twenty-five years and of the accompanying progress of the organization of the party of the working class: in view of the practical experience gained, first in the February revolution, and then, still more, in the Paris Commune, where the proletariat for the first time held political power for two months, this program has in some aspects been antiquated. One

thing especially was proved by the Commune, namely, that the "working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes."

What is the actual wording of the passage which is said to be dated? It reads as follows:

The proletariat will use its political supremacy to gradually wrest all capital from the bourgeoisie: to centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the state, i.e., of the proletariat organized as the ruling class; and to increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible.

Of course, in the beginning this can only be effected by means of despotic interference into property rights and into the conditions of bourgeois production; by measures, therefore, which appear economically insufficient and untenable, but which, in the course of the movement, go beyond themselves, necessitate further inroads into the old social order, and are unavoidable as a means of revolutionizing the whole mode of production.

The measures will, of course, be different in different countries.

Nevertheless, in the most advanced countries, the following will be generally applicable:

- 1) Abolition of landed property and application of all land rents to public purposes.
- 2) Heavy progressive taxes.
- 3) Abolition of the right of inheritance.
- 4) Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels.
- 5) Centralization of credit in the hands of the state by means of a national bank with state capital and an exclusive monopoly.
- 6) Centralization of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the state.
- 7) Increase in the number of factories and instruments of production owned by the state; the bringing into cultivation of waste lands, and the improvement of the soil generally, in accordance with a social plan.
- 8) Equal obligation upon all to labor. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.
- 9) Unification of agricultural and manufacturing industries; gradual abolition of the distinction between town and country.
- 10) Free education for all children in public schools. Abolition of children's factory labor in its present form. Unification of education with industrial production, etc., etc.

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As you see, with a few variations, these are the tasks that confront us today: the introduction, the realization of socialism. Between the time when the above program was formulated and the present moment, there have intervened seventy years of capitalist development, and the dialectical movement of history has brought us back to the conception which Marx and Engels had abandoned in 1872 as erroneous. At that time, there were good reasons for believing that their

