POLISH MARXISM AFTER LUXEMBURG

Edited by Jan Toporowski

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POLISH MARXISM AFTER LUXEMBURG

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POLISH MARXISM AFTER LUXEMBURG

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

In memory of Tadeusz Kowalik

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INTRODUCTION: ROSA LUXEMBURG AND POLISH MARXISM

Jan Toporowski

The ideas of Karl Marx reached Poland relatively quickly. Paradoxically, for Polish nationalists, the suppression of Polish independence in 1795, confirmed at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, had brought Polish intellectuals into the cosmopolitan elite of Europe, where the political discussions that emerged into revolution with the French Revolution were continued. Polish emigrés gathered in the capitals of Europe, while dissidents in Poland looked to developments in St. Petersburg, Vienna and Berlin that would influence social change in Poland. As Russian Poland industrialised, a new urban working class emerged that reflected the ethnic mix of Polish society containing a large Jewish component, as well as every language and religion that was to be found in the lands to the South of the Baltic Sea. With the failure of the 1863 uprising, to the question of national independence were added all the social questions of poverty, unemployment, female and working class emancipation.

Marx's theories were already discussed in Warsaw in the 1870s by radicals around the sociologist and economist Stanisław Krusiński (1857–1886). He gathered around himself a group of journalists, teachers, members of the liberal professions and students who concerned themselves with social progress rather than national self-determination. Later in the twentieth century it became fashionable to decry this group as politically incoherent, since it included anarchists, syndicalists, narodniks as well as social reformers (Holland, 2007, pp. 34–37). But Krusiński helped to translate Marx's *Capital Volume I* into Polish and his associate, Ludwik Waryński (1856–1889), established the first Polish explicitly Marxist socialist party, Proletariat (in full Międzynarodowa Socjal-Rewolucyjna Partia Proletariat – the International Social-Revolutionary Party Proletariat). The new party was established in 1882, after Waryński fell out with Krusiński over the latter's refusal to move towards organising the working class. Proletariat

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was active for only four years. But among its successors was the Polish Socialist Party that was to play a central role in Polish politics in the first half of the twentieth century. It was his membership of the Polish Socialist Party that Oskar Lange was suspended for his 'Marxist' view of the state at the end of the 1920s (Lange, 1986, p. 52).

Socialist commitment then, as now, did not necessarily coincide with an interest in Marx's theories, let alone an understanding of the political economy to which Marx provided a critique. According to Isaac Deutscher, the Polish socialist leader in the Austrian part of Poland, Ignacy Daszyński, 'our famous member of parliament, a pioneer of socialism, and orator on whose lips hung the parliaments of Vienna and Warsaw' admitted that he had not read *Das Kapital*. 'But Karl Kautsky has read and has written a popular summary of it. I have not read Kautsky either; but Kelles-Krauz, our party theorist, has read him, and he summarized Kautsky's book. I have not read Kelles-Krauz either, but that clever Jew, Herman Diamond, our financial expert, has read Kelles Krauz, and has told me all about it' (Deutscher, 1967). Kautsky's summary proved, however, to be influential among many of the later Polish Marxists mentioned in these essays.

Among Krusiński's circle was a student who was to make his name as a sociologist and political economist. Ludwik Krzywicki (1859–1941) was to have a much more lasting influence on Polish Marxist circles into the twentieth century, in part through his university teaching and research. His ideas are represented in this volume in two essays by Jan Toporowski, and Jan Toporowski and Hanna Szymborska, on the concept of 'industrial feudalism', that was put forward by Krzywicki and later taken up Lange.

Krzywicki's ideas on industrial feudalism were closely linked to his pioneering explanation of monopoly finance capital, put forward two decades before the famous analysis of finance capital that Rudolf Hilferding published in 1910. But Krzywicki wrote in Polish, and he had virtually given up writing on political economy when Rosa Luxemburg, writing in German, burst in on Marxist circles within and beyond Poland.

1. THE INFLUENCE OF ROSA LUXEMBURG

Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919) was a founder of the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (*Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy* or SDKPiL) in 1893, together with her comrade and lover Leo Jogiches (1867–1919), a member of the Russian Narodnaya Volya, who also went by the names of Jan Tyszka or Grozowski. Its royal title referred to the geographic region of Russian-occupied Poland, rather than to the elected monarchy of eighteenth-century Poland. The Party was set up as a radical alternative to the Polish Socialist Party (*Polska Partia Socjalistyczna* or PPS), founded at around the same time, and prone to factionalism, in particular over the question of Polish independence. A section of the Socialist party, led by Józef Piłsudski, came to be known as the Revolutionary Faction (*Frakcja Rewolucyjna*) and devoted itself to working class emancipation through the struggle for Polish independence. They

were opposed on this national question by the Left (*Lewica*) faction of the PPS, who gave priority to the struggle against Tsarist autocracy in collaboration with other national and social groups. The SDKPiL took an explicitly anti-nationalist line, with a programme to eliminate nation states and establish an international working-class republic. The national question was crucial because the urban population, and in particular the industrial working class, was very mixed in terms of language and religious or ethnic identity. Indeed, the largest working class organisation in Poland at that time was the Jewish *Bund*, as much a trades union as it was a political party.

Shortly after the establishment of the SDKPiL, Luxemburg left Poland to study for a doctorate in Economics at the University of Zurich and was awarded that title in 1897 for a thesis on *The Industrial Development of Poland*. Zurich was chosen because, at the time, its university was one of the few that admitted women to higher degrees. Luxemburg then moved to Germany, while keeping touch with her comrades in Poland. But the politics of this early radicalism and scholarship was to dog her reputation in Poland, arousing a hostility that perhaps no other Polish political economist of her generation attracted. In his book on Luxemburg, the great Polish political economist Tadeusz Kowalik quoted 'a certain scholar, with significant achievements in economic theory and the popularization of Marx's theory' as observing 'eliminate Rosa Luxemburg, eliminate her ideas at every step' (Kowalik, 2014, p. 1).

After her murder in 1919, Rosa Luxemburg was remembered in her native country for two distinct contributions that she made to political economy, contributions that emerged from that early work. First of all there was her attitude to the question of Polish national self-determination. In a series of blistering articles in the 1890s and 1900s, she denounced the 'social patriotism' of those socialists who sought to make Polish independence a priority over the overthrow of the imperial regimes in Germany, Austria and Russia. A Polish nation-state could only be an instrument of those more powerful regimes, and this reactionary patronage was very apparent in Piłsudski's intrigues to secure sponsorship for an independent Poland from the Austrian and German governments. In this regard, Luxemburg not only challenged the Revolutionary Faction of the PPS and its allies in the German and Austrian parts of Poland. She also contradicted the view of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels that Polish independence was the precondition for revolution in continental Europe. Her consistent opposition to nationalism in any form also extended to any political organisation that would have any truck with national self-determination that, in her view, could only serve to divide the working class and strengthen the bourgeois class. This affected her willingness to work with less resolute socialists in Poland but strengthened her engagement with the Russian and German Social Democrats that made her much better known outside Poland. Her view on the national question came to be mutilated by her later Communist rivals, and her political opponents, and seriously reduced her standing among and influence on the working class movement in her native Poland.

Luxemburg's other legacy to Poland, and to the cause of scientific political economy at large, was her systematic criticism of inconsistencies in Marxist

economics, in her book *The Accumulation of Capital*. In Poland, where a formal political state arose at the end of 1918, her contribution to Marxian economics was overshadowed by her judgement on the national question, a sign perhaps of how little those who led opinion in that country had understood their own history. As Isaac Deutscher would later point out 'Contrary to Rosa Luxemburg's expectations, Poland had regained her independence; but contrary to the expectations of her opponents, Poland had received it mainly from the hands of the Russian and German revolutions' (Deutscher, 1982, pp. 129–161). No sooner did the Polish state arise then it proceeded to engage in hostilities with other 'successor states' that emerged from the Russian Empire on Poland's Eastern borders.

In December 1918, the SDKPiL combined with the Left Faction of the PPS to form the Polish Communist Workers' Party that, four years later, became the Polish Communist Party (*Komunistyczna Partia Polski* or KPP). When the Polish military incursions into the Ukraine turned into outright war with the Soviet Union in 1920, the KPP was divided, with part of it welcoming the Red Army advance on Warsaw. For the bourgeois political parties, and many on the left and among the working class, this fatally compromised Polish sympathisers with the October Revolution, who came to be seen as instruments of Soviet expansionism, rather than working-class emancipation. From this emerged an erroneous belief that the advance of the Red Army towards Warsaw in the summer of 1920 was an expression of the Luxemburgist influence in the KPP.

In fact her friend and comrade from the SDKPiL, Henryk Stein-Domski (1883–1937), who was in the central committee of the new Communist Party, wrote articles for the socialist press denouncing the attempt to impose socialism by means of the Red Army. After the Treaty of Riga, in March 1921, that ended the Polish–Soviet War, the KPP gradually recovered some of the political influence that it had lost during that war, in particular during the strikes and industrial unrest that culminated in a general strike in Kraków in 1923. Nevertheless, 'Luxemburgism' came to be associated with a hostility towards Polish independence that made her ideas less welcome among sections of the Polish working-class movement. Luxemburg had also shared the view, common among the leadership of the Second International, that the peasantry were an ignorant and backward social force whose only contribution to socialism could be through their proletarianisation. Such attitudes were carried over into the KPP and meant that it could not attract widespread support in a society that was still largely rural.

The other distortion of Luxemburg's political ideas came from within the Communist movement that she helped to found. The political judgement of the KPP leadership was called into question in May 1926, when it supported the call for Józef Piłsudski to take power in order to prevent the formation of a right-wing government. Piłsudski did take power, but with a coup that replaced an unstable parliamentary democracy with an autocratic regime of his military cronies. As time went on, they became more authoritarian, especially after the economy descended into crisis following the 1929 Crash. The KPP was marginalised and, after 1931, suppressed. Most of its leadership fled to Moscow. Stein-Domski

himself left for Moscow in 1926, and there became a member of Soviet Communist Party. But his association with the Trotskyist opposition became the pretext for his execution in the Great Purge of 1937.

In Moscow, the KPP exiles found Stalin engaged in his paranoid war against his rivals in the Soviet Communist Party. Stalin was convinced that 'Luxemburgism' was a Polish variety of Trotksyism and that it had penetrated deep into the Polish party. In 1938, the KPP was disbanded by the Comintern and its leadership was imprisoned and eventually executed. Eighteen years later, following Nikita Khrushchev's secret denunciation of Stalin to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the KPP, including Stein-Domski, was rehabilitated and, with them, the reputation of Rosa Luxemburg in the Communist movement. Her writings came out again in Poland edited by the publishing house of the Communist ruling party, and a Polish translation of her *Accumulation of Capital* was finally published in 1963. Nevertheless, Tadeusz Kowalik, whose habilitation thesis on Luxemburg was approved in 1963, recalled that, even at that time, such work was not a route to political advancement in the Communist system.

Luxemburg's reputation proved to be more lasting and continuous among a much narrower group of dissident economists who took an interest in the questions that she had raised in her *Accumulation of Capital*. However, unlike her earlier political work, this influence was indirect: In the 1920s many Polish economists with socialist sympathies sought to understand the economic and monetary instability that affected the newly created Poland during its earliest years. Many of them were familiar with the work of what is nowadays called the Austro-Marxist school, in particular the economist Otto Bauer who took up the work of Luxemburg and her comrade Rudolf Hilferding.

Among those Polish economists were Oskar Lange, who took his faction of the Polish Socialist Party into the Post-War Polish United Workers' Party. Lange is represented in this volume in the essays of Andrew Trigg, Jan Toporowski, Roberto Lampa and Grzegorz Konat. Another was Henryk Grossman, who had been in the SDKPiL and joined the KPP, represented here with a biographical essay by Rick Kuhn. They were all taken by the question that Luxemburg had raised of how capitalist surplus is monetised through markets internal to capitalist production, and those external to capitalist production, that Luxemburg had identified as militarism and imperialism. Despite this, most Marxist economists in Poland during the period of its independence before the Second World War dismissed Luxemburg's analysis and gravitated towards underconsumptionist explanations of economic instability and depression.

The exception among Polish economists was Michał Kalecki (1899–1970), a self-taught economist who derived his economics from Luxemburg and J.A. Hobson and went on to be one of the pioneers of what came to be called the Keynesian Revolution in economic theory and policy. Kalecki considered Luxemburg to be the crucial link between Marx and the new Keynesian ideas because she had identified the crucial role that investment (or 'capital accumulation' as Marx called it) plays in the dynamics of the capitalist economy. In 1939 he wrote:

> It may be interesting to notice that the... [equations showing the equality of profits with investment] ... are contained in the famous Marxian scheme of 'extended reproduction'.[1] Marx even considers the question of how to provide 'means' for increased expenditure on investment. It must be added here that the problems discussed here are treated by Marx from a rather special point of view. He is interested in finding out ... the pace of investment ... which is necessary in order to secure a steady expansion of output ... He does not pay attention to the problem of what happens if investment is inadequate to secure the moving equilibrium [in both sectors], and therefore does not approach the idea of the key position of investment in the determination of the level of output and employment.
>
> Exactly the reverse attitude is represented by one of his eminent pupils, Rosa Luxemburg. In her *Akkumulation des Kapitals* she stressed the point that, if capitalists are saving, their profits can be 'realized' only if a corresponding amount is spent by them on investment. She, however, considered impossible the persistence of net investment (at least in the long run) in a closed capitalist economy; ... it is only the existence of exports to the non-capitalist countries which allows for the expansion of the capitalist system. The theory cannot be accepted as a whole, but the necessity of covering the 'gap of saving' by home investment or exports was outlined by her perhaps more clearly than anywhere else before the publication of Mr. Keynes' *General Theory*. (Kalecki, 1939, pp. 45–46)

Kalecki's theory of the business cycle can therefore be considered an extension of Luxemburg's analysis. However, despite holding various official positions in Poland after the Second World War, Kalecki's theories were viewed with suspicion by the ideologues in the ruling party. In the 1950s, and during the anti-semitic purges, he was accused of introducing bourgeois ideas into political economy.

Kalecki's work won him international acclaim and its contributions to, or dissent from, Marxism have been the subject of considerable controversy. The relationship of Kalecki's political economy with that of Karl Marx is discussed in this volume by Jan Toporowski, Peter Kriesler and Joseph Halevi, Gabriele Pastrello and Riccardo Bellofiore.

During the 1960s Kalecki worked with Tadeusz Kowalik (1926–2012), who studied under Oskar Lange and under his supervision wrote his doctoral thesis on Ludwik Krzywicki, followed by his post-doctoral thesis (*habilitacja*) on Luxemburg. Kowalik is represented in essays by Gavin Rae and Grzegorz Konat.

2. BEYOND POLITICAL ECONOMY

Restricting the influence of Marx to the discussion of political economy in Polish Marxist circles reflects perhaps the limitations of this volume's editor and, unfortunately, gives a very narrow view of the scope of Marx's influence in Poland. Despite nationalist efforts to suppress Marxist ideas in the inter-War period, Communist efforts to confine Marxism to the dogmas of Soviet Marxism, and renewed nationalist hostility after 1989, Marx's ideas continued to stimulate critical thought in scholarly writing. The discovery of Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* in 1932 were discussed among Polish philosophers and were a major influence on a younger general of philosophers like the

[1]Kalecki was here referring to Volume II of *Capital*.

epistemologist Adam Schaff (1913–2006) and Leszek Kołakowski (1927–2009). Kołakowski's major work, written after he had fallen out with the Communist authorities at the University of Warsaw, where he was Professor of the History of Philosophy, is *Main Currents of Marxism Its Rise, Growth, and Dissolution* (Kołakowski, 1978) predates his eventual turning away from Marxism. The book contains some useful summaries of the work of the early Polish Marxists like Krzywicki, Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz (1872–1905) and Stanisław Brzozowski (1878–1911).

In the second half of the twentieth century there was a flowering of research in history that was influenced by Marx's writings. Perhaps the most direct contribution to Marxist historical writings was made by Isaac Deutscher (1907–1967), whose biographies of Stalin and Trotsky, as well as his commentaries on developments in Communist countries, most notably the Soviet Union, but also his native Poland, pioneered the critical historical analysis of socialism (Deutscher, 1949, 1954, 1959a, 1959b, 1967, 1971, 1982). From his studio in London, Deutscher became one of the founding figures of the New Left in Western Marxism in the 1960s, and a key figure in the protest movement against the American war in Vietnam.

Among Polish historians, Witold Kula (1916–1988) acquired an international reputation for his studies of peripheral feudalism (Kula, 1976). Kula studied before the Second World War with the historian of the Polish labour movement Natalia Gąsiorowska (1881–1964). Gąsiorowska had been a member of the KPP before its dissolution and knew the Party's leader Maria Koszutska, who died in a Moscow prison in 1940. Kula's colleague Marian Małowist (1909–1988) was widely known for his contributions to world systems theory. Less well known was Jan Baszkiewicz (1930–2011), whose studies of the French Revolution yielded a theory of bourgeois revolutions that is discussed in the essays by Grzegorz Konat.

Among sociologists, Zygmunt Bauman (1925–2017) now has a worldwide reputation for his critical studies of modernism and post-modern societies. The contributions to the understanding of romanticism made by the cultural historian Maria Janion (1926–2020) are another rich seam of scholarship. But those contributions await translation into English.

Despite the nominal commitment of the post-War Polish government to promoting the study of Marx, many of these scholars suffered censorship, repression and exile, whether earlier on, because of their dissent from 'Soviet Marxism', or in 1968 in the purge of Poles of Jewish origins or 'revisionists' who criticised the policies of the Communist government. The sympathy of scholars of all shades of political opinion for workers' protests against those policies reinforced the difficulties of public discussion in Marxist and non-Marxist circles. Many made real personal sacrifices for the sake of their political ideals.

Following the dissolution of the Communist bloc in 1989, it came to be widely believed that socialism in Poland was finished and that only capitalism could be compatible with democracy and economic recovery. The association of Marxism with Communist repression and economic failure was difficult to overlook but left little scope for systematic analysis and criticism of social problems as the last century came to an end. Out of the workers' revolt against Communism emerged the nationalist populism that now prevails in Poland.

These difficulties do not mean that Marxism in Poland is dying off, with the depletion through death and the defection of those who read Marx with open eyes and an open mind. Critical scholarship was always a minority interest that flourished in the intellectual underworld through the triumphs of bourgeois hubris and hands over to younger generations in Poland today a rich tradition of critical thought and discussion.

3. IN THIS VOLUME

As this Introduction indicates, it is not possible today for historical reasons to give a full and comprehensive account of Polish Marxism in such a volume. The editor of this volume has tried to give structure to the volume by grouping the chapters together around certain themes or the ideas of particular political economists. The first section covers some of the ideas that emerged more or less in the same period as Luxemburg was active and, in the case of industrial feudalism, showing its current relevance by taking this up to the present day. This section starts with a chapter by Andrew Trigg re-examining Rosa Luxemburg's refutation of Say's Law. This is linked to Marx's discussion in Part 2 of *Theories of Surplus Value* to show the inevitability of crisis in capitalism.

A second chapter in this section, by Rick Kuhn, provides an overview of the ideas of Henryk Grossman. Kuhn presents Grossman's theory of capitalist breakdown, which Grossman considered to be his own most original contribution to political economy, as well as Grossman's contributions to the history of science and Marx's scientific method. While Grossman addressed in his own way the German literature of the Second International, the Polish sociologist Ludwik Krzywicki addressed the changes that he observed in capitalism towards the end of the nineteenth century, and identified the emergence of monopoly finance capital some two decades before Hilferding. Krzywicki argued that this would give rise to a more stable capitalism, but with more rigid social hierarchies that he described as industrial feudalism. An original feature of his exposition of monopoly finance capital was his identification of it with American trust capitalism, rather than the dominant role of the German clearing banks. This feature reappeared in Oskar Lange's critique of American capitalism under the New Deal. Jan Toporowski presents Krzywicki's and Lange's analysis and then, with Hanna Szymborska, extends it to twenty-first century capitalism, where the unequal distribution of wealth recreates the rigid social hierarchies of industrial feudalism.

A second section in this volume takes up the much better known development from Polish Marxism of Michał Kalecki, who went on to become one of the founders of what came to be called the Keynesian Revolution in macroeconomics and economic policy. Joseph Halevi and Peter Kriesler locate Kalecki's work in the 'foundational' debates around monopoly capital that emerged in Marxist theory between the death of Marx and the First World War. They put forward Kalecki as the link between these debates and the later work on monopoly capitalism of Paul Sweezy and the New York Monthly Review discussions. The