

Rosa Luxemburg and Sakae Osugi

—Two Attitudes towards “Bolshevik Revolution”—¹⁾

Yoshiki OTA

Rosa Luxemburg criticized Bolshevik's policies sharply before the World War I. Her critiques concerned Bolshevik's approval to right of self-determination of peoples (nations) and the centralism of party organization. In 1903, about the problem of organization she called Lenin's theory on organization “Ultra-centralism”.

Der von Lenin befürwortete Ultra-zentralismus sheint uns aber in seinem ganzen Wesen nicht vom positiven schöpferischen, sondern vom sterilen Nachwächtergeist getragen zu sein. Sein Gedankengang ist hauptsächlich auf die Kontrolle der Parteitätigkeit und nicht auf ihre Befruchtung, auf die Einengung und nicht auf die Entfaltung, auf die Schurigelung und nicht auf die Zusammenziehung der Bewegung zugeschnitten.²⁾

Rosa Luxemburg pointed out the possibility that Bolshevik-type party would be transformed to the obstacle to mass movement.

However, in 1917, she didn't find such possibility in activities of

1) This paper was presented at International Rosa-Luxemburg-Tagung, Tampere, Finland, September 11-13 1998.

2) Luxemburg, R., “Organisationsfrage der russischen Sozialdemokratie”, *Gesammelte Werke (GW)*, Bd. 1 / 2, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1974, S. 433 f.

Bolshevik revolution. She identified the interest of Bolshevik with that of mass movement. In August 1917, She foresaw the second revolution.

Vor allem rollt die russische Revolution soziale und politische Probleme auf, die an sich nicht anders als auf internationalem Maßstab gelöst werden könne. Die unvermeidliche Erschütterung der bürgerlichen Eigentumsformen durch die bevorstehende Lösung der Agrarfrage, die Erschütterung der kapitalistischen Ausbeutungsformen durch eine radikale Umgestaltung der Arbeitsverhältnisse, die von der russischen Arbeiterschaft angestrebt werden muß, die Erschütterung des bürgerlichen Staates durch eine wirkliche Volksherrschaft – alles das kann sich unmöglich in den Rahmen des heutigen Europas fügen, in den Rahmen der krassesten militaristischen Reaktion, wie sie gerade seit dem Ausbruch des Weltkrieges in allen Ländern ungehemmt und unumschränkt die Herrschaft angetreten hat. / Je mehr in Russland die Diktatur des Proletariats naht, um so mehr reift ferner der unvermeidliche Rückfall der russischen Bourgeoisie in die Arme des Konterrevolution heran.³⁾

Rosa Luxemburg considered the seizure of political power by Bolshevik as the realization of this forecast. She identified Bolshevik with mass movement. There was no contradiction with them.

In 1918, in the manuscript in prison "Zur russische Revolution", she also admired Bolshevik as follows.

Die Lenin-Partei war die einzige, die das Gebot und die Pflicht einer wirklich revolutionären Partei begriff, die durch die Lösung: Alle

3) Luxemburg, R., "Brennende Zeitfragen", *GW*, Bd. 4, S. 279.

Macht in die Hände des Proletariats und des Bauerntums! den Fortgang der Revolution gesichert hat.⁴⁾

In this manuscript Rosa Luxemburg criticized some policies of Bolshevik government. They were problems concerning agrarian question, national question and breaking up of the constituent assembly by force. Furthermore she pointed out the possibility of the degeneration of Bolshevik's dictatorship into the dictatorship of clique.

Ohne allgemeine Wahlen, ungehemmte Presse – und Versammlungsfreiheit, freien Meinungskampf erstirbt das Leben in jeder öffentlichen Institution, wird zum Scheinleben, in der die Bürokratie allein das tätige Element bleibt. Das öffentliche Leben schläft allmählich ein, einige Dutzend Parteiführer von unerschöpflicher Energie und grenzenlosem Idealismus dirigieren und regieren, unter ihnen leitet in Wirklichkeit ein Dutzend hervorragender Köpfe, und ein Elite der Arbeiterschaft wird von Zeit zu Zeit zu Versammlungen aufgeboten, um den Reden der Führer Beifall zu klatschen, vorgelegten Resolutionen einstimmig zuzustimmen, im Grunde also eine Cliqueswirtschaft – eine Diktatur allerdings, aber nicht die Diktatur des Proletariats, sondern die Diktatur einer Handvoll Politiker, d. h. Diktatur im rein bürgerlichen Sinne, im Sinne der Jakobinerherrschaft.⁵⁾

But she never blamed the seizure of power by Bolshevik. Near the end of this manuscript she confirmed the significance of Bolshevik Revolution.

4) Luxemburg, R., "Zur russische Revolution", *GW*, Bd. 4, S. 341.

5) a. a. O., S. 362.

Worauf es ankommt, ist, in der Politik der Bolschewiki das Wesentliche vom Unwesentlichen, den Kern von dem Zufälligen zu unterscheiden. In dieser letzten Periode, in der wir vor entscheidenden Endkämpfen in der ganzen Welt stehen, war und ist das wichtigste Problem des Sozialismus, geradezu die brennende Zeitfrage nicht diese oder jene Detailfrage der Taktik, sondern : die Aktionsfähigkeit des Proletariats, die revolutionäre Tatkraft des Massen, der Wille zur Macht des Sozialismus überhaupt. In dieser Beziehung waren die Lenin und Trotzki mit ihren Freunden die ersten, die dem Weltproletariat mit dem Beispiel vorangegangen sind.⁶⁾

In spite of pointing out the fear of "dictator of clique", she argued the identity of interest of Bolshevik with that of the masses.

The reactions against Bolshevik Revolution by imperialists appeared around the world. The murder of Rosa Luxemburg in January 1919 was a sample of them. In Japan Sakae Osugi (1885–1923) was killed by Japanese authorities just after the great earthquake (Kanto–Daishinsai) of September 1923. At that time thousands of Korean were massacred. Osugi was a socialist activist since Russo–Japanese War (1904–1905) and a famous writer having influence on the labour movement. Japanese authorities regarded him as one of the most dangerous persons.

We can read some literatures on the thought and the life of Sakae Osugi in English and in German.

1. Sakae Osugi, *The Autobiography of Osugi Sakae*, translated with annotations by Byron K. Marshall, University of California Press, 1992.

6) a. a. O., S. 365.

2. Thomas A. Stanley, *Osugi Sakae Anarchist in Taisho Japan : The Creativity of the Ego*, Harvard University Press, 1982.
3. Herbert Worm, *Studien über den jungen Osugi Sakae und die Meiji-Sozialisten zwischen Sozialdemokratie und Anarchismus unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Anarchismusrezeption*, Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasians, e. V., Hamburg, 1981.

The socialist movement in Japan started about 1900. But Japanese authorities suppressed all the opposition movements completely by frame-up of Tenno assassination plan (Taigyaku-jiken, 1910). Some of socialists retired from movement, and others emigrated abroad (Sen Katayama 1859-1933, Sanshiro Ishikawa 1876-1956).

It were only Toshihiko Sakai (1871-1933), Hitoshi Yamakawa (1880-1958), Kanson Arahata (1887-1981), and Osugi that stood still under the banner of socialism during the World War I. They were not homogeneous in political orientation. Sakai and Yamakawa stood near German Marxism. Osugi was in sympathy with anarchism of Kropotkin (Петр Алексеевич Кропоткин, 1842-1921). Yamakawa, Arahata and Osugi were also influenced by syndicalism. They had some knowledge of the divergence of SPD during the World War I, and felt sympathy with Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.

When they heard of "February Revolution" in March 1917, they expected the proletarian revolution following it. But they had little knowledge of Russian revolutionary movements of this period. They had no information about the split of Bolshevik and Menshevik. They knew the names Plekhanov (Георгий Валентинович Плеханов, 1856-1918), Zasulich (Вера Ивановна Засулич, 1849-1919), Deich (Лев

Григорьевич Дейч, 1855–1941), but didn't know the names Lenin, Trotsky (Лев Давидович Троцкий, 1879–1940), Martov (Юлий Осипович Цедербаум, 1873–1923).

The labour movement was promoted in the closing days of the War. In 1920 May Day was held in Japan for the first time. The impact of Bolshevik Revolution made clear the divergence within the socialist movement. Sakai, Yamakawa and Arahata formed pro-bolshevik group. Osugi didn't take part in this group. He didn't speak so much about Bolshevik Revolution. Toward the end of 1920 he wrote "the second revolution in Russia made a great impression on the mind of the masses in Japan"⁷⁾ At that time he considered Bolshevik Revolution positive.

After that Osugi turned to assume a critical attitude toward Bolshevik Revolution. In September 1922 he expressed himself against Bolshevik as follows.

Anarchists outside Russia couldn't realize the truth in Russia, and disliked counter-revolutionary forces. With much of sympathy they watched the process of the revolution in Russia. However, the truth became gradually known. It became clear that the government of labourers and peasants itself was the most counter-revolutionary element preventing from proceeding the revolution. Everyone supports the revolution in Russia, but no one supports such Bolshevik government.⁸⁾

Osugi's critique against Bolshevik went side by side with his critique to pro-bolshevik group in Japan (called "Anarchist-Bolshevik dispute").

7) Osugi, S., *Collected Works (CW)*, Vol. 6, p. 74.

8) Osugi, S., *CW*, Vol. 7, p. 74.

The way of labour movement and attitude toward parliament were critical issues in the dispute. In January 1917 Toshihiko Sakai ran as a candidate at the general election. Osugi found no significance in this candidature, and gave sneering laughter at Sakai. The antagonism concerning labour movement was still sharper. Osugi who had influence on unions of printer, argued for "federalism" in national organization. Sakai, Yamakawa and Arahata argued for "centralism". In September 1922 they clashed each other. After this Osugi made clear his attitude toward Bolshevik Revolution.

Osugi had an antipathy against Bolshevik in direct contact with Comintern. Comintern tried to approach Sakai group in order to organize a branch in Japan, and invited the delegation to Shanghai. But Sakai and Yamakawa didn't have confidence in the messenger. In their place Osugi visited Shanghai in October 1920. He took part in "Conference of Far Eastern Socialists", which was organized by Voitinski (Войтинский, Григорий Наумович Зархин, 1893–1953). He wanted to know what Bolshevik was with his own eyes. In January 1921, with funds provided by Comintern, Osugi started the journal "Rodo Undo (Labour Movement)", on which both anarchists and new pro-Bolshevik members (Eizo Kondo 1883–1965, Seido Takatsu 1893–1974) expressed their opinions.

In 1922, Kondo received much money from Comintern in Shanghai. And he was arrested by Japanese police when he spent that money for amusements on the way to Tokyo. After this Osugi cut his connections with Comintern. He had a deep distrust of Comintern and pro-Bolshevik group. Comintern also disliked Osugi's anti-Marxistic orientation. These experiences exerted a great influence upon his view on Bolshevik.

About 1922, Osugi argued against Bolshevik openly. What he put in question were the oppression of non-Bolshevik socialists, the suppression of the riot in Kronstadt, the policy to trade union and the compromises with imperialist powers by NEP. He considered these policies as “counter-revolutionary” acts by Bolshevik. In his last year (1923), he tried to visit Berlin through Paris in order to meet Volin (Волин = Всеволод Михайлович Еихенбаум 1882–1945). Because Osugi had much interest in Makhno movement (махновщина), he wanted to take information about it from Volin. But Osugi was arrested by French police, and was repatriated by force.

Osugi’s critique against Bolshevik stems from his view on labour movement. In his essay “Labour movement and individualism” (October 1915), he explained the causes why labour movement charmed him.⁹⁾

At first, from the point of view of the tendency of economic evolution, we find labourers the nucleus for construction of the new society.

(Second) We have sensitiveness to the oppressions by surroundings, and have an intense instinct to revolt them. Sociology and political economy show me that these oppressions originate from the same root. And I took thoughts that the revolt against oppressions should be approved.

The most important cause why I am attracted by labour movement is not feeling of pity for labourers, but feeling that I would like to find the great power in their lives, to admire the power, and to assimilate myself into it.

Osugi’s starting point was the spirit of revolt against surroundings

9) Osugi, S., *CW*, Vol. 6, pp. 252–254.

that restrict him. Osugi aimed at displaying his individuality. He found such ideal in the life of labourer. Then he wanted to engage himself to labour movement. The understanding that labour class construct a new society according to the law of social evolution is secondary for him. Displaying one's individuality was characteristic in Osugi's anarchism. Osugi criticized Bolshevik from this point of view. He couldn't accept the party that kept mass movement under its control. He refused the organization that treated individuals as instruments. Although Osugi didn't observe the situation in Russia exactly, he saw through Bolshevik's oppressive tendency. Osugi's critique seems to be related to Rosa Luxemburg's critique against Bolshevik's "Ultra-zentralismus".

Osugi's critique was a precursor of estrangement of Japanese veteran socialists from Comintern. Japanese branch of Comintern = Japanese Communist Party was established in 1922. Sakai, Yamakawa and Arahata became its leaders. But JCP was disorganized soon. Comintern was surprised at this disorganization, and tried to reorganize JCP. In 1927, JCP was reconstructed. But Sakai, Yamakawa, Arahata didn't part in it. They were distrustful of the way of leading of Comintern. They continued socialist movement with their organ "Rono (Labourer and Peasant)". They weren't against Soviet Union. But they criticized the leading of Japanese socialist movement by Comintern. Comintern appointed new members as leaders of JCP.

In Japan JCP wasn't a successor of the tradition of the socialist movement since Russo-Japanese War. Sen Katayama was an exceptional person. Osugi was the first who criticized Bolshevik within the veteran socialists.

The rule by Bolshevik in USSR continued more than 70 years, and

finished in 1991. It was criticized not only by the Right, imperialists, liberalists but also by the Left. Trotsky who have led Bolshevik Revolution condemned the Bolshevik rule as Stalinist regime. But he continued to appreciate the significance of Bolshevik Revolution. He had to explain the degeneration of Lenin's Bolshevik into Stalin's clique. Osugi supported Bolshevik Revolution at first. After having recognized what Bolshevik was, he became to be against it, and turned to consider Bolshevik Revolution as negative. Rosa Luxemburg found some points to be criticized in Bolshevik's policies. But she admired Bolshevik Revolution firmly. If she had looked at the situation of Soviet Union after 1920 s, what would she have spoken of Bolshevik Revolution?