

Three indomitable women: Rosa Luxemburg, Manuela Sáenz and Harriet Tubman

written by Lallan Schoenstein
March 8, 2022



Ukrainian security services arrest young communist leaders

Standing up against war fever

Rosa Luxemburg, born in 1871, was a Polish and naturalized German revolutionary socialist. She taught Marxism and economics for the German Social Democratic Party in Berlin. Her rhetorical skill was formidable.

After the Russian Revolution of 1905, she and other leaders had tremendous prestige among the workers on the European continent. In the Social Democratic Party of Germany's women's section, she met Clara Zetkin, with whom she became a life-long ally.

Facing the imminent danger of World War I, Luxemburg worked with V.I. Lenin and others on the [“Basel Manifesto”](#) that was addressed to the Extraordinary International Socialist Congress held in November 1912.

“If a war threatens to break out,” said the resolution, “it is the duty of the working classes and their parliamentary representatives in the countries involved, supported by the coordinating activity of the International Socialist Bureau, to exert every effort in order to prevent the outbreak of the war. ...

“In case war should break out anyway,” the resolution continues, “it is their duty to intervene in favor of its speedy termination and with all their powers to utilize the economic and political crisis created by the war to arouse the people and thereby hasten the downfall of capitalist class rule.”

A key part of the manifesto was the one about using the crisis created by imperialist war to struggle for the abolition of capitalism. That passage was written by Rosa Luxemburg. (see [“Bolsheviks and War”](#) by Sam Marcy)

In August 1914, Luxemburg, along with Karl Liebknecht and Clara Zetkin, wrote

illegal anti-war pamphlets. They vehemently rejected the German Social Democratic Party's betrayal of its principles in support of funding the war, and called for an anti-war general strike. As a result, Luxemburg and Liebknecht were imprisoned in June 1916 for two and a half years.

After their release, Luxemburg and Liebknecht were captured and executed in Berlin on Jan. 15, 1919, by the Rifle Division of the Cavalry Guards of the Freikorps. Luxemburg's body was flung into a canal.



Manuela Sáenz

'Caballeresa del Sol'

Manuela Sáenz was born in 1797 in Quito, Ecuador (then called New Granada). For a number of years she fought by the side of Simón Bolívar in the revolutionary war against Spanish colonialism. They fought to unify South America.

In 1819, when Simón Bolívar took part in the successful liberation of New Granada, Manuela Sáenz joined in a conspiracy to oust the Spanish viceroy of Perú. Sáenz and other pro-independence women conspired to recruit colonial troops from the Spanish royalist defense arsenal in Lima. The action was a success, with much of the regiment, including Manuela's half-brother, defecting to the anti-Spanish army of José de San Martín.

After proclaiming Peru's independence in 1821, José de San Martín awarded Manuela Sáenz with the highest distinction in the campaign against the Spanish Royalists, the title of "Caballeresa del Sol" - the Order of the Sun of Peru.

During her years of collaboration with Bolívar, Sáenz supported the revolution against Spain by gathering information, distributing leaflets and protesting for women's rights. Her heroism was evident in support of a Creole uprising against Spain.

Sáenz did not feel constrained by gendered conventions of feminine behavior. She dressed in military uniforms and trained for military action.

Bolívar named her "Libertadora del Libertador" ("The Liberator of the Liberator") after she saved his life on Sept. 25, 1828, by confronting assassins intent on killing him.

In Gabriel García Marquez's book about Simón Bolívar, "The General in His Labyrinth," he characterized Sáenz as "astute and indomitable, she had irresistible grace, a sense of power, and unbounded tenacity."



Harriet Tubman Civil War
woodcut

Great general in war against slavery

Harriet Tubman, born circa 1821, became widely known as "Moses."

Frederick Douglass said of Tubman, "I know of no one who has willingly encountered more perils and hardships to serve our enslaved people."

Radical abolitionist John Brown characterized Tubman as one of the bravest persons on this continent. She was five feet tall, commanded others with unflagging strength, had brilliant intelligence and carried a rifle.

Tubman was born into slavery on a plantation in Dorchester County, Maryland. As a teenager, she defended a fellow slave from the violence of an overseer and suffered

a heavy blow to her head. That head injury left a grave scar, causing her to experience sudden sleep attacks (narcolepsy) for the rest of her life.

In 1849, when the owner of her plantation died, she was aware that all of the slaves could be sold away from their families to the cotton plantations of the Deep South, where life expectancy could be as short as two or three years. Tubman made the decision to escape.

When she reached Philadelphia, Tubman was, under the law of the time, a free woman. But the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850 gave legal cover to those who could be paid for her recapture, so she operated with caution.

During a period of 12 years, she returned to Maryland 18 or 19 times, bringing more than 300 people out of enslavement. Because of the Fugitive Slave Act, Tubman was forced to guide her passengers on the Underground Railroad all the way to Canada.

Tubman became known throughout North American 19th-century Black activist circles and freedmen's communities as a fantastically successful "conductor."

In addition to her trips to Maryland to help freedom seekers escape, Tubman developed oratorical skills at abolitionist meetings and, later, at women's rights gatherings.

During the U.S. Civil War against slavery, she earned the title of General Harriet Tubman. She fought as a Union soldier, a scout, a spy, a nurse and a leader of Black and white troops fighting for freedom.

Rewards were offered for Moses' capture — at one time as high as \$40,000, an unimaginable bounty in that era. Tubman was never betrayed.



<https://www.struggle-la-lucha.org/2022/03/08/three-indomitable-women-rosa-luxemburg-manuela-saenz-and-harriet-tubman/>