

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières > English > Europe, Great Britain > On the Left (Europe) > History of the Left (Europe, out of France and Britain) > Rosa Luxemburg > Rosa Luxemburg (obituary) > **Rosa Luxemburg in South Africa**

## Rosa Luxemburg in South Africa

Friday 8 December 2006, by [LE BLANC Paul](#) (Date first published: 25 May 2004).

I have survived a difficult trip to South Africa (it takes about a day and a half to get there), where I participated in a very exciting conference on the contemporary relevance of Rosa Luxemburg sponsored by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation and the Anti-War Coalition.

This Conference on Rosa Luxemburg, War and Imperialism was held on May 20-22 at the Workers' Library and Museum in the Newton Precinct of Johannesburg, and drew about 100 activists — from universities and townships, unions, left organizations, and social movements — participated. Most were black or “colored” and included some seasoned activists (including a key conference organizer Salim Vally, Trevor Ngwane, Oupa Lehulere, and Maria van Driel) and some incredibly bright and vibrant student and youth activists. There were a few South African Communist Party folks present, but mostly the people there were further to the left, not necessarily in left groups (though some were), but engaged in movements and struggles.

I should add that I was invited to participate in this conference in part thanks to contacts that I had made through the 2004 World Social Forum in Mumbai, through which I had an opportunity to meet Oupa but especially to work, around the Anti-War General Assembly, with Salim Valley, who is a prominent figure in the anti-war movement of South Africa. The yearly World Social Forums are playing an extremely important role in helping - in multiple ways - to foster a vibrant internationalism among those who wish to comprehend and resist the oppressive, exploitative, and violent results of the dominant forms of “globalization.” They foster a “globalization from below” in the form of pooling information and ideas and experience, in the form of connecting struggles of various countries, and in the form of projecting a common vision of a future worthy of human beings - with liberty and justice and a decent life for all - throughout the world. The Johannesburg conference on Rosa Luxemburg is another aspect of that phenomenon.

There were two panels on Luxemburg herself — one on her life, ideas, and meaning, and one on her approach to war and imperialism. On each of these, there was someone from the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (Eveline Wittich and Ottokar Luban) along with me. In the first I gave a 30-minute presentation which focused on her political strategy and her links with the labor movement, in the second I discussed elements of her important study on imperialism, *Accumulation of Capital*, and the anti-war classic *The Junius Pamphlet* in understanding capitalism, imperialism, militarism, and war. My talks went over very well — people were intensely interested in Luxemburg's ideas and experience. They see parallels between her experience (a revolutionary faced with bureaucratic and reformist developments in her own movement, who understands the lethal nature of capitalist globalization and fights against it) and their own.

These sessions were followed by others on imperialism and war in Africa (and current struggles against war and imperialism), with presentations by such people as Thomas Deve (a prominent NGO activist from Zimbabwe) on war and imperialism in contemporary Congo and Angola, Lindsey Collen (a novelist and activist from Mauritius) on the struggle to close U.S. military bases, Professor N.Y. Osee Muyima (a scientist and activist originally from the Democratic Republic of the Congo) who spoke of developments in his homeland, and others. A video (with English subtitles) of the film “Rosa Luxemburg” (which I brought, and then turned over to the Foundation) was viewed on the second

evening with an intense and rich appreciation.

There were workshops on specific aspects of anti-war and anti-imperialist analysis and struggle: 1) military bases in Africa; 2) the role of South Africa in the regional conflicts and peace-keeping; and 3) the role of big business. We were each assigned (by counting off one two three, one two three...) to one of these workshops, and I ended up in the third workshop, which was incredibly abundant in information and ideas. The other workshops seemed of similarly high quality, given the reports that were given afterward. At the closing session of the conference a number of strands were tied together in a discussion of a draft of a two-page report summarizing what had taken place at the conference.

After this, there was time (before my plane left on Sunday evening) for one of the local Rosa Luxemburg staff people, Rose Khumalo, to show me around areas in which she had grown up — the townships of Soweto and Alexandra. We saw the Hector Pieterse Museum on the Soweto uprising (he was a school kid killed at that time) and the Nelson Mandela house, and also ate great food at one of the local “shebeens” that used to be frequented by Mandela and Walter Sisulu when they lived in Soweto.

Also, I gave three or four radio interviews while there. Salim told me he would try to get me copies of one or two of them. I made many contacts, gathered much material, and hope to follow up on a number of possibilities — academic, activist, and other.

A word should be added about the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (whose website can be accessed at: [www.rosalux.de](http://www.rosalux.de)). It is based in Germany, with branch offices in Brazil (Porto Alegre), Russia (Moscow), and South Africa (Johannesburg). It is dedicated to helping to spread and utilize the ideas of this great revolutionary socialist throughout the world and has been active in the World Social Forum. While having links to the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) in Germany, it seeks to reach out to and work with a broad range of scholars, radical activists and left organizations. Presently I am exploring with them possibilities of developing a three volume set of Luxemburg’s selected works on political, social, and economic questions, plus an additional substantial collection of her correspondence.

I’ll be happy to share copies of my talks, and also on-line photos of the conference, with anyone who is interested. (paul.leblanc3 verizon.net)

The bottom-line: Rosa Luxemburg is alive and well in Johannesburg – and I suspect elsewhere as well.