

A black and white portrait of Rosa Luxemburg, showing her face and upper torso. She is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a serious expression. Her hair is dark and styled in a short, wavy bob. She is wearing a light-colored, possibly white, garment.

**ROSA  
LUXEMBURG**  
1871-1919

**ROSA LUXEMBURG STIFTUNG**

**As Lasalle said, the most revolutionary thing that one can do is to proclaim loudly what is happening.**

ROSA LUXEMBURG

## TRUE TO OUR NAME

The Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung bears the name of one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's greatest women: **Rosa Luxemburg**.

**Rosa Luxemburg** (1871–1919) was one of the most important representatives of democratic socialism in Europe. Alongside Karl Liebknecht, she was a prominent representative of internationalist and antimilitarist positions in Germany's Social Democratic Party (SDP). **Luxemburg** did all that she could to prevent World War 1, and was a passionate and persuasive critic who drew her strength for revolutionary action from her criticism of bourgeois-capitalist society. She welcomed the advent of the Russian revolution, but as a revolutionary democrat, she remained vigilant, and harshly criticised the dictatorial policies of the Bolsheviki.

Throughout her life, **Rosa Luxemburg** belonged to minorities that faced discrimination, if not persecution. She was Jewish, and although she had no strong links to religion, she was invariably affected by anti-Semitism.

**Luxemburg** was inspired by a determination to live independently; this stood in strong contrast to the narrow ideals of her time. Her independence is illustrated by the fact that she gained a doctoral degree at a time during which women rarely even attended university. Moreover, she was also one of very few women actively engaged in politics. This period was characterized by widespread discrimination against women who were active in public life and this also applied to left-wing political parties.

Although **Rosa Luxemburg** was not married, she enjoyed an active love life; a point that was considered provocative and that conflicted with the morals of the time. Furthermore, her political opponents treated her as a foreigner (they considered her to be Polish), despite the fact that she had gained German citizenship. This led her to live the life of an exile.

More than anything, however, **Rosa Luxemburg** was a revolutionary left-wing activist. In Poland, her country of origin, which was occupied by Russia at the time, her activism was considered a crime punishable by death; in her adopted

home – Germany – it resulted in continued persecution, and ultimately led to her death. On 15 November 1919 **Rosa Luxemburg** became a martyr to the German November Revolution when she was murdered by members of the same circles that later openly supported the handover of power to Hitler.

**Rosa Luxemburg** co-founded the Spartacists and the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). Her fate is therefore inseparably linked to the development of the German labour movement, the struggles between its various factions and, finally, its split. She defended her views with uncompromising conviction and a powerful voice. Her warmth and rousing temperament meant that she could win over anyone, at least if they were prepared to debate with her without preconceived ideas, and it is still impossible to be indifferent about her. However, these characteristics also led **Rosa Luxemburg** to encounter intimidation and hatred from those who envied her.

**Luxemburg's** relentless struggle against war and her radical insistence on linking political freedom to social equality are highly relevant today. This relevance is also reflected in the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung's strong commitment to the work of our namesake.

## ROSA LUXEMBURG



**Rosa Luxemburg** was born on 5 March, 1871 in the small town of Zamość in Russian-occupied Poland as the daughter of a wood merchant. Between 1880 and 1887, she attended grammar school in Warsaw, where she gained excellent grades, despite the fact that she was studying in an environment usually reserved for the daughters of Russian state officials. She became fluent in four languages, and developed an early interest in the spoken and written word; it was at this time that she became active in left-wing groups.

After finishing school, **Luxemburg** moved to Switzerland where she studied natural sciences and then economics at the University of Zürich. This university was one of very few higher education institutions to provide equal access for women at the time. In 1897, **Luxemburg** completed a doctoral degree, and was respected as the only woman to have done so among the sons of landlords, factory owners and civil servants. During this time, she maintained a close, loving relationship with the Polish revolutionary Leo Jogiches.

In 1893, **Rosa Luxemburg** co-founded the political party Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland (SDKP). In August 1893, when she was just 22 years old, **Luxemburg** made her first great appearance as part of the international labour

movement. At the third International Socialist Workers' Congress, which was held in Zürich, she made a rousing speech in favour of gaining a mandate for herself and her young party; however, the mandate was refused at the time.

In 1898, **Luxemburg** moved to Germany where a fictitious marriage enabled her to gain German citizenship. From then on, she fought for social democracy in Germany at party and international congresses and through her publications. At the 1900 International Socialist Congress, she set out the need for international action against imperialism, militarism and colonialism. In the same year, the SDKP was renamed Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPaL).

From 1904 until 1914, **Rosa Luxemburg** represented the SDKPaL in the International Socialist Bureau (ISB). From the end of December 1905 until March 1906, she took part in the revolution in Russian-occupied Poland; she was arrested, but granted bail in June 1906. Back in Berlin, she studied the implications of the Russian revolution (1905–1907) for the German working classes, defended political mass strikes as an instrument of revolutionary struggle and made herself a name as the leader of left-wing German social democracy.

In 1907, at the International Socialist Congress, **Luxemburg** developed an anti-war program for the international labour movement together with Lenin and Martov. Between 1907 and 1914, she held a post as lecturer at the SPD's school in Berlin. During this period, she had a relationship that lasted for a number of years with Kostja Zetkin, the son of her close compatriot Clara Zetkin.

In February 1914, **Rosa Luxemburg** was imprisoned for holding anti-war speeches; World War 1 began shortly afterwards on 1 August 1914. During this time, Paul Levi acted as her legal defence, and also became her new lover. In 1915, and writing under a pseudonym, **Luxemburg** wrote a pamphlet against the war that became known as the "Junius Pamphlet". At the end of 1915, she co-founded the International, together with Karl Liebknecht and other social democratic opponents of the war, and this also led to the emergence of the Spartacists in 1916.

Between July 1916 and November 1918, **Rosa Luxemburg** was imprisoned in Berlin, Wronki and Wrocław (Wronke and Breslau at the time). In 1917, she wrote articles from prison supporting the Russian February and October Revolutions. Although she welcomed these upheavals, she also warned against the dictatorship of the Bolsheviki. It was not until 1922, however, that her article *The Russian Revolution*, in which she had warned of the forthcoming dangers, was finally published. "Without general elections", she argued, "without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinion, life dies out in every public institution, becomes a mere semblance of life, in which only the bureaucracy remains as the active element."

**Rosa Luxemburg** was released from prison on 9 November 1918 and immediately did all she could to support the November Revolution. Together with Karl Liebknecht, **Luxemburg** published *Die Rote Fahne* (The Red Flag), campaigned for social revolution, and, at the turn of 1918/1919, became one of the founding members of the KPD.

On 15 January 1919, **Rosa Luxemburg** and Karl Liebknecht were murdered by officers and soldiers belonging to counter-revolutionary army units in Berlin.



# DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM

**Rosa Luxemburg** believed that traditional politics during the bourgeois era was dominated by professional politicians who were attempting to secure social, economic and cultural privileges for one section of society. **Luxemburg** argued that the SPD, a reformist political party, and the Russian Bolsheviks, which promoted revolutionary but dictatorial politics, both stood in this same tradition of bourgeois politics. She argued that neither the SPD nor the Bolsheviks belonged to the underprivileged, and instead reminded that they merely claimed to represent the underprivileged and to act on their behalf.

In contrast, **Luxemburg** believed that socialism was not a service that could be rendered to others, nor a gift that could be given by one party to the oppressed and exploited. She stressed that socialist politics and socialism had to emerge out of joint, voluntary, conscious actions undertaken by the underprivileged. In 1904, she maintained that this implied the development of a movement that would be “the first in the history of class societies to be premised in its every aspect and in its whole development on the organization and independent direct action of the masses”. Furthermore, although professional politicians and parties would constitute part of this movement, she viewed them as merely responsible for organisation and political education.

The growing aggressiveness of German militarism at the time as well as the on-going wars aimed at producing new divisions in the world, and especially World War I, led the question of peace to gain in importance. **Rosa Luxemburg** viewed a future socialist society as inherently peaceful. Socialist society was a society in which all causes of war and barbarism had been eliminated and, as such, a society that enabled everyone to live peacefully. It was **Luxemburg's** deep longing for peace that led her to fervently commit herself to socialism. Her view of socialism also led her to reject the use of force against individual members of the exploitative and oppressive classes. In fact, she rejected all forms of violence against capital owners and instead called for a form of socialism that would be supported by the majority of the underprivileged: “The proletarian revolution to its ends needs no terror, it hates and despises the murder of people. It does not

need this means of struggle, because it is not fighting people, but institutions, because it does not step into the arena with naïve illusions, whose disappointment it would have to bloodily avenge. It is not a desperate attempt by a minority to model the world after its ideal by force, but the action of the great mass of millions of the people.”

Following Marx, she argued that “social restructuring” would mean overthrowing all social relations “in which man is a debased, enslaved, abandoned, despicable essence”. Social revolution, she pointed out, was to be reached through a constant struggle for hegemony that would result in a lasting change in the relations of power. Her aim was not merely to expropriate the expropriators, but to rebuild the foundations of society so as to ensure that exploitation and oppression were no longer possible. In this new society, no-one would even view the reintroduction of capitalism as worthy of consideration.

**Rosa Luxemburg** viewed the struggle for hegemony as an on-going fight for approval and support through qualified majorities; this, she argued, could overcome capitalism. Accordingly, freedom and democracy were not luxuries that socialist politicians could deny at will; they were necessary aspects of socialism: “Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party – however numerous they may be – is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently. Not because of any fanatical concept of ‘justice’ but because all that is instructive, wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on this essential characteristic, and its effectiveness vanishes when ‘freedom’ becomes a special privilege.”

## PLACES IN BERLIN



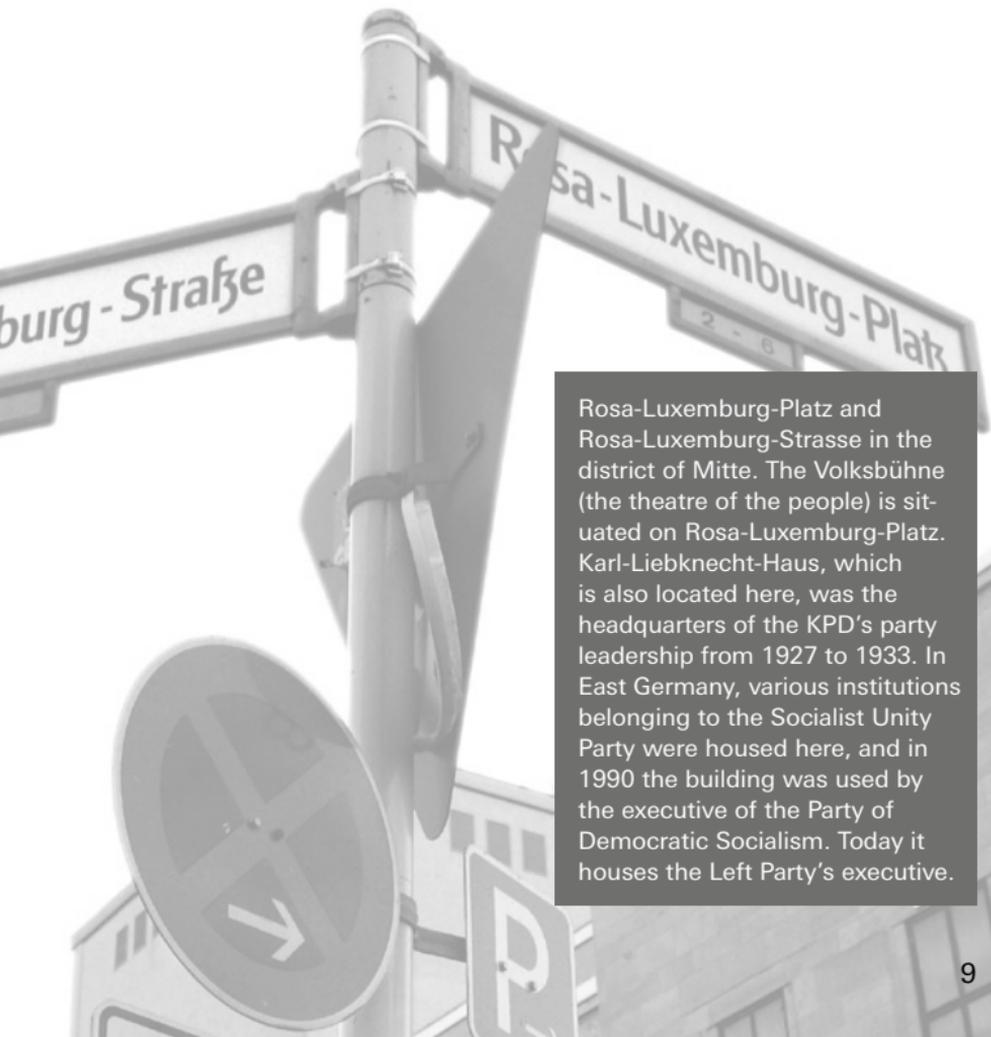
This monument to Rosa Luxemburg is located next to Landwehr Kanal, a canal running through the Tiergarten district, on Rosa-Luxemburg-Steg (close to Budapesterstraße). It was here that Rosa Luxemburg's body was thrown into the canal on 15 January 1919. Her body was not found until May 1919.



The Memorial to the Socialists in Friedrichsfelde. Rosa Luxemburg was buried in this cemetery on 13 June, 1919 next to Karl Liebknecht, and other victims of the counter-revolution. Hundreds of thousands of people came to express their grief at the time.



Rosa Luxemburg was taken from this house (Mannheimerstraße 27, at the time, Manheimerstraße 43) to Hotel Eden at what is now Olaf-Palme-Platz.



Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz and Rosa-Luxemburg-Strasse in the district of Mitte. The Volksbühne (the theatre of the people) is situated on Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz. Karl-Liebknecht-Haus, which is also located here, was the headquarters of the KPD's party leadership from 1927 to 1933. In East Germany, various institutions belonging to the Socialist Unity Party were housed here, and in 1990 the building was used by the executive of the Party of Democratic Socialism. Today it houses the Left Party's executive.



The monument *Von der dicken Berta zur roten Rosa* (From fat Berta to red Rosa) by the Israeli sculptor Igal Tumarkin stands on the centre lane of Bundesallee at its junction with Spichernstraße. This site lies on the path that Rosa Luxemburg was taken along to Hotel Eden. A steel relief representing Rosa Luxemburg faces the fateful vehicle that transported the field gun known as "fat Berta".

Bronze sculpture by Roll Bibi and ceramic reliefs by Ingeborg Hunzinger in front of the entrance to Franz-Mehring-Platz 1 in the district of Friedrichshain. This building houses both the newspaper *Neues Deutschland*, and the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung. The reliefs are of Karl Liebknecht, and Rosa Luxemburg's secretary and friend Mathilde Jacob, a Jewish woman who was murdered by the Nazis.



# ROSA LUXEMBURG'S WORKS

■ Collected Works vol. 1–6

■ Collected Letters vol. 1–6

These volumes have been published by Karl Dietz Verlag Berlin since the 1970s, and represent the most comprehensive collection of **Rosa Luxemburg's** writing. They are edited by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung.

## Further publications by Karl Dietz Verlag Berlin:

■ Rosa Luxemburg: Briefe aus dem Gefängnis, (letters from prison) 17<sup>th</sup> edition

■ Rosa Luxemburg oder: Der Preis der Freiheit, (Rosa Luxemburg or: the price of freedom) Jörn Schütrumpf, (ed) 2<sup>nd</sup> extended edition, 2010

■ Rosa Luxemburg: Nationalitätenfrage und Autonomie, (Questions of nationality and autonomy) edited and translated from the Polish by Holger Politt, 2012

■ Rosa Luxemburg: Die Liebesbriefe, (love letters) (ed) Jörn Schütrumpf, 2012

## The following works by **Rosa Luxemburg** were published during her life-time, or in the 1920s:

■ Die industrielle Entwicklung Polens (The industrial development of Poland), dissertation at Zürich University, Duncker & Humblot, Leipzig 1898

■ Sozialreform oder Revolution? Mit einem Anhang: Miliz und Militarismus (Social reform or revolution? With an appendix on militia and militarism), Leipzig 1899 (Reprint: Dietz, Berlin 1967)

■ Die Akkumulation des Kapitals, Ein Beitrag zur ökonomischen Erklärung des Kapitalismus (The accumulation of capital. A contribution to the economic explanation of capitalism), Buchverlag Vorwärts, Berlin 1913

■ Die Krise der Sozialdemokratie. Mit einem Anhang: Leitsätze über die Aufgaben der internationalen Sozialdemokratie (The crisis of social democracy. With an appendix: Guidelines for the tasks of international social democracy), Union, Zürich 1916 [this became known as the "Junius Pamphlet"]

■ Die russische Revolution. Eine kritische Würdigung (The Russian Revolution). Published posthumously, foreword by Paul Levi (ed), Verlag Gesellschaft und Erziehung, Berlin 1922

■ Einführung in die Nationalökonomie (Introduction to political economy), Laub, Berlin, 1925

■ Gewerkschaft und Massenstreik (Trade unions and mass strike), Paul Frölich (ed), Vereinigung internationaler Verlagsanstalten, Berlin 1928

**Die Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung has also supported the following recordings:**

- Lea Rosh liest Rosa Luxemburg: Briefe aus dem Gefängnis, (Lea Rosh reads Rosa Luxemburg's letters from prison) Zwischentexte: Jörn Schütrumpf
- Rosa Luxemburg: Die Liebesbriefe, (Rosa Luxemburg: the love letters), Lea Rosh and Jörn Schütrumpf

**The Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung has published a number of Rosa Luxemburg's works in English on its website.**

- Ettinger, Elzbieta: Rosa Luxemburg. Ein Leben (Rosa Luxemburg. Her Life), J.H.W. Dietz Nachfolger, Bonn 1990
- Frölich, Paul: Rosa Luxemburg. Gedanke und Tat (Rosa Luxemburg. Ideas in Action), ENI, Paris 1939 (Dietz, Berlin 1990)
- Gallo, Max: Rosa Luxemburg. Eine Biographie (Rosa Luxemburg. A biography), Benzinger, Zürich 1993
- Kautsky, Karl: Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Leo Jogiches. Ihre Bedeutung für die deutsche Sozialdemokratie. Eine Skizze (Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Leo Jogiches. Their significance for German social democracy), Verlagsgenossenschaft Freiheit. Berlin 1921
- Kautsky, Luise: Rosa Luxemburg. Eine Gedenkbuch (Rosa Luxemburg. A Memorial Book), Berlin 1929 (Reprint: ISP, Köln 1997)
- Kinner, Klaus; Seidel, Helmut, eds.: Rosa Luxemburg. Historische und aktuelle Dimension ihres theoretischen Werkes (Rosa Luxemburg. Historical and current dimensions of her theoretical work), Dietz, Berlin 2001
- Laschitzka, Annelies: Im Lebensrausch, trotz alledem. Rosa Luxemburg. Eine Biographie (Rosa Luxemburg. A biography), Aufbau, Berlin 2000
- Rosa Luxemburg und die Freiheit der Andersdenkenden. Special edition of the unfinished manuscript "The Russian Revolution" and other sources on the dispute with Lenin, compiled and introduced by Annelies Laschitzka, Dietz Verlag Berlin 1990
- Mandel, Ernest: Rosa Luxemburg. Leben, Kampf, Tod (Rosa Luxemburg, her life, struggle, and death), ISP, Frankfurt a. M. 1986
- Quack, Sibylle: Geistig frei und niemandes Knecht. Paul Levi – Rosa Luxemburg. Politische Arbeit und persönliche Beziehung (Free in spirit and nobody's slave. Paul Levi – Rosa Luxemburg. Their political work and personal relationship), Kiepenheuer & Witsch, Köln, 1983
- Seidemann, Maria: Rosa Luxemburg und Leo Jogiches: Die Liebe in den Zeiten der Revolution (Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches: Love in revolutionary times), Rowohlt, Berlin 1998
- Shepardson, Donald E.: Rosa Luxemburg and the Noble Dream, New York: Peter Lang 1996
- Trotta, Margarethe von: Rosa Luxemburg. Das Buch zum Film (Rosa Luxemburg. The book about the film), Greno, Nördlingen 1986

**The public life of countries with limited freedom is so poverty-stricken, so miserable, so rigid, so unfruitful, precisely because, through the exclusion of democracy, it cuts off the living sources of all spiritual riches and progress.**

ROSA LUXEMBURG

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