

Rosa Luxemburg Seminar Dinner
Oppidan Dining Hall
8 March 2008

It is my pleasure to welcome you to Rhodes University, to this Rosa Luxemburg Seminar Dinner and to introduce our guest speaker.

In the programme the dinner is advertised as being held in the 'Old Student Union Building'. This is for good reason, as I am pleased to say that the University community has agreed this building will be renamed the Steve Biko Building and a ceremony will be held later in the year at which together with the Biko family we will officially consecrate the building as the Biko building.

Although long overdue, it is appropriate that the Biko will be honoured in this way by this University in this year. This is the 40th anniversary of a tumultuous 1968. In France, workers and students took to the streets in battles against the conservative Gaullist regime. University students in Britain occupied campuses calling for greater democracy and student rights. The Prague spring saw Czechoslovakian patriots take on Soviet tanks in an attempt to overthrow Russian domination. In the United States, mass opposition to the war in Vietnam and the Black civil rights and Black power movements reached new heights.

Here at home, while 1968 was for most white South Africans a time of political calm, prosperity and gay sharing in an economic boom, for most blacks, it was, in the aftermath of the suppression of the ANC and PAC, a period of intensified oppression and exploitation, social control and enforced acquiescence. It was difficult to see how any political challenge to white domination could be mounted and from where it could come. However, it was in 1968 that SASO burst onto the scene under the leadership of Stephen Bantu Biko, Barney Pityana and others. Its launch and the black Consciousness movement

that emerged was to help reshape intellectual discourse and politics in South Africa, ignite the 1976 Soweto uprising, and ultimately contribute to reshaping political relations in general.

This morning when I argued for the need for a revival of critical scholarship that connects with daily struggles, I should have added that there is sometimes a severe price to be paid for such critical scholarship. It was remiss of me not to remind us that this year, 2008, is the 30th anniversary of the brutal assassination, in front of his young daughters, of Dr Rick Turner. Turner was an outstanding intellectual and scholar and Natal University political studies lecturer before he was banned by the apartheid government, and also a close confidante of Steve Biko. I hope that we will find a way of paying tribute to him in an appropriate way.

Our guest speaker, Nickie Turner is Senior State Advocate in the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. Nickie is an alumnus of Rhodes, graduating with a Law degree in 1990.

After spending time as a prosecutor in Port Elizabeth, she moved to Grahamstown to become a junior advocate in the office of the (then) Attorney-General in October 1992.

In January 1998, Nickie became a senior advocate in the Director of Public Prosecutions office. She is the only female senior state advocate in this office. In the same month and year of her promotion, Nickie's son Michael was born, which she describes as a "double bonus". Her daughter, Wendy-Mae, was born in July 2005.

In September 2005, Nickie was awarded the Grahamstown Citizen of the Year Award for the work that she had done in eradicating the enormous backlog that had developed on the criminal appeal rolls for the Eastern Cape. In the same year she also won the National Prosecuting Authority award for the top performing advocate of the year and her criminal appeal computer

programme was runner up in a national Innovative Awards competition. 2005 was a good year indeed!

Nickie has for a number of years specialized in the prosecution of rape cases, especially those involving children as victims. Since relinquishing the reigns of the criminal appeal rolls to a colleague, she now gives most of her time and energy to the preparation and prosecution of cases involving children. This, she says, is really the area where her heart is and that she loves her profession for that reason.

I am going to tackle the subject of my speech from a criminal law perspective, not only because that is my field of expertise but also because I believe that women's rights (or lack thereof) are affected most directly by criminal activity. I will not be broaching the subject of women's rights in the workplace for example. I fear that my speech may be unduly limited by virtue of my profession but I hope to make it interesting by referring to some cases that I have prosecuted recently. In any event 20 minutes is long enough to cover my ideas adequately and would not be long enough to cover the topic any more broadly (or so I hope!).