



## Voice of the Proletariat

District Publication



Ruth Heloise First was born 90 years ago on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 1925 in Johannesburg. After matriculating from Jeppe High School for Girls, Ruth studied at the University of the Witwatersrand. She graduated with a BA degree (Social Studies), focusing on sociology, anthropology, economic history and native administration. Her fellow students included Nelson Mandela, Eduardo Mondlane (Mozambican freedom fighter and the first leader of FRELIMO), Joe Slovo (future husband), JN Singh (executive member of both the Natal and South African Indian Congress), and Ismail Meer (a former Secretary-General of the South African Indian Congress). Ruth helped found the Federation of Progressive Students and served as Secretary of the Young Communist League.

Having grown up in a politically conscious home, Ruth's political involvement never abated. In 1949, Ruth married Joe Slovo, a lawyer and labour organiser and, like her, a communist. Throughout the 1950s their home in Roosevelt Park was an important centre for multi-racial political gatherings which was also raided frequently by the security forces.

In 1950, Ruth and Joe Slovo were among the first 600 to be 'named' under the Suppression of

Communism Act. She was on the drafting committee of the Freedom Charter. In 1956, both Ruth and Joe Slovo were arrested and charged in the Treason Trial.

In 1977, Ruth was appointed professor and research director of the Centre for African Studies at the Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo, Mozambique. She began work on the lives of migrant labourers, particularly those who worked on the South African gold mines. The results of this study were published as *Black Gold: the Mozambican Miner* (1983).

Ruth First was a prolific writer and her penetrating investigative journalism exposed many of the harsh conditions under which the majority of South Africans lived. After the advent to power in 1948 of the National Party, her courageous writing exposed the evils of apartheid that were reflected in every facet of life for black South Africans.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of August 1982, Ruth was killed by a letter bomb, widely believed to have been the work of security agencies within South Africa. Until her death, she remained a 'listed' communist.

Till the day of her death she was a committed Revolutionary and her work undoubtedly contributed in many ways to the liberation of the South African people.

Ruth First's whole life was dedicated to the fight against what was unjust and oppressive.

As we are celebrating Women's Month we should continue to acknowledge the women who have contributed to the freedom of our people; but also acknowledge the women who are continuing the fight against poverty, unemployment and equality today.

**Cde OJ Fourie – SACP Deputy District Secretary**