



Bottomline

BECAUSE THE YCLSA SAYS SO

SOCIALISM IN OUR LIFETIME

YCLSA ATTENDS THE WFDY

**THE 21ST 'WORLD FEDERATION OF DEMOCRATIC YOUTH' CONGRESS
TOOK PLACE IN WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA 20 - 25 MAY 2025**



ISSUED BY THE YOUNG COMMUNIST LEAGUE OF SOUTH AFRICA

SPECIAL EDITION

IN THIS EDITION

- 1. RUTH FIRST: A REVOLUTIONARY & LASTING LEGACY**
- 2. YCLSA TO WFDY: UNITY AGAINST IMPERIALISM**
- 3. AGAINST OPPORTUNISM: THE ERA OF SOCIALIST REVOLUTION**
- 4. WFDY ASSEMBLY: CANADIAN YOUTH SOLIDARITY MESSAGE**
- 5. CHRIS HANI AND WORKERS INTERNATIONALISM**



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EDITORIAL POLICY

**2025 - The Year of the Branch: Consolodate the
Youth Voice for State Power**

Bottomline is the publication of the Young Communist League of South Africa (YCLSA), also known as UFASIMBA. As a unique and revolutionary publication, Bottomline stands in stark contrast to many other South African publications that are either privately owned or part of media monopolies. It is dedicated to educating, liberating, and agitating the working-class youth of South Africa, serving as a voice for progressive ideas and the struggles of the working class. This publication is a testament to the YCLSA's legacy as the oldest youth movement and the first non-racial youth organisation on the African continent.

Our mission is to create a publication that not only informs but also mobilises young people toward active participation in the class struggle, gender equality, and national liberation. We envision Bottomline as a tool for ideological empowerment, contributing to the broader movement for social justice and working-class liberation. Bottomline thus endeavours to cultivate a politically aware and active youth population that is not only conscious of the socio-economic challenges they face but also empowered to take meaningful action. Our goal is to equip young revolutionaries with the knowledge and tools necessary to contribute effectively to the ongoing struggle for social justice, equality, and the realization of a truly democratic society.

Therefore this publication is not merely a newsletter; it is a tool for education, advocacy, and the promotion of youth development within the broader context of our socialist and democratic values. This editorial policy outlines the guiding principles, editorial standards, and content curation strategies that will steer our editorial mandate as we strive to inform, inspire, and empower our readership.

Editorial Principles

1. Youth-Centric Focus:

- Content must prioritize issues relevant to the youth of South Africa, including but not limited to education, employment, health, social justice, technology, and environmental sustainability.
- We will amplify the voices of young leaders, activists, and innovators, ensuring that our publication reflects the diversity and dynamism of South Africa's youth.

2. Accuracy and Credibility:

- All content published in Bottomline must be factually accurate, well-researched, and supported by credible sources. We commit to rigorous fact-checking and verification processes to maintain the integrity of our publication.
- Contributors must cite all sources appropriately and provide context to ensure readers have a clear understanding of the information presented.

3. Balanced Representation:

- While Bottomline is a publication of the YCLSA, it is essential that we provide a platform for a range of perspectives within the progressive youth movement. We welcome contributions from various youth organizations and individuals who share our commitment to social justice and youth empowerment for socialism.
- Editorial content should reflect a balanced representation of gender, race, and socio-economic backgrounds, ensuring that all voices are heard and valued.

4. Advocacy and Activism:

- Our publication will serve as a tool for advocacy, promoting policies and actions that align with the values of the YCLSA and the broader progressive movement. We will highlight campaigns, initiatives, and events that advance the cause of youth empowerment and social justice.
- Editorials, opinion pieces, and commentaries will encourage active participation in social and political discourse, urging our readers to engage in meaningful activism.

5. Ethical Journalism:

- Bottomline adheres to the highest standards of ethical journalism, including respect for privacy, avoidance of conflicts of interest, and a commitment to fairness and impartiality in reporting.
- We will not publish content that is discriminatory, inflammatory, or harmful. Our editorial team will exercise discretion in selecting content that aligns with our mission and values.

Content Curation and Submission Guidelines

1. Content Types:

- Bottomline will feature a mix of news articles, opinion pieces, interviews, profiles, reports, and creative content such as poetry and artwork that resonate with our readership.
- Regular features will include updates on YCLSA activities, policy discussions, and coverage of significant events such as the BRICS Youth Summit and national youth campaigns.

2. Submission Process:

- We welcome contributions from YCLSA members, youth organisations, and allied individuals. All submissions should adhere to our editorial principles and be submitted in a timely manner to meet publication deadlines.
- The editorial team will review submissions for alignment with our mission, accuracy, and overall quality. Feedback will be provided to contributors, and revisions may be requested to ensure the highest standard of content.

3. Editorial Review:

- The editorial team, led by the Editor-in-Chief, will oversee the content selection and editing process. We will work collaboratively with contributors to refine content, ensuring that it meets our publication standards while retaining the authentic voice of the author.

Design and Presentation

- The design of Bottomline will be bold and revolutionary, reflecting its role as a platform for radical youth discourse. The layout will prioritize readability and accessibility, with a clean and minimalist modern aesthetic.

This editorial policy is a living document, evolving to meet the needs of our readers and the broader youth movement.

Editor in Chief, Mzwandile Thakhudi

YCLSA 6th Congress - National Secretary



CENTENARY

COMMEMORATIVE LECTURE
OF CDE RUTH FIRST,
THE FIRST AND ONLY YCLSA FEMALE
NATIONAL SECRETARY

DELIVERED BY RONNIE KARSRILS



SACP veteran Ronnie Kasrils delivers the Ruth First Centenary Lecture



YCLSA National Secretary, Mzwandile Thakhudi hands over a small token of appreciation from the YCLSA to SACP veteran Ronnie Kasrils.

In this special edition of Bottomline, we present the profound paper delivered as the Ruth First Centenary Commemoration Lecture by Comrade Ronnie Kasrils, a distinguished member and of the SACP Central Committee and former government minister. As you read this insightful piece, we also share a selection of images from the commemorative event, capturing the spirit and significance of this important occasion.



THE REVOLUTIONARY LIFE & TIMES OF RUTH FIRST & HER LEGACY



Ruth First's Truth Lasts

Ronnie Kasrils

It is an honour to have been invited by the Young Communist League (YCL) to deliver this lecture concerning one of its most illustrious former leaders, Comrade Ruth First. More especially since this is the centenary year of her birth; the 80th anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany and the 70th anniversary of the adoption of the Freedom Charter. The events marked by these anniversaries, aligning with the struggle to free our country from race and class oppression, were seminal to shaping her entire life. It was after the critical years of that Second World War (1939-45) that she became secretary of the YCL.

Born in Johannesburg on 4th May, 1925, (almost sharing a birth date with Karl Marx – born 5 May, 1808), Ruth Heloise First was an outstanding revolutionary, passionate about justice and equality, who, through her Marxist education and practical experience, became focussed on developing ideas to drive social action. This can be seen in her range of endeavours as revolutionary scholar, investigative journalist and researcher; political activist, orator and organiser; and her membership of the South African Communist Party (SACP) until her death.

Ruth was interested in organisational methods and the development of critical ideas as drivers of social action. She had the honesty, courage and sharpness of intellect to break with conventional wisdom. A heroine of the African National Congress (ANC), SACP and liberation movement; she was a dangerous thorn in Apartheid's flesh and marked down by the regime for persecution and elimination. She was assassinated on 17th August, 1982, in Maputo, at the age of 57. Her creative ideas and scholarship, coupled with her inspiring life remain of immense value to this day. Given the enormous socio-economic problems facing our country, the stark challenges confronted by the National Democratic Revolution (NDR), and the grim international situation, her life bears close study by all patriots, and particularly the SACP, the YCL and a younger generation of South Africans.

Phases of her life

In order to understand Ruth in context, I aim to highlight:

An understanding of the role of the individual in history as a basis for reflecting on Ruth First's life and contribution in the realm of her ideas and action;

Her family background and the early formative years that shaped her;
Her activity in the YCL and graduation at the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) in 1946;

Her career as an investigative reporter and editor of liberation movement journals;

Her activism in the 1950's including membership of the underground SACP and her work with the ANC and Congress Movement, including being one of the 156 Treason Trialists (arrested in 1956) along with her husband Joe Slovo;

Her clandestine work following the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960, and, among other things, her support for the ANC's military wing, Umkhonto We Sizwe (MK), leading to a harrowing detention of 117 days in solitary confinement; and subsequent exile in 1964;

The exile years in Britain 1964-1977, as an internationally acclaimed Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) figure, and university lecturer; publishing nine books with a focus on Africa;

The final chapter of her life, 1977-1982, as professor of social research in Maputo; and activism with Frelimo, ANC, MK and SACP; to her tragic death;

And finally, a consideration of what Ruth's life teaches us in the critical challenges we face in South Africa and the region today.

Marxism

Marxism teaches that the masses make history, without ignoring the crucial role of the individual in the development of revolutionary ideas, scientific discoveries and inspiring great social forces in altering the world. Ruth was rigorous about political studies and took to heart Marx's Theses on Feuerbach and its famous conclusion: "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it." Throughout her life she sought the dialectical interplay between theory and practise as both an analyser and activist. She was committed to testing ideas in practise, making an invaluable contribution to the field of ideas. She was a fierce antagonist of dogma and the substitution of sloganizing and mechanical schemata in place of rigorous thinking; in the first place challenging her own mind. She was not afraid of ruffling the feathers of fellow comrades.

Mandela's generation, of which Ruth First was an integral part, referred to themselves as being "products of the struggle." This reflected their understanding of the material conditions and ideas that shaped them; gave them strength and determination; and enriched their understanding of what needed to be done to overthrow white supremacy and attain freedom and equality for their people. Shared understanding and objectives brought them together as an organised collective of individuals with enduring personal ties, from different ethnic, class and racial backgrounds.

Ruth First was one such person and we seek to understand her in historical context: growing up in a world at war against fascism and within her geographic and social space, initially as a privileged white South African – a drama contextualised within a country deeply divided along race and class lines; colonised for almost three centuries up to the time of her birth; and coming under an even more brutal and rigid apartheid system as she attained adulthood.

Roots

Clearly Ruth's upbringing and awareness motivated her to see what most whites chose not to see and led her to seek the truth; to understand and to act resolutely against injustice, which required high moral principles and courage.

Ruth First was born into an upwardly mobile, secular Jewish middle-class home. Her parents, Julius and Tilly First, were members of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), so it can be said she was a Bolshevik Baby, and her mother in particular encouraged her to study Marxism and read widely. Julius and Tilly had arrived in the country as children in the opening decade of the 20th Century, with the wave of Jewish immigrants, to meet and marry by the time the CPSA was established in 1921, just four years before Ruth's birth. They hailed from Latvia and Lithuania respectively, then part of the Czarist Russian Empire where Jews suffered from severe discrimination as second-class subjects. Such immigrants were working class, artisans and small traders, having survived poverty and bloody antisemitic, xenophobic pogroms. Many, but by no means the majority, were fervently religious, but very few were Zionists seeking salvation in Palestine. If anything, the USA was where most dreamed of emigrating to; with South Africa being among other destinations.

The founder members of the CPSA were a mix of radical white workers and socialists from Europe among them S.P. Bunting, Ivor Jones and Bill Andrews. By the time of Ruth's birth, Tilly was a member, alongside the first black leaders to rise to prominence, including Albert Nzula, Edwin Mafutsanyana, Josie Palmer, J.B. Marks, Johannes Nkosi, James La Guma, Johnny Gomez, Yusuf Dadoo and Moses Kotane, demonstrating the young Party's growing outreach. T.W. Thibedi, became the first black person elected to the Party's central committee.

Julius First founded a furniture factory which in later years when the Party was banned served as a refuge for comrades avoiding the police or as the venue for clandestine Party meetings.

Ruth grew up in a household, where intense political debate took place among people of all races. Her parents had participated in the early Party discourse around the role of the white working class; the 1922 white miner's revolt; the Communist International (Comintern) "Black Republic" thesis which led to an upsurge in black membership; the purge within the CPSA during the 1930s; revival of Party activity during World War Two and its support for the Soviet Union. Inevitably all this influenced Ruth, as she grew up hearing her parents discussing these arguments with comrades.

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She became politically aware at her parents' knees. Her mother, in particular, fostered her interest in reading and advised her on quality literature to read. At the age of 14, she joined the Junior Left Book Club, where youngsters discussed books and pulled slips of paper from a hat with topics to research and report back on. It was a wonderful way of involving young people, growing their self-confidence, and fostering an appreciation of self-discipline.

By the time Ruth was a teenager, the debates in the party had evolved with the influx of black workers into the Party ranks, and it was actively developing strategies to link national liberation with socialism – a process which crystallised when she had become a prominent member in the 1950's. She listened attentively, and must have observed how diverse the views were, and how the Party's positions could shift over time.

The political-economy of South Africa had undergone a seismic transformation by the time Ruth was born; the consequences of which shaped the times. The discovery of gold, a mere 39 years previously, profoundly changed the country and its people.

Johannesburg at the time of Ruth's birth was a young, brash city, fast growing and urban, a melting pot of people, with harsh exploitative conditions facing the black population, many living in shanty towns on the periphery, while the dominant Mining Houses, Randlords and pro-British influence ruled the roost.

The South African War between Boer and British, essentially a war for control over resources and wealth; the emergence of an African proletariat and the challenge to white supremacy and capital by the awakening giants of black labour, trade unionism and African nationalism, shaped the responses of revolutionaries of all stripes. The dual cleavage of class and colour in the country was reflected in the existence of the leading proponents of class and national struggle, initially set on different paths, which converged in the struggles to come – namely the CPSA and the ANC. The leading comrades of Ruth's generation were central to the debate about the road to national and social emancipation; two stages or one; alliance with the ANC or not; and development of Colonialism of a Special Type (CST) and the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) as the road to power.

YCL Secretary

Ruth matriculated at Jeppe Girls at the age of 16, receiving an education designed like that offered at other schools of its type to churn out white youngsters loyal to British ruling class traditions and ideology – something she was inoculated against. By the time she started a sociology degree at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in 1942, she became active in student politics, and joined the YCL.

It was at university that Ruth became acquainted with Nelson Mandela, Eduardo Mondlane – later President of Frelimo the Mozambican liberation movement – JN Singh and Ismail Meer, who became leaders of the South African Indian Congress; and later Joe Slovo, studying law after army service in Italy. Lifelong communist Norman Levy, then aged 14, describes the impact she made on him, when he attended his first YCL meeting when Ruth had become secretary: "I still see her image as she was at that first meeting", he writes fifty years later, "eighteen, curly-haired, short and ill at ease, pursuing her points at breakneck speed."

She was earnest, self-conscious, and miserable with caring, but it was her energy and directness that marked her out from others.”

Among some thirty “others” present were the leading theoretician and scholar Lionel Foreman, Paul Joseph, Lucas Masebe – YCL national chairman, (possibly) Ahmed Kathrada, and the young man, her age, she married five years later, Joe Slovo. Despite appearing to Norman as “ill at ease” he points out that “Ruth and Lionel were the stars, however, and whatever fired them also drove the others.” (*Norman Levy: The Final Prize – My life in the anti-apartheid struggle; South African History Online, 2011, pp 14-15*).

I heard from one of her many admirers of the time, I think it was either Wolfie Kodesh or Ronnie Press, that both racist students and Trotskyist students, waxing irate over Ruth’s merciless denunciations, would chant “Ruth First, Truth Last!” To which her supporters would respond: “Ruth First’s Truth Lasts!”

She graduated with a BA (Social Studies), from Wits in 1946, obtaining first class passes in sociology, anthropology, economic history and so-called native administration. She was never destined to be an ivory tower academic, but was driven by Marx’s maxim: “understand the world and change it.”



Tempestuous Years

Ruth's development as a foremost revolutionary theorist, teacher, writer and activist was honed through the tempestuous times of the 1940s-1950s. From the young orator rallying public support against fascism during World War Two, she became an active foot soldier duplicating and distributing leaflets during the 1946 African Mine worker's strike.

During the height of the struggle in the 1950s, in which she played a central and significant role, issues were resolved not from ivory tower, or through purist notions, but in the harsh school of practical struggle, where the paths of class struggle and national resistance converged into a unique alliance between communists and nationalist revolutionaries – an achievement rarely seen in anti-colonial struggles.

Following the banning of the CPSA in 1950 she was part of the trusted circle in 1953 reviving the Party in its clandestine form as the SACP. As journalist she was searing and tireless in exposing the brutality of the apartheid regime; and was at the front-line reporting on the Defiance Campaign. She was a leader of the Congress of Democrats (COD), which she helped establish in 1953 – the small grouping of whites aligned with the ANC, Indian Congress, Coloured People's Congress, and the South African Congress of Trade Unions (Sactu). But for a government banning order she would have attended the historic Congress of the People at Kliptown in 1955. From the shadows she assisted in formulating the Freedom Charter. Together with husband Joe Slovo, whom she wed in 1949 – and who had become a leading advocate – she was among the 156 accused in the marathon Treason Trial (1956-1961) at the age of 31.



Revolutionary Journalism

After a short stint as a researcher for the Johannesburg City Council, during which she also taught African workers in the Party's evening school, she was drawn into journalism, working for the Guardian, a crusading, socialist weekly which became increasingly supportive of the ANC-led liberation movement, with communists keeping it running. For a decade it survived consecutive banning orders through strategic name changes, and the dedication of its editorial staff, most famously under the masthead New Age. The head office was in Cape Town under the editorship of Lionel Foreman until his untimely early death, followed by Brian Bunting, editor-in-chief until the final banning in 1962, when draconian laws made publication impossible. By then New Age had briefly endured as Spark. Ruth headed the Johannesburg office; Govan Mbeki was in charge in Port Elizabeth, and M.P. Naicker ran the Durban premises. These papers reflected the Leninist definition of a newspaper as an organising weapon. This was journalism at its very best, that spoke truth to power on behalf of the voiceless and downtrodden. It stands as a salutary counterpoint to contemporary media that cynically serves the interests of corporate capitalism and its often white-dominated, Western-funded, and in an unholy alliance with Western imperialism.

Working with rural struggle stalwart Gert Sibande, and her protégé Joe Gqabi, Ruth famously played a pivotal role in exposing the farm labour scandal. This work demonstrated her research-driven, investigative journalism, writing skills and steely determination. It exposed the brutal system run by the police and magistrates, which consigned pass law offenders to virtual slave labour on white-owned farms like the Bethel potato farms. The meticulous research, skilful reporting, and the subsequent protest campaign, epitomised the power of a weekly newspaper like New Age.

Her writing on such topics as the defiance campaign, the mobilisation and consultation leading to the adoption of the Freedom Charter, the women's anti-pass protests, migrant labour system, bus boycotts, and slum conditions, are outstanding pieces of social and labour journalism amidst the upsurge of resistance in the 1950s.

Her methodology, often utilising often clandestine methods of acquiring evidence from facts on the ground, was the forerunner of her much later work in Mozambique, of participatory research at the grassroots. Concurrently she edited the monthly journal, *Fighting Talk*, which provided penetrating political analysis as well as carrying literary contributions. This latter role illustrated Ruth's ability to draw in cultural figures like Nadine Gordimer, Barney Simon, Drum writers and poets, and jazz musicians.

Today, what often passes for "investigative journalism" – frequently funded by Western governments and carried out through white-run NGOs – obsessively focuses on black corruption, often with a tone of sneering contempt. In some instances, vicious attacks have been mounted against progressive media. Ruth's work stands as a shining example of a radically different kind of investigative journalism – one that probes the conditions of oppression.

Like decent people around the world she would have been outraged at the brazen slaughter of the tens of thousands of people in Gaza. She would have felt deeply the deliberate killing of children, along with the women and men. She would have understood the reason for the targeted assault on fellow journalists in an attempt to wipe out the truth. Israel has murdered 216 media workers to date, far more than in any other conflict since WW2. Ruth, would, I am sure, have been particularly moved and outraged by the murder of Shereen Abu Aqleh, another fine and courageous woman journalist.

Ruth First and Joe Slovo were a charismatic and sociable couple, developing life-long friendships, and their home in Roosevelt Park, Johannesburg, was the scene of many joyful parties, where black and white people had rare moments of shared conviviality – while agitated police would glare from outside and take down car registration numbers.

The police raids, banning orders, and arrest of parents – common experiences in many struggle households – unsettled the children. The Slovo family was no exception. By then they had three talented daughters – Shawn, Gillian and Robyn – each of whom went on to successful careers as prolific writers and film makers.

Shawn wrote the screenplay for a film about her mother called *A World Apart*. One of Gillian's many novels, *Ties of Blood*, is based on the family history. Robyn produced a movie scripted by Shawn about MK called *Catch a Fire*, and co-produced the prize-winning documentary film, *Oliver Tambo's London Recruits*.

Ruth was often tasked by the Party to travel abroad to participate in meetings, experiencing at first hand conditions of socialist development in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China, which she enthusiastically conveyed to a liberation movement eager to learn about alternatives to capitalism and racist rule.

She had learnt from her parents, and then the YCL and Party, during the Spanish Civil War and World War II, the vital necessity of international solidarity. These international trips brought her into direct contact with revolutionaries from all over the world, deepening her appreciation for such solidarity in action. With her work in the AAM, in which she had played such an important role in mobilising international support in the struggle to isolate the apartheid regime, came the realisation that solidarity was not a one-way street, but a value that was mutual, reinforcing the internationalism of revolution pitted against the alliances of counter-revolution.

This tradition of internationalism lives on in the Party, which is involved in campaigns supporting the people of the Basque Country, Cuba, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Lebanon, Palestine, Polisario, Russia, Sudan, Swaziland, Venezuela, Yemen, and others. As we build internationalism we hear Ruth's voice imploring us to intensify our efforts.

The stormy struggles, and state repression of the 1950s, saw the unique unity of the ANC-SACP alliance deepen, reflecting how closely the parallel cleavages of class and colour had grown – a bond that would only strengthen in the years to come. Ruth remarked that the ANC, once primarily focussed on annual conferences before the rise of the Youth League, had transformed into a revolutionary, militant mass movement challenging the state and white supremacy.

Through struggle, nationalists like Mandela and Sisulu moved beyond their early anti-communist tendencies and sought to learn Marxism from the Party. Ruth, alongside Michael Harmel, was one of the leading Party comrades entrusted with this highly sensitive task. Ruth's influence on ANC leaders like Mandela, Sisulu and others, cannot be overstated. I would go so far as to say that this was one of her most important achievements. Her handling of such relationships – a woman tutoring the foremost African revolutionary men of the time in theory, while standing shoulder-to-shoulder with them in struggle – was a testament to her unique political acumen and strength.

Armed Struggle

Following the Sharpeville massacre on 21 March 1960, and the state of emergency that followed, Ruth managed to avoid arrest and seek refuge with her young daughters in Swaziland, whilst her husband was detained with hundreds of others. When the emergency was lifted, they were reunited back home, with the situation becoming more challenging and demanding further sacrifice.

16 December, 1961, heralded the birth of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) in which Joe Slovo – later Chief-of-Staff in exile – was dual commander, on behalf of the SACP, with Mandela. Ruth was involved during the initial Sabotage Campaign, which also involved the production and distribution of leaflets and other literature. Walter Sisulu's radio broadcast message from the underground was partly her writing. Following the Rivonia arrests, she worked in stealth alongside Bram Fischer and Hilda Bernstein, to assist and link those in hiding. Whilst Joe was abroad on a mission arranging training and weapons for MK, thus missing being arrested at Rivonia, time was running out for Ruth. She was arrested in August, 1963 under the 90-day Detention Act, and held in solitary confinement for 117 days – which later became the subject of a searing book with that title.

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Detention was an arduous ordeal of mental torture which she struggled to endure, but she emerged without surrendering a shred of information to her tormentors. As a security officer revealed to her: "You could have been charged in the Rivonia case. But we didn't want a woman in that case."

Fortunately, her mother was available to care for the children. Tilly's husband Julius First, who had helped finance the purchase of the Party's underground Rivonia farm headquarters, had fled into exile. Ruth had no choice but to leave on an exit visa with her mother and children, which meant they were forbidden to return to South Africa. They joined Joe in London. With the underground effectively smashed inside South Africa, there was no alternative but to live and work in exile, to fight another day. None imagined it would last as long as 25 more years.

Exile

Amid these difficult conditions, where immense strength and dedication were required to hold onto the dream of a free South Africa, a busy new chapter began in Ruth's active life, lasting from 1964-1977 in Britain. The Slovo family set-up home in the borough of Camden Town, London, with Julius and Tilly as neighbours; and the young girls having to restart their schooling in new, strange surrounds – not easy for parents and children. They were, however, a close family unit, and it was evident – as I observed while working closely with Joe – that Ruth and Joe had created a secure and loving home, despite both being deeply engaged in political and academic work, which required frequent travel – especially Joe, due to his Party commitments abroad. Their home in Camden Town drew many friends, and as in Johannesburg, was a centre of social and political activity.

Ruth was a leading figure in the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM), often serving as a keynote speaker, and she was held in the highest regard by the British Left, the intelligentsia, and a growing number of youthful activists. For six years she commuted between London and Durham, in the north of England, where she lectured in developmental studies. Alongside her comrade and colleague Harold Wolpe, she engaged with leading left academics, developing new theories about South Africa's economy, including Marxist Professor, Ralph Miliband; British Communist Party author on Africa, Jack Woddis; American writer William Pomeroy; South African exiles Ronald Segal and Ros Ainslee; and Vietnam solidarity organiser Tariq Ali. She showed an interest in the rising New Left thinking, and activity, and unlike many in the exile ranks sought to interact with the New Left to test and refresh her Marxism and understand their viewpoint.

This drew criticism from within the Party and she was cold-shouldered by some. It is not true, however, that she was ever suspended from the Party. She became critical of the Soviet Union, questioning its bureaucratic nomenklatura, and the 1968 intervention in Czechoslovakia.

She was affronted that there were so few women in the Soviet central committee which at times numbered several hundreds of members. In sixty-nine years of the USSR's history not a single woman served on its Politbureau. On one occasion, Ruth hammered me pointing out that in wartime, there had been heroines like Ludmila Pavlichenko – the anti-Nazi sniper credited with 309 officers killed. She had been a particular hero of mine since my military training in Odessa in 1964. Yet, Ruth, noted, aside from the woman cosmonaut, Valentine Tereshkova, there were no women in top political positions. I readily admit that Ruth sometimes gave me a hard time, but I came to realise that if she spoke harshly, it was because she was willing to face harsh criticism herself. I sulked over the Pavlichenko tirade, but she later surprised me with a charming gift – a recording of the Woody Guthrie song praising “Miss Pavlichenko well known for her fame”.

Ruth regarded herself as a “late bloomer” regarding feminism but remained cautious of reducing politics to identity alone. She certainly motivated and encouraged young women in their activism – and they were greatly inspired by her; but then so were the young male cadres. If anything, Ruth did not want to be consigned to women's politics. Throughout her political life she was in the forefront of the movement and not by way of tokenism owing to her gender.

Some mistakenly view her as a “dissident”, “dissenter” or “individualistic free thinker” because she was unafraid to raise awkward questions or break new ground, while others remained stuck in a groove, simply repeating old slogans. Ruth's Marxism was that which was developed and advocated by Marx himself. It was a dialectical understanding that theory must develop alongside ever changing conditions: “ask questions and doubt everything” in a disciplined way and enrich theory through praxis – the unity of theory and action. To “understand the world and change it” one had to stay attuned to date an ever-changing world and avoid remaining steeped in the past. This necessity remains as relevant today as ever.

Editor & Author

Ruth's period in Britain was her most prolific in terms of writing. Apart from numerous articles in the Anti-Apartheid News, the ANC's *Sechaba* journal, and other publications, she would have contributed to *The African Communist*, but unfortunately her nom de plume has not been verified. My sense is that she probably penned articles on the Sudan, Kenya and Libya, and other African issues including military coups and challenges of development. Research in this regard needs to be pursued.

Ruth was instrumental in establishing *The Review of African Political Economy* in 1974 focusing on the political economy of inequality, exploitation, and oppression. The journal was the brainchild of a group of young British and South African Marxists with links to Tanzania. One of them, Katherine Salahi (then Levine), one of the London Recruits previously referred to, has explained to me the benefit of having Ruth on board:

...apart from anything else, she was the only one in the collective who had any publishing experience. And of course, her political nous was key. She was a vital part of the collective from early on, incredibly supportive and generous with her time both politically and practically, and steered us towards a more professionally produced publication than we were capable of in our ignorance. She also brought South African academics – Gavin Williams and Robin Cohen – into the working group. Archie Mafeje was on the advisory group and they clashed on the pages of the journal... I have memories of her helping stamp, label and stuff envelopes; she was never above getting her hands dirty. (Email: August, 27, 2020)

Ruth authored and edited several books which reflect her passion for Africa. These saw her travelling to the continent on numerous occasions to collect information on the spot. Her work swiftly gained her an international reputation as a leading authority on Africa.

In the 1970s, she published *The Barrel of a Gun: The Politics of Coups d'état in Africa* (1970); followed by *Libya: The Elusive Revolution* (1974), and, with Jonathan Steele and Christabel Gurney, *The South African Connection: Western Investment in Apartheid* (1972).

It was during this time that she became absorbed in contemporary feminist works, resulting in an outstanding biography: *Olive Schreiner* (1980) which she wrote with Anne Scott. Particularly prescient, given the current situation in South Africa, was this observation she made in *Barrel of a Gun* about the coups in West and North Africa, highlighting the corruption and selfishness of emergent African elites: "It grows through politics, under party systems, under military governments, from the ranks of business, and from the corporate elites that run the state, the army and the civil service." She understood that in certain conditions patriotic officers linked to the masses could emerge from military ranks to lead revolutionary change, such as Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt. I believe she would classify Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and Ibrahim Traore of Burkina Faso in this category.

Mozambique

In 1977, Ruth jumped at the chance to work in Africa, when Frelimo, with which she was closely-aligned sought her out to run the Centre for African Studies at the Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo, Mozambique. Drawing together a dynamic collective of young intellectuals she trained students in research techniques, and directed several large field studies on relations between agriculture and the state. Her best-known project researched the lives of migrant labourers who worked on the South African gold mines. The results of this study, which pioneered a form of participatory grassroots research, was published the year after her death as *Black Gold: The Mozambican Miner, Proletarian and Peasant* (1983). We can say this with a certainty that she would have been appalled at the rise of xenophobia in our country today, at the brutal attacks on fellow African migrants, scapegoated for crime and unemployment by ostensible leaders, some within the ANC.

The Mozambican chapter in her life, from 1977 to 1982, saw her closely involved with the ANC in Maputo, addressing meetings and assisting young cadres involved in reconstructing the underground within South Africa. She was a keen member of the SACP structures and always encouraged comrades in their work; to follow Lenin's exhortation of "the concrete analysis of the concrete situation," and to be open minded and "question everything" in a logical manner. Ruth was in her prime; and living in an apartment with Joe.

Everyone assumed that Joe would be the prime target for the murderous apartheid regime. However, the life of this extraordinary woman was cut down by a parcel bomb, which she opened in her office on the 17th of August, 1982. It was part of a growing number of assassinations by apartheid hit-squads; and followed the murder the year before of her New Age protégé, Joe Gqabi in Harare. There was an outpouring of grief internationally, with 3,000 attending her funeral in Maputo.

In his funeral oration, Moses Mabhida, General-Secretary of the SACP, declared: "The bomb that took Comrade Ruth's life was intended to deprive our movement of the services of one of its most gifted militants. We openly acknowledge the exceptional gravity of the loss to us caused by her death. But we equally proclaim that her immense contribution to our movement will never be lost but will help to guide our actions and inspire our militants in the years to come."

He ended with the words: "We want to say, 'Farewell, Comrade Ruth and we want to assure you that the struggle you so loved will be carried out with all determination and intensity.'" (my emphasis).



Legacy

We still grieve for the life of Ruth First; who would have been 100 this year. Whilst we pay tribute to her, can we say in all honesty that the assurance given by Moses Mabhida, at her graveside 43 years ago, is being carried out by the Movement she gave her life for? To repeat the commitment: “that the struggle you so loved will be carried out with all determination and intensity.”

There is much Ruth would have been thrilled about if she could cast her brilliant critical eye over our country today. This would include the ANC’s insistence on the elevation of women to high government posts, and to a significant presence in parliament. But without question she would have been appalled at the state of the ANC and country today. I have no doubt that she would have raised her trenchant voice against the corruption, crony capitalism, careerism and lust for power; the appalling conditions of unemployment, poverty and living conditions of the poor; the repression of grassroots struggles; the lack of service delivery and chronic mismanagement; the violence against women and abuse of children.

Given her analytical mind, that analysis would not have simply stopped at the Zuma years of greed and plunder, but certainly have interrogated the decisions taken that brought the demise of the RDP, the introduction of Gear, and the lurch into the grip of corporate capital’s free market, neo-liberal economy. She would certainly be involved in a bold Marxist discourse about an alternate socio-economic model; not only for our country but for Africa and the world.

Along with issues facing women and the poverty-stricken, this would include the planetary crisis of eco-system endangered by climate change and environmental destruction. What would have alarmed her too, would have been the rising threat of ISIS terrorism in the north of Mozambique, a consequence of the unbridled corporate exploitation of gas reserves, and the corruption that has stalked Frelimo and other liberation movements. She would be a leading voice in mobilising solidarity for the struggle of the people of Palestine.

I was at her side at the London School of Economics (LSE) in 1967 at the very outbreak of the Six Day War, and she said she was holding thumbs that Nasser would defeat Israel. The Palestinian struggle was always close to her heart as an anti-Zionist Jew. Words escape one for what she would have said about the genocide being perpetrated by a fascist Israel and the impunity provided by the West. She would have been outraged at the arrogant support for Israel among white liberals, and their media, in South Africa.

She would not flinch for offering her support to anti-imperialist movements and leaders, including people such as Hugo Chávez and Ibrahim Traoré. She firmly understood the need for armed struggle where peaceful means were no longer possible. She admired revolutionaries who came from civilian careers, such as Georgi Zhukov, a worker of Red Army fame, Mao Zedong, an academic, Fidel Castro, a lawyer, Che Guevara, a doctor, Agostinho Neto, a doctor, Amílcar Cabral, an academic, General Võ Nguyên Giáp of Vietnam, a history teacher, and Samora Machel, a male nurse. She saw them as outstanding examples of civilians who became army generals or guerrilla commanders when history demanded it.

How would Ruth have responded to the challenges we face today? How does her legacy speak to us? Rigorously answering these questions is a particular challenge for the YCL and a young generation of would-be revolutionaries.

We must begin, as Ruth would have insisted, by striving to understand the concrete situation in all its complexities, driven by the need to address the people's problems. This means learning from the working people and the dispossessed on the ground; tirelessly engaging in study and research; participating in questioning and debate through a collectivist approach; formulating theory; and remaining connected to the grassroots.

She would also have insisted, put ideas to the test through praxis – the unity of theory and action from which strategy and tactics is consistently developed and refined, in a dialectical materialist manner, working through contradictions. Practically speaking as of now the Party's upcoming Red Caravan project, taking the Party to the people, understanding their conditions, mobilising and preparing the ground for the 2026 local elections is a test for our structures at the grassroots base. This is not merely a matter of electioneering for parliamentary representation above all else. As Lenin pointed out to "left communists" who argued against participating in so-called "bourgeois elections" and "parliamentarianism," the real challenge was to use such elections to raise the consciousness of the masses and prepare them for the many forms of struggle on the road to socialism.

Whilst one cannot think for the dead, the living must carry on the struggle Comrade Ruth and her generation were so committed to, with determination, intensity and integrity. In so doing we must be guided by the ideas that energised and propelled her always seeking to "understand the world to change it." Owing to Bantu Education, the learning of black youth in our country has been hampered. It is our duty to assist comrades of all ages who have not had the privilege of a decent education, helping them to discover the liberating experience of good books. Ruth was deeply involved in teaching workers at the Party's night schools. We need to reintroduce this practice in our organisational work today.

To action, comrades!

Strengthen the organisational capacity of the Party and the YCL! Consolidate the unity and strength of the trade union movement! Build a broad left front! Rescue the ANC from its decline, ensuring it faithfully realigns with the revolutionary alliance! Educate and organise a new generation of youth within the YCL! Intensify our international solidarity work and deepen ties with our global allies!

The YCL faces a vital responsibility: to reach out to a new generation of young people from diverse backgrounds who are desperately searching for a bright future. As Lenin pointed out, the socialist outcome of the national democratic revolution depends on the strength of the working class. With the working class and the masses, the struggle for socialism will be victorious.

While we cannot think for the dead—it is the living who must carry forward the struggle—we must learn from Comrade Ruth First's invaluable lessons and legacy. With determination, intensity, and integrity, we must continue the work she and her generation were so deeply committed to. In so doing, we must be guided by the ideas that energised and propelled her forward: "understanding the world to change it" and "asking questions and proceeding from the concrete analysis of the concrete situation!"

On the anniversary of her death, one can certainly declare that Ruth's struggle to change the world continues. Her life is exemplary for men and women, young and old, who wish to understand the world and change it.

Ruth First's Truth Lasts!

Cosatu House, Johannesburg

15 May 2025

Ronnie Kasrils is a member of the SACP Central Committee, a founder member of MK, and a former government minister.

This talk is based on a lecture delivered to the Jack Simons Party School, 23 August, 2020

END

**POLITICAL MESSAGE TO THE
WORLD FEDERATION OF
DEMOCRATIC YOUTH
MZWANDILE THAKHUDI
YCLSA NATIONAL SECRETARY**

To the established Protocol in the Praesidium.
The SWAPO Party Youth League being the Host
Representation of the World Peace Council.

It is a great pleasure and delight to share space in this august
house of the youth of the world.

The World Federation of Democratic Youth convened under the
theme: Forward for our future. United against imperialism. For the
rights of the youth. To build a world of social justice and equality.
The World Federation of Democratic Youth was founded in London
on the backdrop of the ashes of the fall of Nazism post the World
War ii to unite the youth of all nationalities and all races against
imperialism and for the attainment of global peace and improved
living standards. 80 years ago on the defeat of Nazism where the
Soviets lost 27 million to save the globe. We remain eternally
grateful and indebted.

The General assembly convenes also at the time that we have just commemorated 100 years since the birth of our revered National Secretary- Cde Ruth First. She was a proponent of both resistance research and journalism. She was murdered with a parcel bomb 17 August 1982 in Mozambique by the Apartheid regime on the cross-border missions to silence the activists in exile against the mounting pressure of the liberation forces.

This year also marks the 70th anniversary of the Freedom Charter since 1955. The people's charter is an expression of the hopes of our people to govern and to share in the wealth of our country, which remains a distant dream with the recent reversals seen with the government of neo liberal unity in South Africa.

The Freedom Charter declared that our people have been robbed of their birthright to land, liberty and peace by a form of government founded on injustice and inequality.

As Karl Marx highlighted that history always repeats itself. We are here yet again. We are of the firm view that we are returning to this tragic situation in South Africa if you have seen the visit to Washington by the South African government delegation yesterday. Our former colonizers are today with a new costume. Wearing suits, carrying trade deals/agreements and capture concealed by Foreign Direct Investments and aids.

Our revolution in South Africa is severely compromised. It is for this reason that our mother body, the South African Communist Party, has now adopted an epoch-making resolution- we are referring here to the resolution for the SACP to actively participate in elections and contest the upcoming local government elections independently in South Africa. We view this posture as strategic and the approach as a tactical manoeuvre to rescue the sold revolution in South Africa.

The YCLSA, together with the SACP have observed efforts by counter-revolutionary organisations and their academics and professionals in the African continent. The so-called anti-authoritarian and pro-democracy forces. The meeting initially convened in Poland- Gdansk under the auspices of the Brenthurst Foundation, a cover of the DA, which is a mouthpiece of domestic and international capital. This meeting declared a solid position to debase and ultimately unseat the liberation movements on the continent.

With the failure to achieve this set objective in the 2024 general elections, the West especially the USA have now resorted to distortions of the South African body politic. This distortion's chief among them being the propaganda that South African government oversees genocide against the white Afrikaner farmers.

Yesterday at the Oval Office, we saw a mockery and a big exposé of the fallacy of imperialism. We want to say that this fallacy is perpetuated as part of the view to annexe the Western Cape, and they intend to do so through either referendum /military intervention under the guise of security, among other reasons, they may use as a smoke screen. It is for this reason that we need to amplify our call against American military bases on our continent.

The creation of the WFDY organisation was a testament to the new zeal around the globe to undermine imperialism and fascism globally.

The key aim is to establish multilateral understanding among the youth that is anchored on the pillars of national sovereignty, territorial integrity and self-determination.

The organisation mainly seeks to achieve social and economic justice and ultimately crash capitalism. This is by design and ideological orientation. We stand firmly in support of this vision. Lenin postulated that imperialism is the highest and special stage of capitalism- a system ridden of the multiplicity of crises ranging from the economic crisis, environmental and the bourgeois social reproduction crisis.

The crisis is defined mainly by the economic situation breeding abject poverty, mass unemployment, and ever-diverging inequality, which is a lived experience of the majority of the eight billion global population. The ecological precarities, as well as the capitalist social reproduction, engulf our global community. The United Nations Social Report reveals that more than a third of the globe lives in dire poverty, marred by insecurity and inequality. In South Africa, 80% of people experienced poverty at least once since the 2008 global recession till 2025.

Two-thirds of the world population lives in countries where income inequality is growing at a rapid rate. Decades of austerity measures, the budget cuts for social services, deregulation and privatisation are indeed sowing distrust and political anger, especially among the youth. Could another Arab spring be looming?

But Marx again, postulated that Men make history not out of self-selected circumstances. Therefore, the youth of the world must rise to the occasion. The hour of the revolution has struck. We can no longer be victims as revolutionaries.

We concur fully without reservations with Her Excellency, Madam President of the land of the brave- Namibia, Dr Netumbo Nandi Ndaitwah, in the opening when she said that the youth of the world should forcefully stand up for a just cause world over.

In light of the above, we wish to express our unreserved, unwavering and principled solidarity with the people of Palestine, Western Sahara, Syria, Venezuela, Cuba and all other nations that are faced with genocide and the repressive and unjustified sanctions, especially by the West through their three-theatre war strategy.

Forard to Socialism and Progressive internationalism!

Down with Capitalism!



The YCLSA delegation made time for a bilateral with fellow progressives at the WFDY in Windhoek, Namibia.

AGAINST OPPORTUNISM: THE ERA OF SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

**MESSAGE BY LEADER OF GREECE DELEGATION
TO THE WFDY**

Dear comrades, we would like to greet the delegates attending the 21st General Assembly of World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY). We also thank our host, South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), for organizing the meeting in Namibia and for their hospitality.

We think that it is very important that we now clarify who is who and preserve the WFDY. That is why it is essential to emphasize that today we must oppose the opportunist revision of Leninist political economy of imperialism which is sowing confusion within our anti-imperialist camp.

The most modern form of this opportunist revision of Leninist political economy of imperialism, is the ideological construction of the "imperialist pyramid". This nonsensical scheme is a metaphysical dogma designed to deceive and manipulate those lacking a fundamental education in Marxist-Leninist dialectics.

This modern form of opportunism poses a greater threat to the global revolutionary and anti-imperialist movements than previous forms for one specific reason. Historically, opportunism aimed to undermine the workers' movement in the most advanced capitalist/imperialist countries. However, today, the aim is to undermine the movement in dependent and semi-dependent countries – the potential “weak links” in the global imperialist system where the next revolutionary situation could potentially emerge.

First, at the heart of the “imperialist pyramid” nonsense, lies an unprecedented deception. The scientific categories “imperialist stage” and “imperialist state” have been deliberately mixed up. Thus, imperialism cannot be the “highest stage of capitalism” since: “there are no stages” and “anyone who dares to speak of stages is an opportunist”!

To enforce their abominable dogma, the revisionists implicitly declare that the founders of the dialectical laws that govern the stages of historical development and the classics of revolutionary theory are the first opportunists. To the revisionists, if imperialism is not a historically specific stage in quality and essence, it becomes an ahistorical condition - an abstract structure akin to bourgeois structuralist ideotypes, without origins, past or future. This makes EVERY state in the world an imperialist state.

The opportunists reject the contradiction between imperialist countries (a handful of parasites/rentier countries according to Lenin) and independent, semi-independent, dependent countries, presenting through multiple mechanisms of extracting surplus value on a regional and global scale, through the siphoning of monopoly super-profits.

Next on the chopping block is the Leninist category of the “weak link”, the country and/or group of countries where the internal and global contradictions of the imperialist system are concentrated. This is the explosive node that makes the outbreak of revolutionary situations possible and necessary.

Another stepping stone is the de facto rejection of communist strategy through its metaphysical detachment from tactics and reducing the latter to an abstract “anti-capitalism”. The opportunists have gone so far as to purge the word “tactics” from their official texts, marking this word alone to denote “opportunism” or using it only when describing the “tactics of the bourgeoisie”. This leads to the confinement of the movement to blind and meaningless activism, to following the actions capitalist class, reacting to the agenda set by its regime, that is, to a crawling tacticism

This was observed in past forms of opportunism such as Kautskyism of the Second International. The Kautskyists denounced the Bolsheviks and the October Revolution in the name of their “orthodox” adherence to “pure strategy” and “pure socialism”.

Breaking yet another dialectical dipole, the opportunists metaphysically detach theory from practice, while also reducing scientific theory to propagandistic ideological constructions to cover up their opportunist pro-regime drift.

The dialectic of the historical process consists of development in law governed stages. Our revisionists, however, deny even the very existence of law governed stages of historical development, which is a gross rejection of the dialectic of revolutionary development.

The necessity and the very possibility of any real historical project of early socialist revolutions is also rejected. According to their dogma, “all countries are imperialist within the pyramid”, therefore there are no “weak links”, tactical transitional goals and escalation of the struggle from the revolutionary situation, the uprising with frontal anti-imperialist (national liberation, anti-neocolonial, democratic, etc.) movements in dependent countries with an average and below-average level of development, to the socialist revolution.

This is part of their mission to sabotage the escalation of the struggle towards the transitional stage, towards the dictatorship of the proletariat and socialist construction. They also reject the concrete historical process of revolutionary transformations in the existing victorious early socialist revolutions of various peoples. They preach arrogantly, doubting the socialist character of said revolutions while pontificating on how a revolution should be carried out. They invoke a metaphysically idealised “model of pure socialism”, without contradictions, problems and conflicts with counter-revolution, in the spirit of abstract “anti-capitalism”, the imaginary absolute negation of capitalism in the metaphysical beyond of the “maturation of conditions”, which practically means being trapped in the insurmountability of capitalism.

Revisionists also renounce the camp of early socialism of the 20th century. To do that, they emphasise the success of the bourgeois counter-revolutions and the restoration of capitalism in the USSR and the early socialist countries that emerged in Europe after WWII, as well as the bourgeois – reactionary propaganda of the supposed final and indefinite failure and defeat of the very idea and prospect of socialism. This is then applied retroactively to history, where even WWII has come to be described as “imperialist from start to end”. Bourgeois ahistorical ideologies which identify commodity/money relations with capitalism, are used to renounce the socialist character of all the countries of early socialism.

Anti-imperialism and the countries that emerged due to victorious national liberation and anti-colonialist movements under the influence and with the internationalist help of the victorious early socialist revolutions of the 20th century are rejected by the overzealous revisionists. The opportunists label the whole of the anti-imperialist, national liberation, anti-colonialist, etc. movements, every frontal struggle “opportunist”, “reformist”, “imperialist”, operating “under foreign flags”, etc..

In war and in revolution – which war brings urgently back on the agenda – the main enemy of the movement is the imperialist axis of aggression under US leadership. An axis that instrumentalises fascism and uses it as its strike force.

If the revolutionary anti-imperialist movement is to emerge victorious in this life-or-death confrontation with a still powerful enemy (despite the rapid loss of its forces, positions and roles in the global balance of power), it must achieve the maximum consolidation, unification and coordination of its forces, its formation into a strong and effective front at the national and international level.

This is impossible as long as most dangerous dipole in history, opportunism/revisionism, continues to undermine the movement, sowing division and defeatism, disorienting and distracting forces.

This struggle is indispensable for the realisation of the development of the worldwide anti-imperialist front, with the catalytic role of a theoretically and practically reorganised and united global communist movement.

Long live antiimperialist struggle! Long live WFDY



Delegates to the WFDY Marching in the streets Windhoek, Namibia

MESSAGE TO THE WFDY GENERAL ASSEMBLY

YCL-LJC CANADA TO THE WFDY

Comrades, on behalf of the Young Communist League - Ligue de la jeunesse communiste Canada, we extend our warm fraternal greetings to the 21st general assembly of WFDY and all representative delegations. Thank you to the colleagues of Namibia from SWAPO youth for hosting this important meeting of the anti-imperialist youth.

Our assembly is taking place in dangerous times for the youth, marked by the sharpening of capitalism's contradictions. In its drive for profit Imperialism is attacking the social wage more and more, especially for the youth. Education and healthcare are becoming more difficult to access at the same time that the quality is lowering. The rise of the so-called gig economy and precarious work has many workers of our generation feeling alienated leading them to believe that there is no future for them.

The ruling class is becoming more desperate in its attempts to make the working class pay for the crisis of capitalism. As we know, the working class youth are more vulnerable to mass layoffs, a declining social wage, and stagnant wages.

Capitalism in its highest stage continues to rely on speeding up the circulation of capital as well as lowering working conditions to increase the rate of exploitation.

Comrades, we have observed since 2019 when we last met the continued rise of the ultra-right everywhere throughout the world and the increased aggressiveness of imperialism which has led to the outbreak of wars which have taken the lives of far too many young people.

Since our last assembly, the danger of war is not a threat but a reality. Major fronts were opened in Ukraine-Russia Federation, Palestine-middle east, and Sudan. These are the consequences of the deepened structural crisis of capitalism as well as its corollary, inter-imperialist confrontation. These are threats that our generation must overcome. We are not cheerleaders for one faction of the bourgeois over another.

When we observe the history of bourgeois rule since its upheaval of the domination of the aristocracy and feudalism, we can see that it has had different ideologies and approaches to statecraft.

These different ideologies are a reflection of the economic base and reaction by the ruling class to the crisis of capitalism, as well as the level of class consciousness and organisation of the working class.

In our work, proletarian internationalism remains our largest contribution to the movement of young workers and students in Canada. We are unwavering in our absolute commitment to building the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions campaign in solidarity with the cause of the Palestinian people. As well we continue to prioritize Canada-Cuba solidarity amongst the youth in our countries, working to strengthen the movement against the blockade on the Cuban people and their revolution.

Comrades, with our country, Canada, we know many of you have heard about the threats of the annexation of our country by the United States. Last month, there was an election in Canada. None of the parties of big business made any proposals about a rupture from further integration with the United States military or economically.

Trump aims to cripple any value-added industry in Canada and thus any economic independence, But this is not a new development, rather this is a continuation of decades of policy of all the political parties of the monopolies in Canada. What Trump seeks now is to impose the full integration of the Canadian economy into the imperialist war economy of the U.S.

Comrades, since we last met in 2019, with Trump or without Trump in office, the Canadian State has continued to play the role of warmonger. The government of Canada regardless of which big business party is in power advances the interests of monopolies over the people. From massive expenditures in military aid to Israel and Ukraine, to taking advantage of the devastating inter-imperialist war in Sudan to seize minerals and other resources, and now hosting the upcoming G20 meetings. The Canadian state remains an active member of NATO and is committed to advancing the interests of monopolies both in Canada and around the world.

The Canadian state is firmly in the camp of the United States and NATO. Although the US – European Union – Japan triad represents the main imperialist pole, the fact remains that imperialism constitutes a global system and is, therefore, not the prerogative of one country, one alliance or organization. Imperialism is nothing more nor less than the supreme stage of capitalism, as demonstrated by Lenin over a century ago in conditions frightfully similar to the one we are living in.

Fighting against imperialism on the global scale and, more importantly, in advanced capitalist countries, is not a step towards fighting capitalism nor is it a separate struggle. It is part of one fight against the exploitation of the working class by those who own the means of production.



YCL Canada GS addressing the WFDY in Windhoek, Namibia

After imperialism, there can be no other transformation of capitalism. The era of imperialism is the era of socialist revolutions. With this in mind we say that WFDY must reaffirm its relationships and campaign with the other fighters against imperialism, namely, the World Federation of Trade Unions, the World Peace Council, and the Women's international democratic Federation.

We as the member organisations of WFDY must commit to building the united movement for social transformation. For a future for our generation. Comrades, we are here to say that the YCL-LJC Canada will continue the work of bringing the campaigns of WFDY to the working youth and students of our country and in turn bring the perspectives and experience of the working youth and students

CHRIS HANI AND WORKER'S INTERNATIONALISM

Review of African Political Economy (ROAPE.NET)

Written by Pedro Mzileni



In this piece, Pedro Mzileni reclaims International Workers' Day from Eurocentric origins by calling for recognition of African contributions to global worker history. He does this by celebrating the life and politics of South African Communist leader Chris Hani, who was tragically assassinated in 1993. Mzileni presents Hani as a revolutionary thinker committed to the idea that only international workers' struggles against capitalism could end Black oppression in South Africa.

There remains a contested history on how the 1st of May became an International Workers Day. Euro-American Marxists such as Philip Foner trace its origins, as expected, from Euro-American labour resistance that began with the first permanent formation of trade unions in the late 1790s, in Philadelphia; where carpenters mainly went on strike in 1791 demanding a 10-hour working day, under exploitative capitalism that required 14-hours of labour at the time. By 1864, labour transcended the local factory for global solidarity with the founding of the International Workingmen's Association (IWA), which campaigned for an eight-hour day of labour. The IWA was endorsed by the Geneva Congress in the same year – a gathering popularly recorded as the First International.

The next two decades, at least up to 1886, featured a series of labour movements from that part of the world, who mobilised to select a specific day in the year to withdraw their labour to participate in the eight-hour day's labour campaign. The 1875 Industrial Congress in Indianapolis selected July 4th for these mass demonstrations, which was also the same day preferred by the British working class as early as 1844. However, the Edmonston's resolution of the Labour Federation convention of 1844 selected 1 May 1886 as the day to begin the eight-hour day's labour, through a mass parade that featured more than 10,000 demonstrators. The rest was history

As important as this abridged version of Western-orientated literature on labour is, which I do not want to underestimate, it is however an incomplete story that excludes the rest of the world's contributions to the birth and maturity of the Workers International. The remaining part of the story should begin with scientific recognition that by 1492, capitalism was obtaining a global footprint specifically through colonial rule. When Marx and Engels open their Communist Manifesto essay with an admission and concession that the bourgeoisie only started obtaining fresh ground for its unprecedented and rapid development, and an impulse it had never known before through the discovery of America and the rounding of the Cape; they were actually acknowledging the significance of colonialism in the international development of capitalism.

In other words, the bourgeoisie as the core of the colonial world system, zoned Europe and Western society as the exclusive boundary of capital; that views the rest of the world as the periphery to colonise and exploit in extracting its raw material from its dehumanised people reduced to being disposable cheap labour. Frantz Fanon's observation of French colonial rule in Algeria was therefore accurate: "Europe's scandalous opulence was founded from the soil of the underdeveloped world and from slavery and the dead bodies Negroes, Arabs, Indians, and yellow races". These historical, antagonistic, and international labour relations between the North and the South moved former history lecturer at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, Walter Rodney, to reveal how Europe underdeveloped Africa; where he specifically underscored that racism is the ideology of modern capitalism

When Marx, Engels, and indeed Foner decide to present the history of Workers International as the sole invention of Western thought, where the rest of the world is either erased or appears as footnotes, we have an obligation to reveal how philosophers in other parts of the world like Africa witnessed and theorised these questions from the colonies as important contributions to global literature. Martin Thembisile Hani, commonly known as “Chris” in the liberation struggle, is one such philosopher and revolutionary leader in the international history of workers from the colonies that I want to invoke on this May Day for the world to remember. Chris was assassinated on the morning of 10 April 1993 outside his home in Dawn Park, Boksburg, South Africa; in front of his 15-year-old daughter Nomakhwezi, by Janusz Walus and Clive Derby-Lewis; two white racist European settlers who were representing the broader white far-right apartheid project, administered by the Conservative Party (CP), and the National Party (NP) running apartheid South Africa

Nelson Mandela, on the evening of Chris’s assassination, addressed the national broadcaster calling for peace on a clearly provoked population, and described Chris as “an erudite scholar who could have chosen a less arduous path, he nonetheless selflessly chose the often thankless task of being a freedom fighter ... loved by millions, hated only by those who fear the truth”. Cuban revolutionary President at the time, Fidel Castro, also made a public statement concerning Chris’s assassination: “the survival of sectors and forces contrary to the elimination of racial segregation regime, even at the price of such a heinous crime, also confirm that although the future looks promising, the anti-apartheid movement will have to wage great battles and face unforeseeable obstacles”.

Cuban revolutionary President at the time, Fidel Castro, also made a public statement concerning Chris's assassination: "the survival of sectors and forces contrary to the elimination of racial segregation regime, even at the price of such a heinous crime, also confirm that although the future looks promising, the anti-apartheid movement will have to wage great battles and face unforeseeable obstacles". Cuba was the last international visit by Chris Hani outside South Africa, when he led a solidarity delegation of the South African Communist Party (SACP) in February 1993, which was welcomed by Fidel Castro in Havana.

Chris Hani was a revolutionary philosopher who had an astute appreciation of theory and practice as key and simultaneous pillars of struggle. He was a communist with an international consciousness, who understood that the oppressed racialised Black and gendered women in the colony of South Africa were part of a single world system of colonial rule driven by capitalism; and it was only an internationalist workers struggle for a socialist democracy that will liberate humanity. An intellectual biography of his life and thoughts clearly outlines these attributes about him. I will only highlight three aspects of his intellectual life that attach him to the global family of revolutionary philosophers of the Workers International in modern history.

Firstly, Chris obtained academic and intellectual training on the broader anti-colonial strategy. He graduated with a BA from the prestigious University of Fort Hare in South Africa; one of the only three universities in the world that have produced four or more State presidents. The other two universities to have done that are Harvard

It is at Fort Hare where Chris was exposed to Marxist literature in journals such as *The Torch* and *New Age* written underground by world-renowned anti-colonial thinkers such as Govan Mbeki and Ruth First. Afterwards, he went for military training in the USSR, where further Marxist conscientisation was inculcated on him, to advance the option of the armed struggle as a revolutionary path to seize state power for independence. Chris also received political training in Pan-African philosophy from frontline states in Africa at the peak of political decolonisation in the 1960s, whilst exiled in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana, Angola, Tanzania, Lesotho, and Botswana.

It is crucial to put the intellectual value of the armed struggle in context and in connection with Chris. The region of Southern Africa was uniquely undergoing settler colonialism: the most brutal version of colonial rule. In economic terms, settler colonialism was the process by which a large population of European origin invaded the region, dispossessed the indigenous African population off its land, and converted the dispossessed African population into disposable and enslaved cheap labour that creates wealth for the occupying European settlers. It was racial capitalism in the colony. In social terms, settler colonialism saw the European settlers destroy and replace all indigenous social systems with those of the metropole to make themselves feel at home, whilst alienating the dispossessed indigenous population. The only method of resistance against colonialism of this kind becomes the armed struggle; mainly for land restoration to end the settler-native relationship, to end racial capitalism, and to bring justice, peace and independence. Fanon calls this method: revolutionary violence for decolonisation.

In other words, the oppressed are defending themselves by all means necessary against unprovoked colonial violence to free themselves and to rebuild their nation themselves. The armed struggle therefore is a necessary and scientific tool of resistance to end settler colonial violence to bring peace; which is the reason why this method of struggle is protected today under international law as Article 51 of the UN Charter



Chris Hani addressing a rally, date unknown (wiki commons)

Secondly, beyond the academic and intellectual training Chris obtained that facilitated his internationalist consciousness; his upbringing and socialisation also committed his life to the struggle of the Workers International. Chris is born in the Transkei homeland in 1942, in the proletarianised village of Sabalele in Cofimvaba near a settler town called Queenstown; from parents, Gilbert Hani and Nomayise Hani, who were cheap migrant labourers. Gilbert, his father, earned 16 shillings per week as a construction worker in Cape Town and supplemented his income as a street hawker.

But, they still managed to raise Chris as a bright schoolboy who obtained distinctions, that qualified him for the United Transkei Territories General Council scholarship to go study at Lovedale College and University of Fort Hare in Alice. Biographers Janet Smith and Beauregard Tromp reveal that in an extensive interview that Chris did with historian Luli Callinicos, a few weeks before he was assassinated, he underscored this early socialisation as being crucial in building his lifetime commitment to the Workers International: “Now I had seen the lot of Black workers, extreme forms of exploitation. Slave wages, no trade union rights, and for me the appeal of socialism was extremely great. Workers create wealth, but in the final analysis, they get nothing. They get peanuts in order to survive and continue working for the capitalists. So it was that simple approach, that simple understanding which was a product of my own observation in addition to theory. I didn’t get involved with workers’ struggle out of theory alone”.

Thirdly, Chris was a grassroots organiser and public teacher for community self-reliance and people’s power. Chris reluctantly returned from exile to South Africa on 28 April 1990, as part of the secret talks between the African National Congress (ANC) and the National Intelligence Services (NIS) of the apartheid state in Switzerland, a month after the release of Mandela on 11 February 1990; where broad agreements were being made between the two parties for the release of political prisoners and return exiles to begin formal negotiations for a postapartheid order.

The “talks about talks” eventually began inside South Africa between the two adversaries, the NP and the ANC, on 4 May 1990 and they produced the first ceasefire agreement called by the Groote Schuur Minute that was signed by both parties, followed by a joint press conference. The NP did not honour this ceasefire agreement, including many others signed by both parties and more role-players from 1990-1993. Instead, it continued with its political assassinations, genocidal mass killings, and detentions without trial of all thinkers, journalists, activists, and civilians opposed to apartheid rule.

This impunity of the apartheid state was its indirect strategy to prolong white rule, maintain apartheid property relations in post-apartheid society, and sabotage the post-apartheid state’s capacity to pursue total liberation. The 17 June 1992 Boipatong massacre, the 7 September 1992 Bisho massacre, and indeed the 10 April 1993 assassination of Chris, were all standout unspeakable crimes amongst many other known and unknowns massacres and assassinations during this period, which demonstrated how irreparable and consistent the apartheid state was on its original mission to execute Black people. Chris used rallies, community meetings, popular interviews, and mass protests to conscientise Black people about the importance of maintaining the armed struggle, mass action, and revolutionary discipline to achieve total liberation. Chris continued wearing his military regalia as General Secretary of the SACP elected on 8 December 1991; communicating the revolutionary principle of maintaining the armed struggle and building the self-reliance of grassroots communities through the people’s self-defence units (SDUs).

One of the erased facts of history today is that the aspect of SDUs was a much-loved subject of popular conscientisation by Chris, and he attended most of his rallies and community meetings speaking to masses about this issue with his most-fond friend and fellow comrade of common ideas: Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. Whilst the apartheid state viewed the armed struggle as an enemy of its white liberal version of peace, Chris on the other hand viewed the armed struggle as a scientific prerequisite for a peaceful negotiated South Africa; that must be driven by the people's popular demands in communities, not few elites in Kliptown boardrooms of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA). On 1 May 1992, Chris as General Secretary of the SACP, addressed his last Workers International Day rally at the Curries Fountain Stadium in Durban, Natal, alongside Nelson Mandela as ANC President, and John Gomomo as hosting President of the rally by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). Chris used this address to make four crucial points:

- To mobilise the grassroots behind the mass democratic movement to end violence amongst Black people sponsored by the apartheid state in KwaZulu homelands in Natal.
- To intensify mass action around CODESA negotiations to centralise people's power in the qualitative outcome of the ensuing post-apartheid breakthrough.
- To mobilise workers as community members to intensify shopfloor struggles and broader anti-capitalist campaigns for a socialist alternative that will deliver an industrialised economy, full employment, and socialisation of the commanding heights of the economy.
- To mobilise the international working class to reject the emerging neoliberal and unipolar offensive of the imperialist and war-mongering United States, European Union, and NATO – driven by the recent collapse of the Berlin Wall.

In all these mass gatherings, Chris addressed full stadiums at the height of the unemployment crisis, after the international economy sanctioned apartheid South Africa. The Workers International Day of 1 May 1992 was not an official public holiday under apartheid rule, but he managed to pull the grassroots together through popular stay aways. Beyond these outstanding attributes and his international stature and popularity that once placed him as a possible successor to Nelson Mandela; Chris was importantly a democrat who admired and respected the organisational discipline of his movement – the ANC. When the leadership of President Mandela made economic and defence-related concessions to the NP in exchange for the ballot; such as accepting a private property constitutional state on a colonial foundation, and suspending the armed struggle and demobilising a population majority; Chris was not consulted, but he accepted the decisions of the collective.

On 10 April 1993, an Easter Saturday morning, Chris gave his bodyguards special leave and shared holiday break as his personal commitment to workers solidarity, by asking them to go home to be with their families and not guard him that weekend. Walus approached a defenseless Chris inside his home yard, and the rest was history. Today, we remember Chris for living a life of total commitment and integrity to the cause of humanity. We therefore share the words uttered by his two daughters on media interview shortly after his death, Lindiwe and Nomakhwezi, who said: “my dad did nothing wrong to anyone, but God took him away. His crime was that he cared for people ... I couldn’t understand why Walus had to come all the way to South Africa to kill one Black communist. I am sure it makes no difference at all to him, but to me, it’s a world of difference”.



Dr. Pedro Mzileni during a public interview for the NYDA Board, July 2021

Featured Photograph: (SACP) Chris Hani speaks at a press conference on the third day of the first SACP legal congress inside South Africa in 41 years in December 07, 1991 (historica fandom)

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Motlhaba
Village

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