

HEROINES OF THE STRUGGLE

VOL.1

WOMEN MUST CLAIM THEIR RIGHTS



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Foreword

The booklet serves as a commemoration to the heroines and veterans of the struggle.

The brave women of the struggle, women who hold knife from its sharpest edge. Freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression.

The booklet is the product of COSATU Archives in partnership with Rosa Luxemburg. The information is compiled by NANDIPA MITI (COSATU Archivist) pictures by William Matlala and COSATU PhotoArchive.

Brief History of the Heroine 'Rosa Luxemburg'

Early Life

She was born in 1871, she was an outstanding representative of democratic socialist thought and activities in Europe. She put all her effort into trying to prevent the First World War, which then raged from 1914 to 1918.

Career Life

Along with Karl Liebknecht she was the most prominent representative of international and anti-militarism in the SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany). Her passionate and persuasive criticism of capitalism gave her the strength to undertake revolutionary activities. While the Russian revolution filled her with hope, she remained critical and alert as a revolutionary democrat, perceptively attacking the Bolsheviks' dictatorship.

Later Life

Rosa Luxemburg was a co-founder of the German Communist Party. A Polish Jew, she was killed on the 15th January 1919 by the murderers in uniform – people from the circles which later openly supported the handover of power to the Nazis.

Rosa Luxemburg's destiny was bound up with the rise of the German labour Movement, the struggles between its various sections and split it ultimately suffered. She was a person of character who succeeded in combining political commitment with the aspiration to self-fulfillment in an impressive way. Above all her idea of freedom as the freedom of dissent has a compelling force.

Rosa Luxemburg's exhortations and warnings marked the beginning and the end of state socialism.

Rosa Luxemburg's endeavors to link political freedom and justice are still highly relevant today.



Frances "MaBaard" Baard

Early Life:

Frances "MaBaard" Baard was born in 1901. She worked as a domestic servant and then as a teacher but was turned into a militant as a result of her experiences of oppression and exploitation in South Africa. As a budding activist she drew her influence from Raymond Mhlaba and Ray Alexander.

Career:

During the 1952 Defiance Campaign she was an organizer of the ANC Women's League, and later became secretary and treasurer of the League's Port Elizabeth branch. She was also national treasurer of the Women's League and on the executive committee of the Federation of South Africa Women in the mid-1950s. She played a leading role in the Women's march to protest against passes in 1956. She was actively involved with the drafting of the Freedom Charter in 1955 and became one of the defendants in the marathon Treason Trial.

Later Life:

In 1956 she became a member of the executive committee of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). She was detained in 1960 and again in 1963, when she was held for 12 months in solitary confinement. In 1964 she was sentenced to five years imprisonment for ANC activities and in terms of the Suppression of Communism Act. After her release in 1969, she was banned and restricted to Mabopane, near Pretoria. In the 1980s Frances worked with the United Democratic Front, a body that was formed bringing together civic workers, churches and other organizations to oppose the introduction of Botha's Tricameral Parliament. MaBaard died in 1997.



Dorothy Nomzansi Nyembe

Early Life And Education :

Dorothy Nomzansi Nyembe was born on the 31st of December 1931 near Dundee in northern KwaZulu-Natal. Her mother, Leeya Basolise Nyembe was the daughter of Chief Ngedee Shezi. Dorothy attended mission schools until Standard Nine, and at the age of fifteen gave birth to her only child.

Political Career :

She joined the African National Congress (ANC) in 1952, participating as a volunteer in the Defiance Campaign in Durban and was imprisoned briefly on two occasions. In 1954 she participated in the establishment of the ANC Women's League in Cato Manor and becoming Chairperson of the "Two Sticks" Branch Committee. She earned a living as a hawker. She was one of the leaders against the removals from Cato Manor in 1956, and also one of the leaders of boycotts of the government controlled beer hall.

The beer halls were perceived to destroy traditional beer brewing, the only viable source of income for women in the townships. In the same year, Dorothy was elected as Vice-President of the Durban ANC Women's League and a leading member of the Federation of South African Women. On the 9th of August 1956, she led the Natal contingent of women to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to protests against the introduction of passes for women. In December of that same year she was one of the 156 people arrested and charged with high treason, but the charges against her and sixty others were dropped on 18 December 1957. In 1959 she was elected President of the ANC Women's League in Natal, and was active in the potato boycott, called in protest against the use and treatment of prison labourers on potato farms in the Transvaal. She died in 17 December 1998.



Heloise Ruth First

Date of Death: 17 August 1982.

In Summary: Journalist, author, anti-apartheid campaigner.

Early Life:

Journalist, academic and political activist, she was the daughter of Jewish immigrants Julius and Matilda First. Born on the 4th of May 1925. Julius, a furniture manufacturer, was born in Latvia and came to South Africa in 1906. He and his wife were founder members of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) or South African Communist Party (SACP) in 1953. Ruth and her brother, Ronald, grew up in a household in which intense political debate between people of all races and classes was always present. After matriculating from Jeppe High School for Girls, First attended the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, from 1942 to 1946, obtaining a B. A. (Social Studies) with firsts in 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, J. N. Singh (executive member of both the Natal and South African Indian Congress), and Ismail Meer (a Former secretary-general of South African Indian Congress). First helped found the Federation of Progressive Students and served as secretary to the Young Communist League, the Progressive Youth Council and, for a short while, the Johannesburg branch of the CPSA.

Career:

In **1947** First worked, briefly, for the Johannesburg City Council, but left because she could not agree with the actions of the council. She then became Johannesburg editor of the left-wing weekly newspaper, *The Guardian*. As a journalist she specialised in expose reporting and her incisive articles about salve-like conditions on Bethal potato farms, the women's anti-pass campaign, migrant labour, bus boycotts and slum conditions remain among the finest pieces of social and labour journalism of the **1950s**.

Having grown up in a political aware home, First's political involvement never abated. Apart from the activities already mentioned, she did support work for the **1946** mineworkers' strike, the Indian Passive Resistance campaign and protests surrounding the outlawing of communism in **1950**. First was a Marxist with a wide internationalist perspective. She travelled to China, the USSR and countries in Africa, experiences that she documented and analysed. She was central to debates within the Johannesburg Discussion Club, which led to the formation of the underground SACP (of which First was a member) and to closer links between the SACP and the African National Congress (ANC).

In **1949** First 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 multiracial political gatherings. They had three daughters: Shawn (who was to script a film about her mother called *A world apart*), Gillian (who based her novel, *Ties of blood*, on her family) and Robyn House searches and the banning and arrest of their parents by the police constantly unsettled their childhood.

Despite her public profile and wide contacts, First remained a private person. She had a brilliant intellect and did not suffer fools gladly. Her sharp criticism and her impatience with bluster earned her enemies and she was often feared in political debate. But she was not dogmatic. Her willingness to take up a position she considered to be just was not always welcomed within the ANC or SACP. Her shyness, her anxieties, her vulnerable abundance of generosity and love were unsuspected by those who only knew her as confident and commanding in a public context. With friends she was warm and sensitive. She loved good clothes (particularly Italian shoes) and was an excellent cook. However, contradictions between her politics and her role as a mother caused strains in her family, which are evident in the later works of her daughters.

In **1953** First helped found the Congress of Democrats, the white wing of the Congress Alliance, and she took over as editor of *Fighting talk*, a journal

supporting the alliance. She was on the drafting committee of the Freedom Charter, but was unable to attend the Congress of the People at Kliptown in **1955** because of her banning order. In **1956** both First and her husband Joe Slovo, were arrested and charged with treason. The trial lasted four years after which all **156** accused were acquitted.

First considered herself to be primarily a labour reporter, and during the **1950s** she was producing up to fifteen stories a week. Despite this high work rate, her writing remained vivid, accurate and often controversial. Her investigative journalism was the basis of her longer pamphlets and, later, her books. The transition to more complex writing came easily.

During the state of emergency following the Sharpeville shootings of March **1960**, First fled to Swaziland with her children, returning after the emergency was lifted six months later to continue as Johannesburg editor of *New Age* (successor to *The Guardian*). In the following two years she wrote *South West Africa*, a book, which remains the most incisive history of early Namibia. During this time she helped to organise the first broadcasts of Radio Freedom from a mobile transmitter in Johannesburg. In **1963** First was detained following arrests of members of the underground ANC, the SACP and Umkhonto we Sizwe in Rivonia. In the trial, which followed, political leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki were sentenced to life imprisonment. However, First was not among the accused. She was detained in solitary confinement under the notorious **90-day** clause, during which she attempted suicide. Her father fled South Africa and soon after her release First also left with her children to join her husband, who had already fled the country, in Britain. The family settled in North London and First threw herself into anti apartheid politics, holding talks, seminars and public discussions in support of the ANC and SACP. Her book **117 days**, an account of her arrest and interrogation in **1963**, was made into a film with First acting as herself.

During the **1960s** First researched and edited Mandela's *No easy walk to freedom* (**1967**), Mbeki's *The peasant's revolt* (**1967**) and Oginda Odinga's *Not yet Uhuru* (for which she was deported to Kenya). With Ronald Segal she edited *South West Africa: travesty of trust* (**1967**). From **1973** First lectured for six years at Durham University, England, on the sociology of underdevelopment. In the **1970s** she published *The barrel of a gun: the politics of coups d'etat in Africa* (**1970**), followed by *Libya: the elusive revolution* (**1974**), *The Mozambican miner: a study in the export of labour* (**1977**), and, with others, *The South*

African connection: Western investment in apartheid (**1972**). It was during this time that she read contemporary feminist ideas, work which she wrote with Anne Scott (**1980**). Many of these works were landmarks in Marxist academic debate.

In **1977** First 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).

Later Life:

Following a UNESCO conference at the center on the **17th** of August **1982**, First was killed by a letter bomb widely believed to have originated from military sources within South Africa. Until her death she remained a 'listed' communist and could not be quoted in South Africa. Her close friend, Ronald Segal, described her death as "the final act of censorship". Presidents, members of parliament and ambassadors from **34** countries, attended her funeral in Maputo.



Esther Barsel

Early life:

Congress of South African Trade Unions mourns the passing of Comrade Esther Barsel on 6 October 2008, at the age of 83, and sends condolences to her family, friends and hundreds of comrades.

Comrade Esther was a true heroine of the struggle, who devoted the whole of her long life to fight for freedom, democracy and socialism.

She was without doubt the oldest young communist, having joined the old Young Communist League in the 1940s and remained a lifelong communist ever since. That YCL was banned by the apartheid government in 1950, but Comrade Esther was still involved when the new YCL was relaunched 53 years later in December 2003.

Career:

As the current YCL statement says: "When the YCL was re-launched in 2003, Comrade Esther Barsel served as a guiding light and a historical reference on the strategic role that needs to be played by the YCL in smashing and crushing capitalist hegemony in our country."

Throughout those 53 years she was involved in continuous struggle. In 1964, she was one of 15 comrades, including Bram Fischer, who were arrested and charged with having furthered the aims of the SACP or being office-bearers, officers, or members of the party. The charge sheet alleged that they aimed at "establishing a despotic government based on the dictatorship of the proletariat" in South Africa, a charge of which she surely must have been proud.

COSATU dips its banners in honour of this veteran communist and exemplary role model for future generations, who must now carry forward the revolutionary baton that she ran with for the whole of her life. Let her inspire us to intensify and win the victory of the revolution and the achievement of socialism in our lifetime.



Lilian Masediba Ngoyi

Early life:

Lilian Masediba Ngoyi was born in Pretoria in 1911 to a family of six children and obtained her primary schooling in Kilmerton. She later enrolled for a nurses training course, but eventually took employment as a machinist in a clothing factory where she worked from 1945 to 1956. It was during this time that she joined the Solly Sachs-led Garment Workers Union (GWU), and later became one of its leading figures. Impressed by the spirit of ANC volunteers, she joined the ANC during the 1950 Defiance Campaign and was arrested for facilities in a post office that was reserved for white people. I

Early Career:

Her energy and her gift as a public speaker won her rapid recognition and within a year of joining the ANC she was elected as president of the ANC Women's League. When the Federation of South African Women was formed in 1954, she became one of its national vice-presidents, and in 1956 she was elected president. In 1955, she travelled to Europe as a delegate to a conference called by the Women's International Democratic Federation and was invited by socialist delegates to tour Russia, China and other eastern bloc countries. She became a member of the Transvaal ANC executive from 1955, and in December 1956 she became the first woman ever elected to the ANC national executive committee.

Later Life:

On the 9th of August 1956 she led the women's anti-pass march on the Union Buildings in Pretoria, one of the largest demonstrations staged in South African history. Holding thousands of petitions in one hand, Lilian was the one who knocked on prime minister Strijdom's door to hand over the petitions. In December 1956 Lilian was arrested for high treason along with 156 other leading figures, she stood trial until 1961 as one of the accused in the four-year-long Treason Trial. While the trial was still on and the accused out on bail, Lilian was imprisoned for five months under the 1960 state of emergency. She spent much of this time in solitary confinement. She was first issued her banning orders in October 1962, these confined her to Orlando Township in Johannesburg and forbidden to attend any gatherings. In the mid-1960s she was jailed under the 90-day detention act and spent 71 days in solitary confinement.

Her banning orders lapsed in 1972 but were renewed for new five-year period in 1975. During the time of her banning Lilian's great energies were totally suppressed and she struggled to earn a descent living. Lilian Ngoyi, affectionately known as 'Ma Ngoyi' suffered heart trouble and she died on the 13th of March 1980 at the age of 68.



Adelaide Tambo

Early life

Tambo was born on 18 July 1929 in Top Location, Vereeniging, in the Vaal Triangle, as Adelaide Frances Tshukudu.

Early career and education

Tambo attended the St Thomas Practising School in Johannesburg and Orlando High. She worked as a nurse at the Pretoria General Hospital and at an old people's home in London.

Details of their career at its height

Adelaide Tambo's political life started at the age of 10 after a raid by the police, following a riot in Top Location, Vereeniging. A police officer had been killed, and Adelaide's ailing grandfather, aged 82, was among those who were arrested and taken to the town square. There the old man collapsed and Adelaide had to sit with him until he regained consciousness. The way the young policemen pushed him around and called him 'boy' made her swear to fight them till the end. This was in 1939 and at the time she was a primary school pupil at St Thomas Practising School in Johannesburg. In 1944, she started working for the ANC as a courier, while studying at Orlando High. She had joined the school's debating society and, as it was during this time that Dr Malan was entrenching apartheid, it became a heated subject for most of the students.

At 18, Tambo joined the ANC Youth League and was elected chairperson of the George Goch branch. One of her duties was to open branches of the Youth League in the Transvaal. Later, as a student nurse at Pretoria General Hospital, she started a branch with the help of people like Sheila Musi, Mildred Kuzwayo and Nonhle Zokwe. She met Oliver Tambo at a meeting of the Eastern township branch of the ANC and the two were married in December 1956, during the Treason Trial. They were aware that both were likely to be arrested

sometime and so discussed their political involvement as well as having children. They decided that one would have to do full-time political work and the other would have to work part time and take full charge of all family matters, including giving support to the old people of both families.

Oliver and Adelaide Tambo were asked by the ANC to leave the country in 1960 and to carry on the work of the organisation outside South Africa once they were settled. Adelaide resumed her work as a courier - this time for her husband. Based in London until the unbanning of all political parties, Adelaide became a founder member of the Afro-Asian Solidarity Movement and the Pan-African Women's Organisation (PAWO). She also assisted in identifying and financially assisting some of the families whose children left South Africa after the 1976 uprisings. In 1994 she was elected to represent the ANC in Parliament, but preferred not to serve a second five year term.

Later Life:

Details of their last years and death or if still alive, what are they currently doing

Besides her work as the national Treasurer of the ANC Women's League, Adelaide also occupied herself with community work, caring especially about elderly people in old age homes. She launched the Adelaide Tambo Trust for the Elderly and was honorary life patron of the Cape Town City Ballet.

Her contribution to the liberation struggle and commitment to community projects earned her several awards, namely, the Noel Foundation Life Award for initiating the anti-apartheid movement in Britain; the first Oliver Tambo/Johnny Makatini freedom award in February 1995; the Order of Simon of Cyrene in July 1997, the highest order given by the Anglican Church for distinguished service by lay people; and, in 2002, the Order of the Baobab in Gold.

Ma Thambo, as she was affectionately known, passed away on 31 January 2007 (Wednesday) night at her Hyde Park home in Johannesburg at the age of 77. The cause of her death was not immediately determined. Her memorial service was held on Sunday 5 February 2007 at the Johannesburg City Hall. The service was attended by eminent people from government and private sectors. She was given a state funeral on Saturday 10 February 2007.

Thousands of people, including government ministers, diplomats and clergy, attended her funeral service, which was held at a stadium in Wattville. Ma Tambo was buried next to her husband Oliver Tambo in the Tamboville cemetery named in their honour. Kenneth Kaunda, former Zambian president, was amongst the mourners. She is survived by three Children, Dali, Thembi, Tselane and several grandchildren.



Helen Joseph

Date of Birth: 8 April 1905.

Place of Birth: Sussex, England.

Date of Death: December 1992.

Place of Death: South Africa.

Gender: Female.

In Summary: Politician, Activist
against apartheid

Early life:

"Two roads diverged in a wood" and I, I took the one less travelled by. And that has made all the difference" - Robert Frost: The Road Not Taken

For forty years Helen Joseph dedicated herself single-mindedly to opposing apartheid. Her commitment earned her the ANC's highest award, the Medal. It also led to a relentless government campaign to silence her, a campaign which ultimately failed - for generations of South Africans, Helen was an inspiration and a symbol of defiance, integrity and courage.

Helen Beatrice May Fennell was born in Sussex, England, in 1905. She graduated from King's College, University of London, in 1927, taught for three years in India, then came to South Africa in 1931, where she met and married Billie Joseph. Her service as an information and welfare officer in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force during the Second World War, and her subsequent decision to become a social worker, exposed her to some of the realities of South African life.

Career:

In 1951 Helen took a job with the militant Garment Workers Union, led by Solly Sachs. Sachs had a profound influence on Helen - from him she learnt

her politics. Through him she came to see the true face of apartheid - the physical and psychological oppression of people not classified white. She joined the political fray, not as an ideologue, but as one moved to great anger by the injustices she witnessed. Helen was a founder member of the ANC's white ally, the Congress of Democrats, and in 1955 was one of the leaders who read out the clauses of the Freedom Charter at the Congress of the People, Kliptown.

Helen was appalled by the double oppression of black women, and was a pivotal figure in the formation of the Federation of South African Women. The 9th August 1956 was one of the most important moments of her illustrious political career, when, with the FEDSAW leaders, she spearheaded a march of 20,000 women to Pretoria's Union Buildings to protest against the pass laws. August 8 has, since then, been commemorated as South African Women's Day.

Arrested on a charge of high treason in December 1956, banned in 1957, Helen's life became a long saga of police persecution. She was the first person to be placed under house arrest. She endured, and survived threats, bullets shot through her bedroom window late at night, even a bomb wired to her front gate. Her last banning order was lifted when she was in her 80th year. Helen used every opportunity, each brief respite from her restrictions to keep talking, to bear witness, to address meetings.

She wrote three books: *If This Be Treason*; *Tomorrow's Sun*, in which she documented her 8,000 mile search for people banished to remote regions; and her autobiography, *Side by Side*. Helen showed that what a dictatorial and corrupt regime fears most is not force and firing power, but the witness of people of dignity and integrity.

She was fond of quoting an item that appeared in a political "gossip" column in 1970. Writer, Joel Mervis, described an imaginary meeting of Nationalist Party supporters, in which a speaker thundered: "We have the finest army in the world, the finest navy, the finest airforce - what do we have to be afraid of?" A voice at the back: "HELEN JOSEPH!".

One of Helen's many endearing qualities was that there was no separation between her public and private life. The loyalty and devotion she gave to the struggle was the same as that she gave to her many friends who became her family. She had no natural children, but took into her care, as her own, the children of those who were sent to prison or into exile: Nelson and Winnie Mandela's Zinzi and Zenani; Bram and Molly Fischer's Ilsa; Eli and Violet Wienberg's Sheila.

There were so many aspects to Helen's personality. She was deeply spiritual - her religion was a private and personal strength.

Later Life:

She was also a gregarious person with a wonderful sense of humour. Her two favourite days in the year were her birthday, April 8, and Christmas Day. On both days her home would be filled, not only with friends and colleagues, but with the tributes, flowers and fond greetings from every corner of the world. In the early 1960's Helen started a tradition of remembering all those in exile, in prison and those that have died in the struggle, every Christmas day at noon. Even during the years of house arrest and bans, this commemoration continued. At times it was only possible for her friends and families of prisoners to file past her gate one at a time, but Helen was always there to greet and encourage them. It is a sign of her extraordinary will that Helen lived until after midday Christmas commemoration which she had organised before her final stroke.

Helen, we so much wanted you to share with us the triumph of the struggle to which you have dedicated your life. Your memory will continue to urge us on of a fight for a fully liberated and democratic South Africa. As the last phrase of The Freedom Charter, which you repeated often, says:

"These Freedoms we will fight for, side by side, throughout our lives, until we have won our liberty"



Florence Matomela

Early life:

Florence Matomela was born in 1910 and worked as a teacher while raising five children. In 1950, angered by new influx control regulations in Port Elizabeth, she led a demonstration that ended in the burning of permits. In the Defiance Campaign launched in 1952 she was one of the first women volunteers and spent six weeks in prison for civil disobedience. She was later tried with the Cape leaders of the campaign and given a nine month suspended sentence.

Career:

In the mid-1950s Florence was the Cape provincial organiser of the ANC Women's League and vice-president of the Federation of South African Women (FSAW) . She was among the original 156 defendants in the Treason Trial, but charges against her were later withdrawn. She was banned and restricted to Port Elizabeth in 1962 and was subsequently given a five-year sentence for furthering the aims of the banned ANC. While she was in prison, her health deteriorated badly, as she was sometimes deprived of much-needed medical attention, such as the insulin injections for her diabetes. Soon after her release, Florence was banned again, and she died in 1969, while still under banning orders.



Rachel Alexandrowich

Early Life:

Rachel Alexandrowich was born on 12 January 1913 in Latvia, a Baltic country in Northern Europe. While she was at school she displayed little fear in challenging authorities. Her independent thinking suggested she pursue a career in medicine, but she was soon taken up with politics. When about 13 she became active in the underground Latvian Communist Party.

Career:

She arrived in South Africa on 6 November 1929, to discover that there was much work to be done organising black workers into unions. Five days later, on 11 November 1929, after meeting Cissie Gool and lifelong friend John Gomas, she joined the Communist Party of South Africa, aged 16. In the same year she had already lost her first job for taking part with Blacks in an anti-pass campaign.

She was involved with all facets of the Party's work, and after being dismissed from a job for attending the founding conference of the Anti-Fascist League, became increasingly involved with trade union activity. Ray was the Secretary of the Communist Party in 1934 and 1935, when she recruited many women. She helped organise workers in many different trades, but the union which became synonymous with her name was the Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU). Founded in 1941, the FCWU spread through the fruit canning industry of the Boland and up the west coast among fishing communities.

It recruited Black and White workers, men and women, and earned the reputation of being both effective and militant. In the 1950s it played a leading role in the South African Congress of Trade Unions. Ray wrote a regular column on trade union matters in The Guardian, a newspaper affiliated to the Communist Party of South Africa. In September 1953 she was served with the first of a series of banning orders. It was issued by Justice Minister

Swart, forcing her to resign as general secretary of the FCWU. It recruited Black and White workers, men and women, and earned the reputation of being both effective and militant. In the 1950s it played a leading role in the South African Congress of Trade Unions. Ray wrote a regular column on trade union matters in The Guardian, a newspaper affiliated to the Communist Party of South Africa. In September 1953 she was served with the first of a series of banning orders. It was issued by Justice Minister Swart, forcing her to resign as general secretary of the FCWU.

The union president issued the following statement at the time: "We and our members fully understand that Ray Alexander has been expelled for... lifelong devotion to the cause of the oppressed. The men who have done this are the representatives of the rich and employing class... Nothing that they do — the Swarts, the Schoemans and other enemies of the workers — will destroy what Ray Alexander has built up, or uproot her from our hearts". In April 1954, together with Helen Joseph, Lilian Ngoyi and Florence Mkhize, she helped found the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW), which fought for women's rights. She participated in drafting the pioneering Women's Charter. Her FCWU banning precluded her joining the famous 1956 Women's march to the Union Buildings, but it was an event she had helped to organize. Through Ray's agency, about 175 women from Cape Town participated. Another banning order, in April 1954, forced her to resign from FEDSAW.

Later Life:

Ray married Professor Jack Simons in 1941, the day after she formed the Food and Canning Workers Union. Together they were some of the first non-Africans to join the ANC. Jack Simons, a devoted communist, was also a powerful impartor of ideas. As a lecturer in African Studies at the University of Cape Town, he introduced generations of students to the rich textures of African law, culture and society. Jack Simons was banned too, first in 1961, and then again in December 1964, when he was barred from lecturing. On the 6th May 1965 Ray and Jack left South Africa for Zambia, and they were to remain in exile for 25 years until 2 March 1990. From Zambia they went to England, where Jack got a position at the Manchester University. Together they wrote the classic labour history *Class and Colour in South Africa: 1850 - 1950*, a pioneering analysis of the relationship between class and race, and how these have shaped the South African political and social landscape. They returned to Lusaka in 1967. They were the first Whites to be accepted into the African National Congress (ANC), and Jack Simons lectured in the bush camps in Angola. Ray continued doing underground work with the Movement, and lectured on the position in South Africa. In 1990 she attended the Malibongwe

conference in Holland, that was a follow up to the 1984 women's conference. They were amongst the first exiles to return in 1990. Ray and Jack had two daughters and a son, all resident in South Africa. Jack died in August 1995. After her return, Ray advised various trade unions, as well as the ANC and SACP, and worked on a book on her involvement in the FCWU.

Reflection :

Today Ray Alexander remains honoured for her contributions to organisations like the Communist Party, ANC and FEDSAW, Unions, SWAPO and the New Women's Movement. In 2004 the ANC's National Executive Committee bestowed the ANC's highest honour of *Isithwalandwe* on this liberation movement stalwart. The specific wording on the award is: "The people of South Africa dully express their sovereign will do hereby through the African National Congress proclaim Ray Alexander Simons *Isithwalandwe Seaparankoe* in recognition of her outstanding and heroic service to the Nation". She is the third woman to receive this award, and some of the previous 18 recipients are Chief Albert Luthuli, Father Trevor Huddleston and Yusuf Dadoo in 1955, Lilian Ngoyi in 1982, Nelson Mandela and Helen Joseph in 1992. Literally translated, *Isithwalandwe* means "the one who wears the plumes of the rare bird". On 12 September 2004 Ray Alexander died at the age of 91. Some tributes to her follow: South African President Thabo Mbeki described her as "an outstanding leader of our workers and people who spent her entire adult life fighting for the freedom of our people", and a "Giant of Non-Racialism".

The ANC Women's League said of Ray that she: "lived a fulfilling and glorious life. She provided hope and restored the confidence of many whose lives have been made meaningless by apartheid. She was an outstanding communist, veteran trade unionist, matchless fighter for women's liberation and a giant of non-racialism. ... the ANC Women's League wishes to record our gratitude for her leadership, dedication and lifetime commitment to the total emancipation of women. Together with Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph and Amina Cachalia, Ray formed the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) and launched the Women's Charter on 17 April 1954 as the first attempt to establish a broad-based women's movement. Bringing together over 230 000 women from all over South Africa, the founding conference of the Federation pledged its support for the general campaigns of the Congress Alliance. ... She will be remembered as an outstanding fighter for the rights of women. ... Her legacy for her children Mary, Tanya and Johan, the women of South Africa, the workers, her comrades in the ANC and the ANC Women's League, the SACP, the ANC Youth League and all South Africans is her matchless integrity, her exemplary work ethic and her great love of our country."



Dorothy Mokgalo

Early life:

Tireless fighter for the rights of women and workers!

COSATU mourns the loss of its Organising Secretary, Comrade Dorothy Mokgalo. Comrade Dorothy was tragically killed when her car overturned in the early hours of the morning of Saturday 2 August 1997 on the N1 south of Johannesburg.

Her contribution to the working class struggle is virtually immeasurable. Dorothy's union work started in the mid 80's when she was a Shopsteward in National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (then Metal and Allied Workers' Union), at a company called National Bolt in Wynberg, Gauteng. She was elected secretary of the local education committee and later became acting chairperson of the National Education Committee. In 1991 she was appointed to the post of regional education officer for the NUMSA, Wits Region. While she held this position, she was also appointed National Gender Co-ordinator of NUMSA.

Career:

Her strengths and talents were so evident that within a short space of time she was appointed the first ever National Gender Co-ordinator of COSATU. Two years later she was promoted to the position of COSATU Organising Secretary, a position she held at the time of her tragic death.

In addition to her role within the Federation, she also made her mark outside of COSATU, as well as internationally. In 1996 Dorothy was elected as a member of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Governing Body in Geneva, becoming the first woman from the labour movement in Africa to be elected to

such a position. She was also a board member of International Labour Research and Information Group (ILRIG) and of South Africa's Unemployment Insurance Fund.

She also represented the labour movement on the Task Team set up by the Minister of Labour to investigate methods of payment for maternity leave. This is a key demand of workers in our struggle around the Basic Conditions of Employment Bill.

It is hard to measure the contribution a person like Comrade Dorothy has made to the working class struggle. In her compassion, her hard work, her discipline, her dedication, her sharp mind and her limitless strength, she personified the fundamental principles, values and culture of democratic trade unionism. Comrade Dorothy was a living example of COSATU's dedication to the eradication of gender oppression within the trade union movement and throughout the broader society. Those who had the honour to work with her found her a true inspiration - an unfailing comrade, trusted friend and a unifier. Dorothy will take her place in the history of the revolution alongside the rest of our heroes such as Ruth First, Lillian Ngoyi, Chris Hani, Joe Slovo and Helen Joseph.

Comrade Dorothy dedicated her entire adult life to the struggle for the dignity of human kind.

Comrade Dorothy laid to rest in Makgokgwe Village, Mafikeng, 9 August 1997

Dorothy's passing away is not only a loss to the Mokgalo family, but to the entire labour movement, to both urban and rural women, and to the working class of South Africa and the world. Her warm personality and a sense of humour always made a strong impression on people she met and worked with. She has made particularly significant contributions on gender issues and worker education.

Dorothy Mokgalo has made a vast contribution to our country.

Later Life:

We have lost a great martyr, an astute debater, a real representative of workers, an analyst who had a particular way of dealing with issues and resolving them successfully. COSATU has lost a valuable working class leader at a crucial period of transformation - more so in that she was leading COSATU's programme of action on the Basic Conditions of Employment Bill. *"Comrade Dorothy dedicated all her life to serving the community in different capacities, and it will be difficult to fill this gap,"* said Mbuyi Ngweda.



Victoria Mxenge

Early life:

Victoria Mxenge was born in 1942 in King William's Town, Eastern Cape. She trained as a nurse and midwife and worked in Umlazi Clinic near Durban. She then changed to law, and was eventually admitted as an attorney in 1981 after serving articles in her husband's (Griffiths) legal firm. After her husband's banning, detention and subsequent murder, Victoria continued with the legal practice.

Career:

The death of her husband made her active in United Democratic Front (UDF) structures, becoming one of the more prominent members of the Natal Organisation of Women (NOW). She spent many years fighting for the rights of people, representing youth and students who were detained by the security police and who were treated badly in detention. She was also part of the team that defended the United Democratic Front and the Natal Indian Congress during the treason trial in the Pietermaritzburg Supreme Court.

Later Life:

In 1985 she was brutally murdered before the trial and did not live to see the fruits of her efforts in putting evidence together in preparation the defence. Her death sent shock waves though the community and led to much criticism of the apartheid system. The international community, including the Reagan administration condemned the incident. Her funeral was attended by about 10 000 people, showing the prominent position she played in her community. Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo sent letters of condolence. In 1987 a Durban magistrate refused to open a formal inquest into her death, claiming that she died from head injuries and had been murdered by persons unknown. Her killers were heard by the amnesty committee of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), however the Mxenge family still feels that justice was not done.



Ncumisa Khondlo

Early life:

1958-2008

Ncumisa Khondlo, a selfless revolutionary, who died after a short illness. Khondlo was the chairperson of the ANC Parliamentary Caucus and a committee Whip. She served our country and its people with dedication in various capacities, including as a Member of the ANC National Executive Committee, ANC National Working Committee, MEC, Parliamentary Whip, SACP Deputy Chairperson and as a member of its Central Committee.

Career:

Comrade Ncumisa was born into the struggle in which she spared neither strength nor courage in her contribution to the attainment of the democratic majority rule. Like Solomon Mahlangu, Comrade Ncumisa belonged to a generation of the defiant and brave young activists who spurred the cause for the national liberation through the country's radical youth movement.

Later Life:

She cut her teeth in student politics and played a leading role in South African Youth Congress in the 1980's as well as in the formation of the ANC Youth League in the Eastern Cape. She was uncompromising in her abhorrence for racism and inequality, and clearly cherished the ideals for freedom and equality for all South African.



Pretty Nomhle Singonzo

Early life:

The Congress of South African Trade Unions mourns the passing of Comrade Pretty Nomhle Singonzo, 2nd Vice President of the Police and Prisons Civil rights Union (POPCRU), on the **10th June 2008** after a short illness.

Comrade Pretty was humble and down-to earth, and full of laughter, energy, and dedication to POPCRU, to COSATU, and to the cause of liberation from gender-based oppression.

Comrade Pretty had a passion for education and she led by example in this regard, as in others. Soon after the date of her untimely passing, Cde Pretty was due to complete a course at the Wits School of Public and Development Management (P&DM) where she had been studying together with many COSATU comrades. Cde Pretty was an inspiration to all of them, and an example of dedication to them.

Cde Pretty was a pillar of support to her four children and to her parents who survive her. She lived a loving family life even while holding high leadership responsibility, both as a police officer and as a top office-bearer in her union, POPCRU.

Career:

Cde Pretty had a rare organising ability. She personified the unique relationship that POPCRU has created within South Africa's trade union movement - one that combines serious policing with revolutionary unionism. Cde Pretty was a true policewoman, whom we respected as such. We often used to call her "Kaptien". She was dedicated to the fight against crime, but

not in the old gun-and-baton, skiet-'n-donder style. For Cde Pretty, the key to maintaining the relationship between the masses and their police force is the proportional use of force, and not the cruel, lethal and outrageous use of force that is still too often the case in our country. Cde Pretty was always ashamed when she saw pictures of police officers shooting fleeing workers in the back with rubber bullets.

Among the members of COSATU's Central Executive Committee (CEC), Pretty Singonzo was known as a supporter, and in a real sense a mother, to other leaders, both men and women, at that level whenever they met trying times. She had made it her speciality to build a new family spirit in the CEC, and to give comradeship its proper meaning.

Pretty Singonzo contributed a new spirit to POPCRU and helped POPCRU to put behind it a period of relative stagnation and poor service. She helped to turn POPCRU round and to make it one of the fastest-growing unions in the country, with membership way above **130,000**. Cde Pretty helped to make POPCRU the union of choice for police and prison officers: a union that is stable, unified and focussed on improving the lot of its members.

Cde Singozo will be equally missed in her ANC Branch in Kempton Park, where she was an active member.

For these and other reasons we are all, in COSATU, particularly hurt by Pretty Singonzo's untimely death.

We send our condolences to POPCRU members, to Cde Pretty's P&DM classmates, to her comrades in the POPCRU leadership and in the COSATU CEC, and in the ANC, and to all those who knew her, and especially to the four children and to her bereaved parents.

Comrade Pretty was humble and down-to earth, and full of laughter, energy, and dedication to POPCRU, to COSATU, and to the cause of liberation from gender-based oppression.

Later Life:

Comrade Pretty had a passion for education and she led by example in this regard, as in others. Soon after the date of her untimely passing, Cde Pretty was due to complete a course at the Wits School of Public and Development Management (P&DM) where she had been studying together with many COSATU comrades. Cde Pretty was an inspiration to all of them, and an example of dedication to them.

Cde Pretty was a pillar of support to her four children and to her parents who

survive her. She lived a loving family life even while holding high leadership responsibility, both as a police officer and as a top office-bearer in her union, POPCRU. Cde Pretty had a rare organising ability. She personified the unique relationship that POPCRU has created within South Africa's trade union movement - one that combines serious policing with revolutionary unionism.

CEC, and in the ANC, and to all those who knew her, and especially to the four children and to her bereaved parents.



Dora Tamana

Early life:

WOMEN STAND TOGETHER: THE LIFE OF DORA TAMANA 1901-1983

Dora Tamana was born on 11 November 1901 at Hlobo, Gqamakwe. The nearest town was Idutywa, there to four hours walk to the nearest shop. There were no buses in Hlobo, roads were extremely rough, medical facilities were non-existent, and a two-roomed mission school catered up to standard six. Dora attended this mission school up to standard four. Her father worked a small allotment on which she and her sisters helped before and after school. The nearest water supply for the family was a spring about half a mile away. Every day Dora and her sisters made several trips to collect water, working in and around their homes.

Under these conditions, Dora grew up with little or no knowledge of the outside world. Women traditionally occupied a junior position, yet increasingly, the burden of all agricultural work was falling on women and Dora was no exception.

Her father and two uncles were followers of Enoch Mgijima, and were killed in the Bulhoek Massacre (1921?), in which 163 people were shot dead. The massacre was condemned by the then United Communist Party, which distributed a pamphlet headed, 'Murder! Murder! Murder!' The Bulhoek Massacre made a deep impression on the 20-year old Dora.

Career:

In 1923 Dora married John Tamana, also from the Transkei. Living in Queenstown, Dora scraped together a meager income by fetching thatching grass from the surrounding hills to sell in the locations. By that time, she had f

our children, three of whom died from starvation and tuberculosis. In 1930, in desperation, she insisted on joining her husband in Cape Town, where he was working. The family settled in the shanty area of Blouvillei, near Retreat. Dora soon became a leader of the community. They organised a branch of the ANC and succeeded in resisting attempts by the authorities to demolish their camp. When war broke out, Dora, together with other African and Coloured women, responded to the shortage of food and the savage increases in food prices, and built the Women's Food Committees, which forced the authorities to bring food in lorries at controlled prices, not only to District Six, but to Langa, Retreat and other outlying areas.

She joined the Communist Party in 1942, met other women Party members, and appealed to them to assist her in establishing the first ever crèche for African and Coloured children in a shack at her small but clean home. This was not only a pioneering action, but a pioneering idea, with the barest minimum of facilities - a shack, cardboard boxes for the babies to sleep in, a large pot and fire cook on. She organised this creche with local mothers in 1943 - sixty years ago!

Later Life:

Dora fully participated as a leader and organiser in the 1940's, in every campaign against the passes, influx control, demolition of homes and against increases in bus and train fares, in school feeding schemes for African children, and in the 1952 Defiance Campaign.

When the WIDF (?) convened the World Congress of Mothers in 1955, Lillian Ngoyi and Dora Tamana were elected as delegates from South Africa. The ANC arranged for them to go by boat, and they were dressed up like Cape Malay women going to Mecca. After all the trouble to disguise them and get them onto the boat, the Special Branch got to hear about it. They got them off the boat, but the movement then succeeded in sending them by air. They worked as a team and were a real credit to our organisation and to our struggle.

Dora, together with other comrades, organised the big contingent from the Cape Province to participate in the courageous march to the Union Buildings in 1956, when 20 000 women presented petitions carrying 100 000 signatures against the pass laws, singing the famous song:

"Strijdom, you have tampered with the women

You have struck a rock

You have dislodged a boulder

You will be crushed."

She was detained in 1960 for four months. She was from time to time harassed by the police, and on one occasion when they came to arrest her

during the night, she dressed all her children and grandchildren and insisted they come with her, as she was not going to leave them alone. Her determination forced the police to leave her. She was an inspiration to all her comrades with her. When the Rivonia comrades were imprisoned in 1964, Aunt Dora, together with other comrades, organised to receive their relatives when they visited the comrades on Robben Island. She organised food parcels for comrades at Christmast and on their birthdays.

She never deserted the comrades or gave up the struggle for freedom. Right through the years of reaction, she saw to it that August 9th was remembered, though in small gatherings - round fires, children were told about the big demonstration of 1956.

Together with others, she organised the big rally in Hanover Square on August 9th 1978, and helped to establish the United Women's Association, a forerunner to the United Women's Organisation.

When Cape Town women commemorated August 9th 1980 in a hall in Lansdowne, holding the pride of place at the gathering were three honoured guests, all veterans in the struggle for women's rights: Mrs Annie Silinga, Mrs Dora Tamana and Mrs Francis Baard.

On Saturday 4 April 1981, about 300 people - men and women - from all over the Western Cape gathered in the hall of the St Francis Cultural Centre in Langa. People came in from Paarl, Worcester, Wolsley, Stellenbosch, Montague, Ashton, Elsies River, in minibuses, cars and by public transport. Women from Nyanga, Gugulethu, Langa and the Cape Flats, as well as Cape Town, came and joined the spirit of the first Conference of the United Women's Organisation (UWO).

This is how UWO was formed, by Aunt Dora's leadership. She said, "I came to speak to you out of love for you.." She spoke with fire in her heart. She called on everyone present to speak out:

"You who have no work, speak.

You who have no homes, speak.

You who have no schools, speak.

You who have to run like chickens from the vultures, speak.

We must share the problems so that we can solve them together.

We must free ourselves."

Men and women must share housework.

Men and women must work together in the home and out in the world.

There are no crèches and nursery schools for our children, no homes for the aged, or people to care for the sick.

Women must unite to fight for these rights, Aunt Dora said.

"I opened the road for you.

You must go forward!

The government put us in stables for horses, not houses.

There are no ceilings, no floors, no doors, but the rents are high.

We have to find a strong organisation to fight for us. This organisation is the UWO. Now that we are strong, call the women to join. Hambani Makhosikazi! Mothers, release yourselves. All people are crying for relief, people of all colours.

Senzenina? Senzenina? Senzenina?

What have we done? What have we done?

Women, stand together, build the organisation, make it strong!"

Through her family, she became personally involved in the armed struggle at an early age. Her son, Bothwell, fought Rhodesian and South African troops as part of a joint campaign by the ANC and the Zimbabwe People's Union (ZAPU). He was captured, and spent thirteen years in the Smith regime's maximum security prison, only being released when Zimbabwe became independent in 1980.

During the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Zimbabwe by Ian Smith, Aunt Dora managed to make the hazardous journey to see him and other South African prisoners in goal. At first she traveled on a South African passport. After 1976 she was told to apply for a Transkeian passport, and so she was no longer able to visit her son. For to have done this would have implied recognition of the 'independence' of the Transkei bantustan. She died without seeing him.

Comrade Dora Tamana passed away on 23 July 1983 in her Gugulethu home in Cape Town.



Joyce Kgoali

Early life:

National Council of Provinces chairman Joyce Kgoali died unexpectedly yesterday after a minor operation, according to the ANC.

The party announced Kgoali's death "with deep sadness and regret".

Politicians around the country reacted with shock to the news.

ANC spokesman Smuts Ngonyama said Kgoali "died at the age of 54 at Park Lane Hospital in Johannesburg following a minor operation". He said Kgoali's death was "stress related".

Several sources in Parliament have indicated that Kgoali took ill after the NCOP's landmark sitting in KwaZulu-Natal two weeks ago.

Kgoali, a former MEC for public works and transport in Gauteng and also chairman of the ANC caucus in Parliament, was sworn in as chair of the NCOP after the April election.

Career:

"The ANC lowers its revolutionary banner in honour of this dedicated cadre of the movement."

"In her passing she will continue to strengthen the movement as we pledge to pick up the spear where it has fallen and continue her work."

Parliament said in a statement it had learnt about Kgoali's untimely death "with shock and sadness".

It said: "We pay tribute to this icon of the struggle for democracy who was a great visionary and champion of workers' rights who had excelled as a trade unionist and political activist during our struggle for democracy."

"Ms Kgoali injected new life to the NCOP in particular and Parliament with her collective style of leadership. She was a great asset to the entire institution and will be sorely missed by MPs and the entire staff of Parliament."

Later Life:

United Democratic Movement leader Bantu Holomisa said: "To become chair of the NCOP was quite an achievement and she also made a valuable contribution to the Gauteng government before that."

Independent Democrats leader Patricia de Lille said Kgoali's death was "a sad loss for South Africa".

De Lille said: "She had so much potential and put so much energy into South Africa. Our sympathies go to her family, government and the ANC for having lost a great woman and a great leader.

"She was very fair in dealing with all political parties and she will be missed by all of us."

New National Party spokesman Carol Johnson said: "Ma Joyce played a very valuable role in the effective functioning of the NCOP and Parliament. We will miss her."

Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) chief whip Koos van der Merwe said: "We are terribly shocked. She was a very capable chairman."

The ANC Women's League said Kgoali was a "gallant leader of our struggle".

Joyce Lesawana Kgoali was born on January 13 1950 in Lesotho and grew

up in Pimville, Soweto. Her political life started as a trade unionist in the 1980s when she became a shop steward while working in the textile industry.

In 1998 she became national treasurer for the South African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (SACTWU) and later an organiser for Cosatu.

After the first democratic poll in 1994 Kgoali was elected to represent Gauteng in the Senate, which later became the NCOP.

In 1997 she was appointed MEC for transport and public works in Gauteng, but returned to Parliament after the second elections in 1999 to become chief whip in the National Assembly.

In 2001 she rejoined the NCOP as the Gauteng provincial whip and in 2003 became chairman of committees in the NCOP as well as chairman of the ANC's parliamentary caucus. She became chairman of the NCOP after the 2004 election.

Kgoali is survived by her husband, Godfrey Nhalana Simelane and four sons, Sekgalo, Moeketsi, Thabiso and Tshidiso. - Political Bureau.

The loss of a committed revolutionary whose commitment and passion for justice contributed immensely to the liberation of our country. She put the needs of our people above her own needs in pursuit of a better life for all.

She contributed enormously to the struggle for freedom and justice. After the dawn of our freedom, she played a central role in consolidating and entrenching our democracy. She helped transform parliament from an elitist ivory tower into an effective tool for participatory democracy.

This distinguished cadre of our liberation movement lived a life of service to her people and leaves behind a legacy of selflessness and footprints of commitment.

The people of our province will forever cherish her memory.

Joyce Kgoali of Cosatu Wits Women's Forum says " There is that fear the bright ideas that come from women can no longer be used by your male comrades as their own ideas."

Joyce as a senator Kgoali said of her appointment, "It is challenging. One has to deal with men who seem to be hard-line on women's issues. She is a member of the Rules Committee which sets the code of conduct for the senate. We are only two women out of fifteen on this committee. We end up being watchdogs of women's issues, although men are coming into tune.

"It is important there are women's structures outside parliament to support what is happening inside parliament. Without any support from outside it is pointless. Woman parliamentarians must be part of these structures. During breaks in parliament women must go back and account to these structures. As a trade unionist I will not forget about women workers and I will go back to the gender committees in the unions."



Abrahams, Lizzy Adrian

Date of Birth: 19 September 1925

Place of Birth: Paarl, Western Cape, South Africa

Date of Death: 17 December 2008

Place of Death: Paarl, Western Cape, South Africa

In Summary: Anti-Apartheid activist and Trade Unionist

Early Life

Lizzy Adrian Abrahams (nee Joseph) was born on 19 September 1925 in Paarl, in the Western Cape. She was born into a large family of 8 children, and attended a multi-racial school in Paarl called Bethanie School. Her father, Henry Josephs, who worked at a butcher, became ill with tuberculosis. When a doctor suggested that the climate in Paarl was not good for his health, the Joseph family moved to Cape Town where he worked as a gravedigger in the Observatory cemetery.

The family was only in Cape Town for a short while, as Henry Joseph soon died and the family had to move back to Paarl. Obligated to assist her mother as the sole breadwinner, Abrahams dropped out of school at age 14 in 1940, after finishing standard 6. She went on to work with her mother at a fruit factory- where working conditions were poor and racism was rife.

When Abrahams' mother also fell ill, she was forced to work full time at the factory. It was around this time that she became actively involved in labour politics and joined the Food and Canning Workers Union, established in 1941.

Organized by prominent leader Ray Alexander, she started as a member of the floor committee, but was soon promoted to the branch executive.

Career Life

During the early 1950s a large majority of South African activists were banned by the Apartheid regime. One of these activists was the general secretary of the Food and Canning Workers Union, which led to Abrahams being elected as the acting general secretary in 1956.

After the Annual Congress of the Union, she was elected as the official general secretary. Her duties included organizing branches in the Eastern and Western Cape and negotiating with branch secretaries. Abrahams then went on to become the Treasurer of the Food and Canning Workers Union.

While working for the Union, Abrahams was also the Western Cape secretary of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), and belonged to the Coloured Peoples Congress (CPC) and the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW). As a CPC member Abrahams was not a member of the ANC, but often attended ANC meetings.

In February 1963, the ANC asked Abrahams to help four of its members that had been arrested. Abrahams was told that Archie Sibeko, Chris Hani and two others had not actually committed any crimes, but were arrested and had skipped bail. Abrahams was made responsible for Sibeko, who recalled in his autobiography (1996):

"My controller was Liz Abrahams, who ... was responsible for me for at least a month. It was a risky job because had she been discovered she would have been imprisoned for long years. She moved me frequently, mostly keeping me in farm worker compounds, but once I was in a house in a canning factory compound, right opposite a police station. Liz arranged for [my wife] Letitia to visit me... She had evaded the police when coming to Paarl, but they picked up her trail later and followed her, hoping to be led to me. When they realised I was no longer around they detained her for months and then expelled her from Cape Town. Liz continued to hide me until the message came for me to proceed north. She was the last of the Western Cape leaders to see me before I left home".

In 1964 Abrahams was banned under the Suppression of Communism Act for a five year period, and soon many other union leaders were banned as well. This made it a difficult time for the Union. In fact, Abrahams was banned a month before the Unions conference which she had organised. She recalls this story:

"I had prepared everything. It was very difficult so we held the conference upstairs and I was downstairs so they could run up and down. I was confined to Paarl area, and I couldn't be in a crowd of more than three people or it'd be an illegal gathering...."

"In the 1960s our union was the hardest hit of all the unions because all our organizers, all our secretaries and all our presidents were banned. At the time almost all our people were banned from top to bottom because they said that our union was a red union, we were influenced by the communists, just because we won't hide anything from the workers, just because we discussed any law that affected the workers in our meetings. Of course, the employers didn't like it and the government said we are a union that is near to the Communist people".

Although banned, Abrahams remained an activist, operating underground, and still faced continuous harassment from the Security Branch. When the five year banning order was over, Liz was asked to resume her work in the Union. She agreed, but continued to work undercover with one or two union members from home- to avoid being banned again.

Abrahams came out into the open again in 1979 when she helped organize the strike at Fatti's & Moni's in Bellville, which lasted for seven months. The grueling seven month strike paid off when White bosses eventually called Abrahams and others in to conduct negotiations. All the workers who had been fired because of the strike were reinstated and given leave. During this time the company provided them with transport, food and other things for them to take home to their families.

In 1983 Abrahams was involved in a serious car accident. She suffered four broken ribs, a broken leg and an injured arm and spent 14 days in Malmesbury Hospital. After the accident she carried on working for two years but her injuries eventually became too much and she retired from the Union in 1985. However, she continued to remain active in other capacities.

In the 1980s she assisted Ray Alexander while in exile, and hid MK soldiers in her home. She also continued to help FAWU (the Food and Allied Workers Union) to organise farm workers in the Noorder Paarl and Pniel branches.

When the United Democratic Front (UDF) was formed in 1983, Abrahams became involved with the organisation. She assisted the UDF civic with setting up street committees, and on 12 June 1986 she began making night time house calls. The next day, on 13 June 1986 she was detained for almost three months, first in Paarl and later in Pollsmoor Prison.

In the 1990's Abrahams continued to be actively involved in politics: "In 1990 we started the ANC branch in Paarl and I was elected as the interim chairman. The next year, after the conference, they elected the executive and I was re-elected as chairman. I was the chairlady of the ANC Women's League in Paarl but I said they should get other women involved and we should build up their confidence. Once they have confidence they will take the lead. I was vice-chairlady of the ANC Women's League, a member of the Communist Party, and assisted the civics with problems and deputations and marches and so on. So I was all over. I was retired but I was working harder than when I was working for the union".

When a democratic Parliament was elected in 1994, Abrahams took her position among the leaders of the new nation. She was elected to Parliament in 1995 and served on the labour committee. She remained a Member of Parliament until 2000.

Later Life

In 2002 she received the 'Order of the Counselor of the Baobab' in bronze from South African President Thabo Mbeki. In 2005 she was awarded the 'Freedom of Paarl', and in the same year her biography, "Married to the Struggle" was published by the University of the Western Cape, to mark her 80th birthday.

In 2007 FAWU awarded her the Elijah Barayi Award at COSATU's national congress, but due to her failing health, the award was handed to her at her home.

Liz (Nana) Abrahams died on 17 December 2008 at the age of 83. A memorial service was held in Paarl on 23 December, where current finance minister Trevor Manuel was the keynote speaker (see tributes).



Violet Seboni

Date of Birth: 18 September 1965

Place of Birth: Diepkloof, Gauteng, South Africa

Date of Death: 03 April 2008

In Summary: A Great champion of the workers' struggle

Early Life

Violet Seboni was born on 18 September 1965. She was a single mother and leaves behind two daughters: Lesego (24 years) and Lesedi (12 years).

Career Life

Violet was an exceptional workers' leader. She was first elected as a SACTWU shop steward in 1989. She was most recently employed at Supreme Hat 'n Cap, a Johannesburg-based clothing company. Her exceptional talent and dedication as a worker leader resulted in her quickly rising through the ranks in SACTWU and in COSATU.

In 1999 she was elected as the first female chairperson of the SACTWU East Rand Branch. In early 2001, she was elected as the Regional Treasurer in SACTWU's Gauteng Region and later the same year as the SACTWU 2nd deputy President, at the union's 8th National Congress held in Durban. She was elected as COSATU's Second Deputy President in 2003.

At SACTWU'S 2004 National Congress, she was elected as 1st Deputy President of this clothing, textile and leather trade union.

She also played a leading role in the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) and in 2005, she was also elected as a Vice-President for the Africa

Region of the International Textile Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF), a global union federation of textile, garment and leather trade unions. She was also a member of the Brussels-based ITGLWF's international Executive Committee, representing her union SACTWU.

During her lifetime, Violet has served in all structures of SACTWU, from factory level (where she started as a shop steward in 1989) right up to the national structures of the union. She has served in the union's East Rand branch structures, on the union's Gauteng Regional Executive Committee, on the union's National Co-ordinating Committee as well as on the SACTWU National Executive Committee. Besides her work in COSATU, she was also an endless campaigner for a better and more sustained future for clothing, textile and leather workers.

She was also a member of the SACTWU clothing industry wage negotiating team for more than a decade.

She has played a broader role to advance the interests of the labour movement in general, in many other areas.

Later Life

At the most recent National Co-ordinating Committee meeting of SACTWU, held in mid-February this year, she spoke passionately about the importance for a decisive ANC victory in the April 2009 general elections.

The union movement has lost a great worker leader and revolutionary heroine, a person who was passionate about a better life for clothing, textile and leather workers in particular and all workers nationally and globally in general. She devoted her whole life to the struggle to liberate her people and build a socialist world. She will be sorely missed and her contribution will never be forgotten.

COSATU's Deputy President, Violet Seboni, passed away in a car accident on Friday 3 April 2009. Typically she died with her boots on, on her way to Mafikeng, where she was to participate in ANC election campaign. Her family, friends and comrades have lost a great champion of the workers' struggle and a wonderful person.



Elizabeth Mafikeng

FAWU Veteran Elizabeth Mafikeng "Rocky"

Early life:

Comrade Rocky died on the 28th of May 2009 after celebrating her 90th birthday on the 11 September 2008.

Elizabeth Mafikeng, lovingly known as "Rocky", was the president of the then African Food and Canning Workers' Union and was a national leader of the ANC's Women's League in the 50's. She had to spend many years away from her family while in exile in Lesotho from the early 1960's.

The comrade have played invaluable role and made huge sacrifices during the struggle years. She contributed immensely towards the rich history and growth of FAWU, then known as Food and Canning Workers' Union [FCWU]. During the apartheid years, they have also worked closely with legendary and dedicated trade union unionists like Ray Alexander, Oscar Mpetha and Vuyisile Mini.

Career:

Elizabeth Mafikeng was born in 1918 in Tarkastad and attended school until Standard 7. Living conditions in her birthplace forced her to leave for Paarl in Cape Town in early 1930s. In 1935 she started working in a canning factory where she peeled fruits. She worked in the industry until Pass Laws were introduced. She thus became actively involved politics to fight the injustice brought about by these laws. She first rose to the position of National Vice-President of the ANC Women's League and later elected into the National Executive Committee of the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) in

the 1940s. In 1952 Mafikeng participated in the African National Congress (ANC) led Defiance Campaign and SACTU 1957 'Pound a day' Campaign. Mafikeng also served as the president of the militant South African Food and Canning Workers Union and Paarl branch secretary of the Food Workers Union. In 1955 she skipped the country without legal papers to represent the Food Workers Union at the trade union conference held in Sofia, Bulgaria. She was met by the police brutality upon her return from the conference. Police sought to know what was her business in the conference. There was an attempt to deport her to a remote area in the Northern Cape. On the night of her deportation the union leadership organised a large number of workers to bid her safe journey. She got onto a train and started waving farewell. She quietly walked two coaches and jumped off the train unnoticed. She was whisked to Lesotho and sought political refuge in there to avoid deportation. In honour of all the work she did, Mafikeng was awarded with Meritorious Service Posthumously.



Emma Thandi Mashinini

Her outstanding contribution in building the trade union movement, her resilience under apartheid harassment and detention, in the cause for a non-sexist, non-racial, just and democratic South Africa.

Early life:

Emma Thandi Mashinini was born on 21 August 1929 in Sophiatown, Johannesburg. Her family (like so many others) suffered the experience of being forcibly moved from one area to another under apartheid policies. They lived in Sophiatown until it, too, was declared an area for white people only. She attended various schools, but her parents' marriage broke up and she was unable to complete her education.

Career:

She married and had six children, three of whom died during infancy. In 1956, she found work at a clothing factory as a trainee machinist. She joined the Garment Workers' Union (GWU), headed at the time by Lucy Mbuvelo. The GWU, for black workers, could not be registered under the laws of the time, and any industrial action was regarded as illegal. In spite of this, they did strike and did embark on 'go-slows', and were proud of the struggles they did win.

She was promoted to supervisor, but did not allow this to deflect her from her commitment to her shopsteward tasks. Her political awareness grew, and she was present at Kliptown in 1955 when the Freedom Charter was drawn up. The 1960s were extremely difficult years for trade union organisations and many leaders were detained or left the country, but Emma Mashinini continued her

work in spite of the pressures. It was during this period that she met and married her second husband, Tom Mashinini.

In 1975, she was asked by the National Union of Distributive Workers (NUDW) to join them; to start a new union for black shopworkers, the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa (CCAWUSA); and she became its general secretary. The union grew, and within five years it had opened offices in Durban and Cape Town. In 1977, the Wiehahn Commission was appointed by Government, and by 1980 major strikes and boycotts had demonstrated the power of the trade union movement.

In 1981, CCAWUSA and the NUDW moved into Khotso House, headquarters of the South African Council of Churches. Work began on the formation of the Congress of South African Trade Unions, which was formally established in 1987. However, in November 1981, Mashinini was detained (on the same day as her colleague, the late Neil Aggett, and many others). The chapter in her book, *Strikes have Followed me all my Life*, gives a moving and chilling description of her experience in Pretoria Central Prison and then in Jeppe police station, followed by interrogation at John Vorster Square.

After her release in May 1982 and a brief period of therapy in a clinic in Denmark, Mashinini returned to CCAWUSA, despite frequent raids on her home and further interrogation by the security police.

In 1986, she was appointed director of the Anglican Church's Department of Justice and Reconciliation. In this role, she worked particularly closely with the families of detainees, under the umbrella of the Detainees Parents' Support Committee. During the nationwide state of emergency, thousands of people were detained without trial. As Mashinini herself wrote: 'Now – after the restriction on other organisations speaking against apartheid, which society used as their windows for venting their oppression and suppression – it is the Church which has emerged to speak on behalf of the people'.

She used the opportunity, too, to speak out against capital punishment and the horrors of death row.

Her life has been one of dedicated service and of suffering, but also one of remarkable achievement. She has defied the limitations of her gender at a time when the apartheid society oppressed black women in their fight for the cause of justice.

Emma Thandi ('Tiny') Mashinini's life has been a roller-coaster of political struggles, trade-union movement involvement, harassment at the hands of police, and selfless dedication to the emergence of non-racism, non-sexism,

democracy and justice in South Africa. She has withstood all this harassment with exceptional grace in pursuit of keeping the flickering flame of freedom alive. She lives in Monument Park, Pretoria.

SACCAWU - SOUTH AFRICAN COMMERCIAL, CATERING AND ALLIED WORKERS UNION

History

Saccawu celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. The union was founded in 1975 as Ccawusa (Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union) under the leadership of veteran unionist Emma Mashinini. Due to labour laws at the time, Ccawusa initially organised African workers only. However, it soon opened its doors to all workers, in line with the ideal of non-racialism.

Before Cosatu's launch, the union had relations with both Cusa and Fosatu. Its membership and leadership were instrumental in the formation of Cosatu in 1985.

Campaigns - Saccawu joined in the battle against the apartheid regime, and together with other progressive organisations, fought the 1986 state of emergency. Spontaneous protest strikes took place in all Saccawu's sectors.

On 18 December 1986, thousands of OK workers from 137 stores came out on a legal strike - the longest of that time - giving massive impetus to Cosatu's living wage campaign.

Saccawu was the first union to sign a maternity agreement with Metro Cash & Carry. The union has championed the struggle for parental rights, and the first agreement (for a maximum of 11 months leave) was signed with Pick 'n Pay, and other companies followed.

Saccawu continues to pursue the objective of centralised bargaining forums in each sector or industry.

Membership - Saccawu, Cosatu's fifth largest affiliate, has over 135,000 members.

Sectors - Saccawu is a service industry union organising in commercial (wholesale, distributive, retail), catering, hospitality and finance sectors.



Lydia Kompe

Mama Lydia Kompe – a member of the Rural Women's Movement who led the march, told the Speak why drought is especially hard for women. A champion of Rural women's rights.

Early life:

Mama Lydia Kompe, her experiences as an organiser for Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAAWU). She joined MAAWU after losing her job while on strike in 1976. She said " At this time I was the only woman organiser. I encountered many problems, but I coped, because I realised there was no excuse but to cope. I wished I was not married, because the marriage stood right in my way. My feeling is that of all the problems women encounter, marriage is the biggest problem that prevents their involvement in union activity.

Career:

" All these problems need to be taken into serious consideration. A woman is a human being. She needs support of her husband and her family as a human being. And we appeal for equal rights, for God's sake. We don't want to be inferior."

Mam' Lydia Kompe trade unionist. Branch secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union. "I wouldn't like my child to grow the same way as I did, or to be as I am now. I would like my grandchildren to actually feel free, in organisations, at home, everywhere. They should have the same say, the same rights."

JAN

FEB

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MAY

JUN

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WOMEN FOUGHT FOR THE VOTE



The brave women of the struggle - Women who hold knife from its sharpest edge