

David Pallister
on a monument
to Ruth First *Gda.*

Ruth's ²²/₄/₈₃ record 003

A UNIQUE resources centre for information on southern Africa is being planned to commemorate the work of Ruth First, who was killed in Maputo last August by a South African letter bomb. The primary aim of the centre, initially to be based at a British university, will be to collect on microfilm all the historical, economic, and sociological material on southern Africa currently held in universities and institutions around the world.

In London this week the Ruth First Memorial Trust was officially launched by her old friend and one-time Penguin editor, Ronald Segal. The trust has been registered as a charity and has already attracted pledges of over £3,000.

Ruth First was a journalist, author, teacher, and revolutionary, a member of the African National Congress and the South African Communist Party. Banned as a radical journalist in the early sixties she left South Africa after being arrested and held in solitary confinement for 117 days.

In exile in Britain she lectured in sociology at Durham University. Her husband, Joe Slovo, continued to be active on the revolutionary council of the ANC.

Always aware of the risks, she returned to southern Africa to become the director of research at the Centre for African Studies in Mozambique. In what turned out to be a grim prophesy, the last line in her book on prison, *117 Days*, and now reprinted by Penguin, read: "When they left me in my own house at last I was convinced that it was not the end, that they would come again."

After her assassination the international tributes to her energy, warmth, and intellectual rigour provided the inspiration for a more enduring memorial. Ronald Segal's plan is ambitious and sponsored by an impressive list of academic and literary figures. Large collections of material on southern Africa are held in Britain and the United States; the Hoover Institute, in particular, has an invaluable library. Most African universities are less well-endowed.

Several British universities have already expressed a keen interest in providing accommodation and computer time for the resource centre. A Swedish development agency has tentatively offered to match every pound raised in the appeal. Fund committees have been formed in France, Italy, and the US.

The secondary aims of the centre will be to collect Ruth First's papers, to provide travel and research grants for scholars to visit the centre and to fund research projects and publish their findings. Access will also be granted to people not affiliated to universities.

Donations can be sent to The Ruth First Memorial Trust, c/o Ronald Segal, The Old Manor House, Manor Road, Walton-on-Thames, Surrey.