

Robert Edgar, “Josie Mpama and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1930-1948”

redgar@howard.edu

Joining the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) in Potchefstroom in 1928, Josie Mpama became one of its most prominent black women leaders. Based in Sophiatown in the 1930s and 1940s, she was an outspoken, independent voice in the Party on a range of issues: critiques of CPSA policies, relationships between whites and blacks within the Party, how the CPSA should involve itself in black politics nationally and locally, the relationship of black women with black men in political organizations, and strategies for mobilizing black women in local protests.

Mpama spent a year in Party training at a Communist International school in Moscow in 1935-1936. This essay draws on records she left behind that are archived at the Russian Center for the Preservation and Study of Contemporary History in Moscow.

ROBERT EDGAR BIOGRAPHY SKETCH

Robert Edgar is Emeritus Professor of African Studies at Howard University and Senior Fellow in the Department of History at Stellenbosch University. He has taught as a visiting professor at the University of Virginia, Georgetown University, the National University of Lesotho, University of Cape Town and University of Western Cape. He specializes in the history of modern religious and political movements in southern Africa. Among his publications are *An African American in South Africa: the Travel Notes of Ralph J. Bunche* (1992), *African Apocalypse: the story of Nontetha Nkwenkwe* (2000), coauthored with Hilary Sapire, *The Making of an African Communist: Edwin Mofutsanyana and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1927-1939* (2006), *The Finger of God: Enoch Mgijima, the Israelites and the Bulhoek Massacre in South Africa* (2018), *Africa’s Cause Must Triumph: the Collected Writings of A.P. Mda* (2018), co-authored with Luyanda Msumza, and *Josie Mpama/Palmer: Get Up and Get Moving* (2020).