Ron Wilkins has been an activist walking point for controversial issues since the 1960s. And as much as anyone in Southern California, he is responsible for increasing public awareness of apartheid and the United Nations' cultural boycott of South Africa.

As West Coast chairman of Unity in Action, Wilkins organized a picket line around Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley's home after Bradley presented the South African consul a key to the city in 1982.

He has pressured local National Assn. for the Advancement of Colored People branches to cease honoring entertainers who have performed in South Africa, and his organization has convinced several celebrities to refuse engagements in the stridently racist country.

His style ranges from vociferous confrontation to thoughtful discussion, from publicly embarrassing a target to discreet confidential meetings.

"We believe in holding black elected officials accountable for their actions," said Wilkins, 41. "And actions such as Bradley giving the key to the city to the South African consul, and the NAACP giving a lifetime achievement award to Frank Sinatra are dearly unacceptable."

Wilkins noted that since Unity in Action picketed the NAACP event honoring Sinatra last year, the singer has signed a pledge that he will no longer perform in South Africa.

Organizing is a way of challenging existing power arrangements, and such challenges have been a persistent theme in Wilkins' life.

After the United Nations imposed its cultural boycott on the Republic of South Africa in 1982, Unity in Action, a coalition of several activist groups, was formed to bring public pressure on individuals who ignored the ban on performing there.

Unity in Action has also organized protests against the United States' 1983 invasion of Grenada, and it was instrumental in getting the Beverly Hills City Council to ask the State Department to remove the South African consulate from that city.

The group was also among the key players who convinced the City of West Hollywood to adopt the most stringent ban on purchasing goods from South Africa or from companies doing business there.

The organization's primary reason for being, however, remains enforcing the UN cultural boycott. The UN provides Unity in Action with lists of performers who have accepted engagements in South Africa.

Wilkins said his organization contacts those artists and "lets them know we consider their performing in South Africa the same as collaboration with the racist regime."

"We ask them to sign statements of apology to the people of South Africa and to sign pledges not to return to perform there until apartheid is ended and there is majority rule."

Since Los Angeles is the entertainment capital of the world, the West Coast chapter of Unity in Action has been able to obtain "the largest number of pledges" of any anti-apartheid organization in the country, Wilkins said.

One artist who has been picketed but steadfastly refuses to sign a pledge is singer Ray Charles, Wilkins said. He added that he has met with Charles' personal representative, but he has been unsuccessful in getting a pledge from the singer.

In a sense, Wilkins could be considered the militants' militant—a committed crusader with uncompromising convictions. He is also a talented photographer who shows his work at Los Angeles area galleries, and he is the host of Continent to Continent, a political commentary and African issues show heard the first and third Wednesday of each month on KPFK-FM (90.7) at 8 p.m.
Ron is a leading activist with the Patrice Lumumba Coalition and the Unity in Action Network. West Coast, Los Angeles. He is a professional photographer who has done extensive political travel and taken photographs in Ghana, Guinea, Nicaragua, Cuba, Libya, and Grenada.

Part of the history of the Capital District Coalition Against Apartheid and Racism has been a successful six year coast to coast, phone to phone collaboration with Ron around anti-apartheid work in general and cultural boycott work in particular.

We are delighted that Ron has agreed to visit with us during his trip East.

The focus of the discussion for the evening will be:

- an update of the cultural boycott status
- discussion of culture as a weapon
- a look at African nations and people who are in the front line of the struggle against Western domination.

Looking forward to seeing you for this most interesting discussion.

Forwards,

"Mike"

Vera Michelson