Khola and Moses Mayekiso celebrate his release on bail prior to full acquittal on treason charges this April.

VICTORY!
MAYEKISO FREE!

In a stinging defeat for the South African government, union leader Moses Mayekiso has been acquitted of treason, and alternate charges of sedition and subversion, after a two year trial. On April 24, Mayekiso was set free along with four co-defendants, Paul Tshabalala, Richard Mdakane, Obed Bapela, and Mzwanele Mayekiso, his brother. The verdict ended up as an indictment of the government instead of the accused.

Mayekiso and his co-defendants had been leaders in community organizing efforts to improve conditions in Alexandra Township during a resurgence of anti-apartheid activism in April 1986. The government claimed such organizing constituted an attempt to overthrow the state.

However, the judge in the case was clearly appalled at the stark poverty facing blacks in the township and acknowledged that their exclusion from political rights contributed to unrest. The verdict was also critical of police conduct during a vigilante attack in Alexandra that cost seventeen lives that April.

Far-reaching Trial

The Mayekiso victory may be far-reaching on several counts. It was obvious from the start that the government had targeted Mayekiso because of his prominence as general secretary of the National Union of Metalworkers (NUMSA) and as a militant COSATU leader. Moses was imprisoned over six months before charges were even made.

The case tested the right of unions to become active in political struggles, especially at the community level. In fact, the Mayekiso treason trial was considered a dress rehearsal for a broader crackdown on political activism in the labor movement. While the apartheid regime has seldom needed much pretext for repression, the verdict here may make showcase trials a less effective tactic.

The case also tested the "legality" of building independent, democratic structures within black communities, such as street committees, people's courts, rent boycotts, and protest campaigns against the police and puppet township councils. The judge's view that these were understandable responses to oppressive conditions opens up the question of how far the state can go to suppress activism.

The Mayekiso case was also the focus of the largest international campaign ever waged around a South African trial. Worldwide solidarity efforts were launched by the International Metalworkers Federation. The U.S. "Justice for Mayekiso" campaign was led by NUMSA's counterpart, the United Auto Workers, which sponsored a panel of court observers and placed ads in South African newspapers. In New York, the Labor Committee Against Apartheid held two support rallies and sent several thousand postcards.

International labor agitation around the case was directly credited with improving jail conditions for the defendants and securing their release on bail last December, after nearly three years in prison. Many observers felt that solidarity efforts had a major impact on the careful conduct of the trial and the unusual verdict.

Triumphant Homecoming

The acquittal of Mayekiso and his comrades gave new optimism and a moment of celebration to anti-apartheid activists in the unions and townships. There was no denying what Alexandra residents thought on the night of Moses' release and return to the township. As reported in the Weekly Mail:

"The kombi (truck) carrying Moses Mayekiso and his colleagues hooted as it approached the older part of

Continued on next page
Mayekiso Free!

continued from front page

Alexandra. Gradually, the filthy unlit streets came to life as other cars hooted and put their lights on.

"A second truck arrived carrying youths chanting slogans and singing freedom songs. They climbed out of the kombi...and danced the Toyi-Toyi.

"The sounds of 'Viva Nelson Mandela, Viva Oliver Tambo' and slogans about other leaders of the African National Congress filled the air.

"Standing in the middle of the crowd, Mayekiso began speaking and all the noise died down as people strained to hear: 'We are back and we will start where we stopped.'"

Khola Mayekiso Leads Solidarity Campaign

While Moses Mayekiso stood in the dock in the Rand Supreme Court, Khola Mayekiso travelled to the U.S. and Europe building the international movement that helped to free her husband and his co-defendants.

Khola Mayekiso is a staff member with the Metalworkers (NUMSA), which Moses heads. The Mayekisos lived in Alexandra Township with their seven children and were at the center of community organizing activities before Moses' arrest in June 1986.

"You have to imagine this place. There are 350,000 people living in twenty-two square blocks. There is no running water, no sewers, no electricity. We have to organize just to live," Khola told an audience of union supporters at a rally April 7 in New York City.

She described how angry township residents felt as they left their jobs in immaculate, modern white Johannesburg to return to the squalid unpaved streets of Alexandra. Their children go to inferior schools, if they go at all. Health care services are inadequate or non-existent. The Alexandra Action Committee was organizing community solutions to these problems through street committees and protests.

They had even put together a project for a worker-owned cooperative employing hundreds and providing child care and children's services for all the workers. The project had secured funding from Scandinavia, but was stopped by the authorities in the crackdown on the township committee.

During Moses' three-year imprisonment, life for Khola and her family was especially hard. In order to ensure her own safety at the time of his arrest, she had to go into hiding, separated from her children who stayed with relatives far from Johannesburg.

After Moses was formally charged, she was allowed to see him only 30 minutes, twice a week. She also had to support her children, both her and Moses' parents, and assist the families of the other detainees, which include her brother-in-law Mzwanele.

In the course of her solidarity tour, Khola addressed union groups in Sweden, Britain and the U.S., with stops in Chicago, Detroit and Washington. Khola spoke at a Free Mayekiso rally in New York City, co-sponsored by the NY LCAA and the Women's Committee of District Council 37 AFSCME.

The rally was hosted by LCAA chairperson Stanley Hill, executive director of DC 37, and chaired by Bill Henning, CWA Local 1180. The event was also addressed by Louise DeBow, DC 37, and UAW officers Cleveland Robinson, Sam Meyers and John Christianson. The spirit was provided by the AFSCME Local 420 Choir, who put their solidarity into gospel music.
SHOWDOWN IN NAMIBIA

After more than seven decades of bloody repression and diplomatic evasion, the South African government agreed last year to end its military occupation of Namibia. In an agreement brokered by the U.S. and signed by South Africa, Angola and Cuba, there were to be free elections in Namibia leading to independence and majority rule. The agreement was backed by the United Nations, which sent observers and troops to Namibia to monitor the withdrawal of Pretoria’s troops and the election process.

But less than twelve hours after UN peacekeeping forces arrived on April 1, the agreement began to unravel. And throughout April and May, South Africa has stepped up its campaign of harassment and intimidation against the local population. Hundreds of people have been killed. Pretoria is now actively organizing to frustrate attempts to organize free elections.

Still In Charge

Although the UN is to monitor the election process, South Africa remains in charge of the government, implementation of the elections, and the country as a whole. The Namibian liberation movement, SWAPO, which commands the overwhelming support of black Namibians, was sidelined by the agreement signed last December and has not been involved in recent negotiations. As of June 1, South Africa has refused to lift legislation barring the return of SWAPO leaders to their country.

Shortly after the UN arrived, the South African government announced that SWAPO forces had committed massive violations of the peace accords and demanded that its troops be able to take military action. The UN peacekeeping forces were in no position to accurately assess the situation, in part because US budget cuts had kept them from reaching full strength. The UN agreed that South African troops could leave their bases.

The result, according to press and church accounts, was that South Africa killed more than 300 SWAPO troops, including many congregating for UN protection. Hundreds of civilian supporters of SWAPO were assaulted, jailed, tortured; at least 12 were killed. Many of the brutal paramilitary units that operated during South Africa’s occupation have been redeployed as part of the police force, charged with supervising elections.

The man who helped form one particularly vicious paramilitary unit, the Koevoet, has actually been named commander of the police. A church source in the north reported that half of the 6,000 police in the territory were actually from Koevoet.

Unions Protest ...and Prepare

The National Union of Namibian Workers, the chief union federation, which commands the overwhelming support of black Namibians, was sidelined by the agreement signed last December and has not been involved in recent negotiations. As of June 1, South Africa has refused to lift legislation barring the return of SWAPO leaders to their country.

Shortly after the UN arrived, the South African government announced that SWAPO forces had committed
VIGILANTE VIOLENCE

For three years the South African government has exercised nearly total press censorship over the freedom struggle against apartheid. Americans now view the struggle through a trickle of information, most of it managed by the government and a lot of it showing "black on black" violence: youth fighting in the townships, houses burned out by rival factions, tribal clashes in the rural settlements, etc.

The words and images are intended to persuade the outside world that black South Africans can't possibly handle their own problems, let alone exercise majority rule. What the reports seldom convey is how much of this violence is organized by forces seeking to crush or divide the democratic movement.

These forces of violence predictably include the government itself, the police force and government apparatus. But the security forces, neo-Nazi paramilitary organizations, and employers using the police state. But violence is also purveyed by a handful of black leaders who seem to have cast their fate with apartheid instead of the freedom struggle.

What Is Inkatha?

Last year, more than 2,000 black people were murdered in South Africa, at least 800 in Natal Province. According to COSATU, the leading labor federation, and its allies in the United Democratic Front (UDF), one can find the roots of this carnage in an organization called INKATHA.

INKATHA is the mass organization of Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi, chief minister of the KwaZulu homeland designated by the South African government. Although Buthelezi portrays INKATHA as a Zulu cultural organization, it functions more as a hierarchy of regional and local warlords, trying to dominate black communities, enrich themselves, and intimidate other organizations. As nominal ruler of Kwazulu, Chief Minister Buthelezi also commands his own police force and government apparatus.

From this base, Buthelezi assertively promotes himself as an alternative to leadership by the United Democratic Front and African National Congress. While he calls for the reform of apartheid, he is an outspoken opponent of sanctions and divestment, pushing his views in the international media from "Firing Line" to Reader's Digest.

Buthelezi is a staunch defender of South Africa's free enterprise system and is often championed by corporate friends of apartheid. Buthelezi has even established a labor front, the United Workers Union of South Africa (UWUSA), which seeks to undermine COSATU unions through ethnic-based organizing and sweetheart deals with employers.

While Buthelezi tries to appear the voice of "moderate" change in South Africa, there is nothing moderate about INKATHA's activity at the grassroots. INKATHA vigilante groups regularly and viciously attack UDF and COSATU activists, particularly in Natal province, which includes the KwaZulu homeland.

In what some describe as "civil war" conditions, INKATHA-linked vigilantes and paramilitary guards have been repeatedly charged with harassing, beating, torturing and killing community and union leaders. The toll in Natal includes more than 1,000 dead in the last two years, with 3,000 homes burned and 30,000 people displaced. INKATHA members are also regularly implicated in breaking up public meetings and fueling ethnic conflicts.

The complicity of the police is also apparent. A COSATU report in March linked the police to high-ranking INKATHA leaders, citing incidents of police participation in INKATHA attacks. A 1988 church study also pointed out that the police have selectively detained COSATU and UDF activists under emergency decrees, while allowing INKATHA members to move freely.

And as many observers have noted, the political violence organized by INKATHA has spawned a more general climate of violence, especially among dispossessed township youth. Political attacks have provoked blood feuds, gang warfare, and the settling of personal grievances through violent means. The overcrowding and destitution of both urban and rural black communities contributes as well to an explosive situation.

A Truce?

The anti-apartheid movement agrees that the main winner in INKATHA's game is the government, which has sat back and let vigilante violence take its political and personal toll on activism.

In an effort to end the bloodletting, COSATU arranged peace talks with INKATHA last year and established a conciliation board to hear and resolve cases. COSATU also recognized that the truce had to be worked out at the local level, with discussions between the rank-and-file members of COSATU, UDF and INKATHA.

While the talks are a hopeful sign, they have not produced firm results. One obstacle is that so many UDF leaders are jailed or banned, preventing their participation in an open peace-making process. In addition, ways need to be found to bring unorganized township youth and the unemployed into conciliation efforts.

Clearly the struggle against apartheid must be fought on many fronts, including the home front.
ACTWU Visits ACTWUSA

AN INSIDE LOOK AT WORKERS' CONTROL

by John Hudson

This April, the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU) sent two officers, John Hudson and Clayola Brown, to the special congress of its South African counterpart and namesake, ACTWUSA. John Hudson is manager of the Headwear Joint Board, a Vice-President of ACTWU, and a founder of the NY LCAA. Here is his account of their visit:

We came to South Africa to attend a special congress of ACTWUSA, which ratified their merger with the Garment and Allied Workers Union. The merger will create the second largest union in COSATU, after the mineworkers, with over 200,000 members.

I was impressed by many things, but especially by the exercise of workers' control in every aspect of the union's activity. For instance, the Congress was held in a cooperative factory that ACTWUSA has recently established in response to lay-offs in the textile industry. The factory is named, "Zenzeleni Basebenzi," which in Zulu means, "Workers, do it yourselves!"

The Congress was conducted with a mixture of discipline and celebration. The issues were complex and the debate on the floor was exhaustive. Delegates tackled the terms of merger, and the formulation of a "workers' charter" to express ACTWUSA's views on the independent role of unions in a post-apartheid society.

The Congress was chaired by ACTWUSA president Amon Ntuli, who opened the assembly with the thundering shout "Amandla!" (power), answered by 200 delegates shouting "Awethu" (ours!). Ntuli, 30, has worked at the Frame Textile complex in Pinetown since his late teens, when he came to Durban from his Kwazulu farm. Like all members of the ACTWUSA national executive, he continues to report to his regular job and must be elected shop steward in order to hold higher union office.

Worker Structures

ACTWUSA, like other COSATU unions, is structured around the shop steward system to ensure that power flows from the bottom up. Stewards are elected on the shop floor, as many as workers feel they need. In each shop or plant, there is a chief steward and a branch committee made up of stewards. The branch executive committee feeds into a regional executive committee, feeding into a national executive committee.

Union staff members, or "officials," are viewed as trusted servants of the union rather than as spokespersons or leaders. They facilitate the functioning of worker structures, but do not displace worker delegates or stewards. While officials may be allowed to speak during a debate, there were several occasions when President Ntuli announced that "this will be the last official to speak on this subject."

We saw worker control at the grassroots when we ventured beyond Durban to visit with branches in Capetown, East London and Johannesburg. One example was the meeting of a bargaining committee in advance of negotiations with an employers' association.

The data and policy considerations were very intricate. But rather than entrust this information to only one or two people, the stewards spent nearly three hours going over every conceivable detail of the negotiations. The next point would not be taken up until it was clear, from a show of hands and verbal spot check, that every steward fully grasped every detail. The result was negotiations in which workers fully participated—and controlled.

Steward Training

Steward training was equally thorough and intensive. In addition to role playing and more traditional methods, there was thoughtful and provocative discussion on the political and policy implications of choices workers make on the shop floor. In one session, there was spirited debate based on an actual situation where workers would choose between observing the May Day holiday they had fought so hard to win, or trading it in for a four day holiday. The stewards—and workers—emphatically endorsed the observance of May Day.

Unions in South Africa are at an exciting moment of struggle. They are very conscious of the best and the worst of labor experience in other countries. They want unions that are independent champions of workers' interests. They want a strong shop floor foundation, without the problems of "professional bureaucratization" which they feel have undermined many Western unions.

It was apparent to us that while American unionists can assist our South African brothers and sisters in their immediate struggles, we would also do well to watch and learn. These unions are a both a reflection of our past and a beacon for our future.
"Let’s remember, apartheid is an economic system," was the message of Calvin Makgaleng, president of the South African Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU). Makgaleng and CWIU general secretary Rod Crompton were addressing an LCAA meeting in New York this April, stressing the need to assert labor rights in the struggle to get multinational capital out of South Africa.

The CWIU leaders stressed the rights of South African workers and their unions to negotiate the terms of withdrawal when corporations pull out of South Africa as a result of sanctions and divestment movements.

The CWIU has pressed their demand for notice and negotiation with 39 multinationals which may potentially leave South Africa, directly affecting their membership. Using the threat of job actions, the union has succeeded in getting 24 of these companies to agree to talk about ways to ensure workers' security, benefits and union rights if the companies should decide to withdraw.

Among those 24 companies entering negotiations are the U.S. corporations Caltex, Colgate Palmolive and Gillette. Predictably, the main holdouts against negotiating over withdrawal are the large oil companies, primarily Shell and its subsidiaries.

In addition to joint negotiations over standards for possible disinvestment, the CWIU demands: one year advance notice; full disclosure of plans for the sale and transfer of assets; the right to good faith bargaining over such plans; guarantees of no new conditions of employment by new employers; and the creation of worker trust funds from the profits made on disinvestment, with these funds under the control of workers.

The demand for worker-controlled trust funds is especially critical, since a number of corporations have established foundations in South Africa, ostensibly to support community and educational projects. However, CWIU believes that most of these funds exist only to benefit the companies, not their workforce.

"Mobil, for instance, will spend a small fortune to educate one black petroleum engineer," Crompton explained, "money that could be used to wipe out illiteracy in the townships. The company wants to create a special elite whose interests are not those of the majority." CWIU maintains the principle that these funds are benefits earned by workers and that workers should decide themselves how the money should be distributed.

CWIU leaders stressed the importance of more sophisticated sanctions legislation which includes labor rights to notice and negotiation as a basic standard of responsible disinvestment. They endorsed the labor rights amendments proposed for Intro. 1137, New York City’s new sanctions bill, for upholding their slogan: “Disinvest - on our terms!”

Mobil's pull-out: A case in point

In a surprise move this April, Mobil Oil announced it was pulling out of South Africa, under duress from the tax penalties attached to sanctions legislation. The announcement was a victory for the anti-apartheid movement, particularly since Mobil had led corporate forces in the U.S. opposed to disinvestment.

The Mobil announcement was, however, double-edged. The company had refused to give notice to their workers, represented by the CWIU, or to disclose the terms of sale to the South African company Gencor. They indicated that Gencor would continue to use Mobil product names and formula.

The CWIU supports disinvestment but openly questioned: is Mobil’s pull-out sham or real? The union demanded disclosure of the deal and negotiations over the terms of withdrawal. U.S. labor leaders from the Mineworkers and OCAW immediately backed the CWIU demands, as did other anti-apartheid groups here and abroad. Mobil was named the target of Soweto Day demonstrations scheduled in New York in June.

The CWIU also went on strike at fifteen Mobil installations in South Africa to impress on Mobil that they could not just "hit and run" over their South African workers. As of mid-May, Mobil backed down and entered negotiations with the CWIU over the conditions of the pull-out.

If the result is less than good faith bargaining, Mobil can be assured that the anti-apartheid movement won’t let them off the hook.
Workers Summit builds Unity

The South African labor movement held a historic Workers’ Summit this March to forge a united response to government repression and employer assaults on union rights. Over 700 shopfloor delegates attended the summit from across the country and from every sector of the workforce.

The meeting was sponsored by COSATU, the leading federation, but was also attended by independent unions and eleven affiliates of the second federation, NACTU. Although NACTU had formally pulled out of the conference, the representation of nearly half its affiliates was considered a positive sign for developing unity and cooperation.

The chief issues addressed were how to roll back the repressive provisions of the new Labor Relations Act, passed over union protests last September. The Summit delegates agreed to fight directly with employers for the right to strike, due process in dismissals, sole recognition for majority unions, and the right to conduct sympathy strikes.

They also called for union rights to be extended to farm and forestry workers, domestic workers, and public sector workers. They agreed to step up protest actions against the labor law and to broaden the living wage campaign.

The rank-and-file strength of South African unions was demonstrated at the Summit by the fact that all delegates were shopfloor representatives. Union staff officials were excluded, except for a small number of recording secretaries. The summit also showed that workers were “ready to discuss their differences and seek new ways to achieve unity,” COSATU stated.

Defying The New Labor Law

The campaign against the new labor law restrictions on unions has shown some success in recent months, as industrial relations lurch toward anarchy and confrontation.

NUMSA, the metalworkers’ union, reports that a wave of wildcat strikes has broken out, involving more than 2,000 union members at a dozen plants. The wildcat strikes raise a range of demands, from problems around disciplinary codes to lay-off procedures. What they have in common is that the union won’t intervene to settle disputes, since the new labor law allows employers to sue the union over damages resulting from job actions.

NUMSA is sticking by the letter of the law not to get involved, unless the companies agree they will not use the new law to outlaw strikes or hold the union liable. As a result, employers find themselves without ways to resolve disputes and workers find they must fight outside the law.

NUMSA is clear that the situation will continue until employers repudiate or repeal the repressive features of the new labor. Many commentators warn that this is the wave of future labor-management disputes unless the law is reformed.

Employer Violence

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), South Africa’s largest union, reports that employer violence and repression has grown significantly since the national miners’ strike in 1987. An NUM study of Anglo-American mines found that worker’s hostels are guarded like prison camps, armed patrols supervise worker’s movements, stewards’ rooms are searched, and union activity has been banned from the compounds.

The company has actively harassed shaft stewards and even broadcast anti-union radio messages into the mines. Two Anglo-American mines have re-segregated worker’s living quarters according to ethnic origins, a move designed to heighten tensions.

The NUM report challenges the common image of Anglo-American as a model employer and moderate force for reforming apartheid. The union is concerned that employers are using incidents of violence as pretexts for introducing draconian security measures and undermining the union. NUM points out that companies are not addressing the roots of violence, including provocations by security forces, terrible living and working conditions, job insecurity, and the migrant labor system imposed by apartheid itself.

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LABOR RIGHTS GAIN MOMENTUM IN NYC SANCTIONS BILL

For the labor movement, here and in South Africa, one of the crucial conditions of responsible disinvestment is that departing companies recognize the right of South African workers to advance notice and good faith negotiations over the terms of withdrawal. Too often, companies have used the pretext of disinvestment as an excuse to break union contracts, renege on pension and benefit commitments, and deny union recognition under new corporate ownership. The demand to recognize labor rights to notice and negotiation has become the central focus of union efforts in New York to tighten up City sanctions legislation. The campaign centers on passage of a new sanctions bill, Intro. 1137.

As it stands, Intro. 1137 closes major loopholes in previous City sanctions by addressing ways that companies maintain indirect ties with business in South Africa. For instance, many companies claim they no longer operate in South Africa, but maintain lucrative licensing and franchise agreements there. Other companies are still actively doing business in South Africa, but evade sanctions by selling to the City through third party vendors.

New York City unions wholeheartedly support closing these loopholes, but insist that labor rights provisions are equally important conditions for disinvestment. The amendments put forward by the NY LCAA have been endorsed by forty local and district union presidents and by the NYC Central Labor Council.

In addition, ten area unions have testified at public hearings and news conferences in support of labor rights amendments, including leaders from D.C. 37 AFSCME, CSEA, CWA, ILGWU, ACTWU, UAW, TWU and 1199. Over 1,000 members have signed petitions and sent postcards. At this point, Intro. 1137 and its labor rights amendments are making slow progress through legislative channels. But there are obstacles yet to surmount. Last winter Mayor Koch appointed a panel to review City sanctions, which in April recommended several revisions to Intro. 1137 which could weaken the bill.

The Mayor’s panel would allow banks to roll over existing loans to South Africa for up to ten years, would give companies up to five years to close out licensing and franchise agreements, and would limit purchasing restrictions to products vaguely designated as “strategic.”

In addition, the Mayor’s panel did not recognize the need to strengthen the enforcement mechanisms in the law, nor the need to extend sanctions to non-mayoral agencies such as schools and hospitals. A new draft of Intro. 1137 is expected in coming weeks. Support prompt action on Intro. 1137, with full labor rights provisions and no compromises, by writing to City Council Chairperson Peter Vallone, City Hall, New York NY 10007. To help out further, contact Kate Pfordresher, LCAA coordinator, at (718) 768-1756.