



Moses Mayekiso

**FREE
MOSES
MAYEKISO**

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The South African government is notorious for its repression of all opposition to the apartheid regime. Of all the charges brought against opponents, "high treason" is among the worst.

Moses Mayekiso and four others—**Paul Tshabalala, Richard Mdakane, Obed Bapela,** and **Mzwanele Mayekiso** (Moses' brother)—, from the Alexandra township, were charged with high treason in April 1987. When the trial began on 20 October 1987, the state backed off from demanding the expected death penalty, following strikes in South Africa and an international campaign on behalf of the defendants. They now face life in prison.

The charges stem from the work in the community—in the **Alexandra Action Committee (AAC)**—and the trade union work of the defendants. Moses Mayekiso is general Secretary of the **National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA)**, and an executive member of the **Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)**. During the political debate within COSATU, Moses Mayekiso emerged as the leading spokesman for the view that the South African black workers should take the lead in the anti-apartheid struggle, and should be the leading force in a future South African society. The government is now claiming that these views in the debate also constitute treason. This is the first time that a high treason charge has been brought against a senior trade union leader.

The attack on these militants is an attack on the whole anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. Life imprisonment for them would be a serious blow particularly against the independent, non-racial trade unions which have been built since 1973.

The **International Metalworkers Federation (IMF)**, and the **United Auto Workers (UAW)**, have acted on behalf of Mayekiso, including by sending jurists to monitor the trial. The **Committee to Free Moses Mayekiso** exists in the US to build support for Mayekiso and all victims of apartheid terror. In particular, we call on the trade union movement in this country to help build a campaign to force the South African government to set Moses Mayekiso and his fellow defendants free.

Background to Moses' Life

Moses was born 39 years ago in the Cala area of the Eastern Cape Province in what is now the Pretoria-sponsored 'homeland' of the Transkei. Like so many young men from the impoverished rural areas, he became a migrant worker in the mines, living in the harsh, prison-like conditions of single-sex hostels.

In 1978, Moses joined the fledgling Metal and Allied Workers Union while working at the Toyota auto plant. He soon became a key figure in building MAWU into a force to be reckoned with

by bosses unaccustomed to having to deal with any unions at all.

He also became a target for victimization and, in 1979, was sacked by Toyota. By then, however, MAWU, which pioneered the democratic, shopfloor-based organization now adopted by COSATU, was already one of the strongest of the emerging trade unions.

In 1980, as Transvaal secretary of MAWU, Moses played a leading role in various struggles for union recognition as

well as in several successful battles to improve pay and conditions.

After the mass 'stayaway' strike by workers on the gold-rich Witwatersrand in 1984, Moses was arrested and kept in solitary confinement at the notorious John Vorster Square detention center.

Following massive pressure from workers within South Africa and by supporters abroad, Moses was released in November 1984, after a month in detention.

Charges relating to his union activities were then brought against him — and dropped. Obviously, he had become a prime target of an increasingly vengeful state.

In April and again in May 1985, he was arrested and released. Twice more charges were brought against him — and then dropped. Moses refused to be intimidated and MAWU continued to grow.

By the end of 1985, MAWU became one of the founding unions of COSATU, South Africa's largest union federation. One of the key figures in this move to unite workers was Moses Mayekiso. He served on the committees which drew up the COSATU constitution and planned its inaugural congress.

Brother Mayekiso was also active in the community in which he lived: Alexandra Township, northern Johannesburg. Moses, his wife Khola and his brother (and co-defendant) Mzwanele, all MAWU organizers, and the couple's seven children lived together in one room. It was fifteen feet by ten feet with two beds: one for Moses and his wife and the other for his brother. The children slept where they could. They had a wood-burning stove, sink and kerosene lamp.

There was no direct supply of water or electricity; they shared toilet facilities with six other families.

It was to 'Alex' that truckloads of armed police came the next time the state decided to arrest Moses Mayekiso. Moses at the time was both a member of the central executive committee of COSATU and the elected chairman of the grassroots Alexandra Action Committee which took over the running of the township after the residents rose up and expelled police and government administrators in early 1986.

The original 160-page indictment for high treason, subversion and sedition was based solely on the Action Committee's administration of the township during this period.

In the early hours of Tuesday, February 18, 1986, armed police surrounded the Mayekiso home. A squad moved in, kicked open the door, ransacked the house, and dragged 'Bra Moss', Brother Moses, off again to John Vorster Square detention center.

Once again there was talk of serious charges, but with no evidence to back them and in the face of yet another concerted campaign including widespread strike action by MAWU members, 'Bra Moss' emerged from police custody in March to be elected General Secretary of MAWU.

Moses visited Europe shortly after these events. Attached to his indictment are 16 pages of further charges relating to his activities in Britain raising support for South African black workers striking the multinational corporation British Tire and Rubber. BTR has purchased Stewart-Warner Corporation in the U.S.

'MAWU is campaigning for the release of Moses Mayekiso in South Africa and there have been a number of stoppages already. MAWU is extending the campaign internationally and calls on the international trade union movement, workers and concerned people to join in the campaign to secure the unconditional release of Moses. We will not rest until he is free.'

Geoff Schreiner,
National
Education
Officer of
MAWU
(predecessor of
NUMSA).

continued over ■

Moses Mayekiso
being arrested
outside a union
meeting in Johannesburg, 1986



The present state of emergency was declared in South Africa on June 12, 1986 while he was meeting with Swedish metalworkers in Stockholm.

The Pretoria regime refused to renew his passport, due to expire on June 14. It was a transparent attempt to force one of South Africa's finest labor leaders into exile.

But on June 28, Moses went home, was arrested and once again taken to John Vorster Square detention center. 25 other leading MAWU militants were also in John Vorster Square and other prisons around the country.

MAWU has been one of the hardest hit of the COSATU affiliates, the state apparently hoping to decapitate the organization.

In spite of the repression, in May 1987 MAWU joined with a number of other unions to form NUMSA with a membership of 130,000, the second largest COSATU union.

As Moses himself has said: "When the power remains with the workers on the shop floor, there is no head to cut off."

Upon his arrest, Moses was beaten for 5 days. For over a year, he was kept in solitary confinement, incommunicado, deprived of sleep, and denied books and food from the outside. Poor prison food contributed to his developing a stomach ulcer. He also has developed a hernia and impaired vision.

When Moses appeared in court in January 1987, there was a picket of 200 trade unionists, including COSATU General Secretary Jay Naidoo and National Union of Mineworkers leader Cyril Ramaphosa.

Shortly before his pre-trial hearings began last August, Moses and the other four defendants were placed in the same cell and were allowed to consult with their attorneys. Moses is reportedly in good spirits and is following the international campaign in his behalf.

PURPOSES OF THE COMMITTEE TO FREE MOSES MAYEKISO

The Committee to Free Moses Mayekiso has been organized to mount a campaign in the US as an extension of the international effort to win freedom for Moses Mayekiso, General Secretary of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), and the four members of the Alexandra Action Committee (AAC) currently undergoing trial for high treason in South Africa. Following NUMSA's lead, we are concentrating the campaign primarily in the trade unions, but we also invite all individuals and groups who defend these victimized for their struggles against the apartheid system to support our efforts.

In addition to disseminating information about the case, soliciting resolutions of support and circulating petitions, etc., we encourage direct **labor solidarity actions** by US unions in defense of our embattled South African brothers and sisters.

We remain in contact with the Friends of Moses Mayekiso (Britain), and NUMSA, working with them to further this vital international campaign. We seek invitations and sponsors, primarily but not exclusively from trade union bodies, for a US tour by a NUMSA representative to speak on Mayekiso's behalf. We also seek to initiate similar committees throughout the US to further the campaign.

The Committee to Free Moses Mayekiso is a defense organization open to all groups and individuals who agree with and are willing to do work around the demand, "Free Moses Mayekiso and all victims of apartheid terror!" Participants retain their political and organizational independence, and may make statements in their own names (whether in literature, speeches, etc.) at actions or events of the Committee. Differences with and/or criticisms of positions taken by other members of the Committee are permitted, but no literature or statement, etc., may be issued in the name of the Committee except by democratic decision of the Committee.

WE NEED YOUR HELP

Every day Moses Mayekiso and the other defendants remain incarcerated in Pretoria's filthy cells is another blow against the black masses of South Africa, and against workers and oppressed people everywhere. These courageous opponents of apartheid need your help now!

There are many ways to help. To begin with, make a generous donation today. Then help us get the word out. Order some more copies of this brochure, buttons and petitions, and help us get your union or other organization to back the campaign. Your individual or organizational endorsement can influence others to help build and extend the campaign. Some of the unions that have already endorsed the **Committee to free Moses Mayekiso** are AFSCME Council 10, AFSCME Local 3270, HERE Local 2, and SEIU Local 535. We welcome your union's endorsement of our committee's work.

Most importantly, **get involved**. There are petitions to circulate, leaflets to distribute, and other work to be done. Please take the time right now to think what you can do, fill in the reply blank and return it to us today. (And don't forget your donation!)



'I miss my man. Life is difficult and no one knows what will happen tomorrow. We have come this far. There is no turning back. The people remember Moses...we can help through strong organization.'

Khola, wife of Moses Mayekiso and fellow MAWU organizer.

FREE MOSES MAYEKISO

- Enclosed find a **contribution** of \$ _____, comprising:
\$ _____ to the campaign, and/or
\$ _____ to the families of the defendants. (Unspecified donations are divided evenly between the US campaign and the families of the defendants. In either case, checks must be made out to: Committee to Free Moses Mayekiso.)
- I would like to endorse** the Committee to Free Moses Mayekiso.
I agree with the demand, "Free Moses Mayekiso and all victims of apartheid terror," and accept the purposes of the Committee, as outlined in this brochure. (Organizational affiliation will be listed as "for identification only.")
- We would like to endorse** the Committee to Free Moses Mayekiso as an organization (same basis as above).
- I/We would like to **join** the Committee to Free Moses Mayekiso.
- I/We would like _____ additional copies of this **brochure**.
- Enclosed find \$ _____ for _____ copies of the **information packet, at \$2 per copy**. The information packet contains news articles on the Mayekiso case, the resolution to formulate a workers charter endorsed by the NUMSA, The Charter of COSATU, the Freedom Charter of the African National Congress (ANC), and other material. The packet is for your information only, and does not necessarily represent the viewpoint of the Committee to Free Moses Mayekiso.
- Enclosed find \$ _____ for "Free Moses Mayekiso" **buttons** at \$1 each.
Please call or write for discounts for bulk orders.
- I/We would like a copy of the **petition** to Free Moses Mayekiso
additional copies on request

Fill out and Return to/make all checks payable to:

COMMITTEE TO FREE MOSES MAYEKISO

PO Box 40338

Berkeley Ca 94704

Or contact us by phone at: (415) 641-4440, 644-1235 or 865-8914

Name/Position: _____

Union/Organization: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State/Zip: _____

Phone: (____) _____

March 1988

