THE ACTION IS AT THE GRASS ROOTS

With U.S. mass media focused on the major personalities in South Africa's political drama and on the disturbing violent outbreaks there, developments are proceeding swiftly at the grassroots level:

- The African National Congress is mobilizing to become a nationwide, mass organization. It has begun launching branch offices across the country, toward a goal of creating 1,500 such branches by December. At that point it will hold a national membership conference and seek a mandate for its political agenda.

- Labor is asserting itself in a wave of militancy: Three times as many strikes have occurred in the first half of 1990 as in the first half of 1989. COSATU is also leading national campaigns to reform the Labor Relations Act and to win a living wage for South African workers.

- Civic organizations and the United Democratic Front are also organizing new constituencies and pressing the popular struggle. Squatters, now a quarter of the black population, are opposing forced removals and increasing their demands for legal rights and social justice.

- Political exiles are continuing to return from abroad by the scores, reclaiming their places in the struggle within the country.

At the same time, activists report that conditions for organizing have become very difficult. The DeKlerk strategy is clearly to try to politically outflank and physically terrorize the democratic movement. Activists call it "negotiations at the top, repression at the bottom."

- In August, the Natal branch of DeKlerk's National Party, which created the apartheid system, announced it would lift all racial barriers to membership.

- Inkatha also announced that it was forming a political party, the Inkatha Freedom Party. The Weekly Mail recently disclosed that Inkatha vigilantes are being trained by the South African Defense Force at bases in Namibia and along the Mozambique border.

- Using the rising violence as a pretext, the government declared 27 black townships near Johannesburg to be "unrest areas" and gave police there sweeping powers of search and detention without warrants. Police have immunity from prosecution for any actions taken in these townships to enforce the law.

- Troops have also been deployed against rent strikers in the township of Siboleba, and earlier in the month, 42 were killed as police moved in on anti-rent-increase demonstrators in Port Elizabeth.

Violence In South Africa: A Political Issue

A young girl watches a council building burn in Kagiso Township, outside Johannesburg, during the new wave of violence ignited this August. For the story behind the headlines, see pages 4 and 5.

The negotiations between DeKlerk and the ANC leadership will continue to consume the larger part of the U.S. media's attention. But it is these struggles on the ground that will truly define the future of South Africa. Who wins and who loses in the townships, the workplaces, and the "homelands" will determine the democratic forces' strength at the bargaining table.
Cosatu Raided By Police

In late August, police raided COSATU's national headquarters and arrested several of the federation's senior leaders after union activists apprehended a police spy near their building and forced him to address a news conference.

At that news conference, COSATU members introduced the spy, who appeared with a sweater pulled over his head. The agent even demonstrated the use of his two-way radio, during which a voice at the other end told him to "turn off your radio or shut up."

COSATU General Secretary Jay Naidoo said that in addition to his radio, the spy had been carrying photos of labor activist Geraldine Fraser, who only recently returned from exile. For a fee of $200, the spy said he was to identify Fraser when she showed up at the COSATU office and radio police "so that they can arrest her."

COSATU telephoned the security police after the press conference, telling them to come and get their agent. When the police arrived, however, they invaded and searched the offices, arresting Naidoo and other senior union officials. The unionists were later released on bail.

Progress At Cyanamid

The Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) reports success in its long campaign to get multinational companies to agree to responsible disinvestment procedures. In late September, the union reached an advance settlement with American Cyanamid over terms for disinvestment. Although Cyanamid has not yet decided to pull out of South Africa, the company conceded that if it does withdraw, it must give notice to and must consult with the CWIU. Cyanamid also agreed to negotiate with any prospective buyer to ensure that the new employer will maintain the existing union contract, prevailing pay and working conditions, and medical and pension benefits. The union's demand (reported in the last issue) that the company convert the pension fund to a provident fund still stands, however.

Gold Miners' Nugget Of Success

In July, the National Union of Mineworkers agreed to wage increases of 14.5% and 17% for gold miners, averting a strike in that strategic industry. But the union rejected the settlement for 22,000 coal miners. The NUM said coal miners wanted a 20% increase and the closing of pay differentials at different companies. With conciliation board talks having failed, the way was cleared for a union strike vote. NUM members also challenged racism in the mines and management's attempts to bar them from political activity. Across the country, a series of underground sit-ins stopped mines from operating.

Teachers Fight Back

Poor salaries, classroom overcrowding, bureaucratic red-tape, and gross inequities in teacher training and school facilities—all have led to an uprising among the teachers who serve South Africa's black and colored students.

Starting last spring, thousands of teachers began taking to the streets, holding packed meetings, and openly defying the Department of Education. By June, teachers were threatening a national strike. Ten thousand marched on parliament to demand a unitary education system for blacks and whites that would correct inequities between the two current systems. Earlier, 6,000 marched through the streets of Cape Town over discrimination, long delays in payment of their salaries, and conditions in the schools, where the teachers are responsible for five or six classes of 50 students each.

In Pretoria, a "chalk down" strike over the suspension of 13 teachers left classrooms deserted. And in Johannesburg, more than 5,000 parents, teachers, and students from townships around the area marched in protest against the lack of textbooks and other supplies. More than 60 schools for "Coloureds" ground to a halt over delays of up to six months in the payment of teachers' salaries.

In late June, the government relented, committing itself in principle to a basic living wage for teachers, with no gap between male and female salaries, and to job security. But the joint statement between the education minister and the 150,000 member National Teachers' Unity Forum has not sapped the energies of those demanding reform. Unity discussions among the three largest teachers unions are continuing.
Victory Sets Precedent For Public-Sector Unions

On May 10th, black South African hospital workers scored an important win against apartheid health services and barriers to public sector unionization.

After a 10-day strike by 11,000 non-professionals at 17 public hospitals in the Johannesburg region, the government granted permanent employee status to all the workers, set a maximum 40-hour work week and guarantee maternity benefits. Most hospital workers are women. As "temporary" workers, they have had no protection against being fired or transferred even after 30 years of service. The government also in effect recognized the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU), and consented to future talks over wages, which remain as low as $98 (R250) a month.

The agreement with NEHAWU is the first ever between the government and a public-sector union, and will require the state to revise collective-bargaining procedures for public workers. Under current law, public-sector workers are not considered employees and all strikes are illegal.

But government workers have grown increasingly militant, initiatiing almost half of this year's huge number of strikes. COSATU has made recognition of public-sector unions an integral part of its most recent demands for reforming the Labor Relations Act, and the government has said it plans to introduce new public-sector legislation for the next parliamentary session.

The hospital workers' victory is sure to spur further demands by the country's 1 million teachers, railway workers, police and other public workers.

"Open Hospital"

Just one week after the strike victory, the government announced it would open most white-only public hospitals to black patients, redressing one of apartheid's most visible inequities. Even official reports acknowledge a huge surplus of 11,700 beds for whites, while there is a chronic shortage of at least 7,000 beds for blacks. Unfortunately, implementation was left to individual management and some hospitals have continued segregated wards and denied access to black patients.

The government was pushed to desegregate by the fast-rising cost of maintaining three racially separate health care systems. As the system expanded, government funding couldn't keep pace with the result that even white hospitals have suffered serious budget cuts. The government's solution is to privatize. Trade unionists report an alarming number of hospitals are now being sold off to private investors. NEHAWU has vowed to fight privatization, and in the strike settlement, won the right to be consulted when individual hospitals are to be sold.

Scab Cooks

The strike began at Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto and quickly spread to 16 other facilities. What started out as small-scale picketing during tea breaks and lunch hour became a series of slow-downs and finally full-blown strikes. Doctors had to break into kitchens and cook their own food, as striking kitchen workers locked the doors and hid the pots and pans. NEHAWU worked with sympathetic doctors and professional staff to keep emergency services open.

As usual in health care workers' strikes, there was heavy criticism that the action endangered public welfare. While acknowledging the strike might create hardships for some patients, Monde Mditshwa, one of NEHAWU's founders, said "Our members should not be mistreated and racially discriminated against — then held at ransom over the right to strike." He also pointed to the support shown by black patients for strikers.

New York hospital workers union Local 1199 extended messages of solidarity to NEHAWU during the strike and has pledged to raise $100,000 on its behalf. It has already sent $10,000 and urges other LCAA members to join the campaign.

Save This Date!
Saturday, March 9th, 1991
"LABOR SOLIDARITY FOR A NEW SOUTH AFRICA": LCAA Conference

Even while DeKlerk moves toward negotiations to end apartheid, South African unions face stepped up attacks from employers, police and vigilantes. As NUM General Secretary Cyril Ramaphosa said, "We need your solidarity now more than ever."

LCAA's one-day conference will bring together South African labor leaders and local New York union members to discuss strategies for ongoing support including sanctions, labor rights and corporate campaigns.

For information, contact LCAA at (718) 768-1756 or (212) 226-6565.
A new wave of violence swept South Africa this August, which the ANC and government both admit could threaten national negotiations to end apartheid.

What is going on?

At the heart of the violence is Inkatha, an organization led by Gatsha Buthelezi, chief minister of the KwaZulu homeland, created under apartheid’s bantustan system. Inkatha functions as Buthelezi’s political machine in local communities throughout Natal, complete with local warlords and armed vigilantes. Buthelezi also commands the resources of the KwaZulu police and patronage apparatus.

Since 1987, Inkatha operatives have attacked COSATU and UDF members, their families and communities in a violent campaign to prevent those organizations from winning support in Natal Province. Over 4000 have been killed and 60,000 made homeless in the three-year conflict — most supporters of the non-racial opposition.

In August, the carnage escalated dramatically as Inkatha extended its brutal recruiting drive to the migrant worker hostels near Pretoria and Johannesburg. This new wave of violence has claimed 750 new victims in one month alone, and the death toll continues to rise.

Is this tribal rivalry?

Inkatha’s base is the ethnically-defined KwaZulu homeland. Buthelezi rallies his supporters behind the banner of Zulu nationalism and superiority, asserting that Xhosa and Indian leaders in the ANC and COSATU are out to get the Zulu people. He has won a national and international forum for his anti-sanctions declarations by professing to represent South Africa’s 7 million Zulu-speakers.

But in fact, most of Inkatha’s victims have been Zulus. What is really at stake is who will hold power in post-apartheid South Africa. Inkatha would lose its base if the ANC succeeds in its demand for dismantling the homeland system and establishing a unitary, non-racial, non-tribal state.

What is the government’s role?

If Inkatha’s objective is to weaken the ANC and COSATU, it is certainly shared by factions within the South African police and military. In fact, this new wave of Inkatha terror appears so clearly coordinated with the police that COSATU and the ANC are certain that elements within the South African government are directing the attacks at a high level.

What is DeKlerk’s strategy?

President DeKlerk’s strategy is two-pronged: he continues to draw the ANC leadership deeper into negotiations at the national level, while sabotaging the ANC’s ability to organize and communicate with its supporters at the grass roots. The pattern of Inkatha violence is consistent with this strategy. Attacks have been focused to undermine COSATU unions and UDF civic organizations, which have been the backbone of anti-apartheid opposition.

DeKlerk wants Buthelezi as an ally in the national negotiations to force the ANC to concede the issue of minority group rights in the post-apartheid settlement. Having Buthelezi at the national negotiating table also shakes the ANC’s legitimacy in the international arena, especially on the crucial question of economic sanctions.

What are COSATU’s demands?

COSATU has called on the South African government to immediately arrest all Inkatha warlords responsible for the violence and to appoint an independent board of inquiry to fully investigate police collusion with Inkatha. COSATU maintains that the internal police investigation authorized by DeKlerk in August is totally inadequate. Finally, COSATU is demanding that the government dismantle Inkatha’s power base by disbanding the KwaZulu police and abolishing the homeland system.

Three million workers staged a one-day strike on July 2nd and tens of thousands more struck again on August 27th to pressure the government to take action to end the violence. In addition, COSATU demanded an end to the country’s migrant labor policy and single-sex hostels which have been the locus of the recent violence.
Unions Are The Target

The wave of Inkatha violence is having a serious effect on the democratic trade unions, Cyril Ramaphosa, General Secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), told the LCAA on September 30th. COSATU affiliates, including NUM, have been forced to abandon strike plans and to settle for less favorable terms for fear that a walkout would precipitate further clashes with Inkatha.

"People are terrified," he said. "They've begun demanding arms from the ANC to protect themselves. It is difficult to convince people in the townships that negotiations should go on when the violence is so severe." COSATU has undertaken a resolution to form self-defense committees from the shopfloor up, but has so far emphasized negotiations at the local level while pressuring the government to rein in the police.

"We believe the South African government is following a conscious strategy to use violence to undermine and demobilize our organizations," Ramaphosa stated. "President DeKlerk has the power to stop the killing and control the police. We need your help in holding him accountable."

Support COSATU Peace Efforts!

The New York Labor Committee Against Apartheid is calling on labor organizations throughout the area to join in passing a resolution to stop the political violence in South Africa. A similar resolution was passed in June at the national convention of the Communication Workers of America (CWA). All resolutions are being sent to COSATU. Contact the LCAA at 212-226-6565 or 718-768-1756 to join the campaign.

Whereas the escalating violence by the South African police and military in support of Inkatha vigilantes directly undermines the free political activity of democratic organizations and subverts the national negotiations to end apartheid:

We, as American trade unionists, endorse the demands of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) that:

1. Inkatha warlords responsible for the attacks be immediately arrested and jailed without option of bail and be promptly tried for murder, arson and violence;
2. An independent commission of inquiry be established to investigate the role of the police in continuing the violence;
3. The KwaZulu police be disbanded;
4. The bantustan (homelands) system be abolished.

Further, we support COSATU's decision to defend its members. We demand that the U.S. government condemn Inkatha's role and pressure the DeKlerk government to stop the violence. We support negotiations to create a united, non-racial democratic South Africa. We pledge to maintain pressure for economic sanctions until a constituent assembly is elected by universal suffrage to write a new constitution.

NUM leaders Cyril Ramaphosa and Marcel Golding join the New York Labor Committee Against Apartheid in the "Vote for Sanctions" campaign. For information on the campaign, call the American Committee on Africa (212) 962-1210.
One day not too far off in the future, the black majority of South Africa will acquire political power—and along with it, influence over Africa's most developed and most unequal economy.

Preparing for that day, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) has put together a collection of union economists and activists called the "economic trends group." They are grappling with how to create new economic strategies that can replace stagnation and social deprivation with growth and social justice. This article reviews some of their recent ideas and the huge challenge that awaits a democratic government.

**Massive Waste**

South Africa’s rulers portray their country as a sleek economic powerhouse. In fact, staggering economic problems have been created by apartheid, which has deformed modern development and directed economic benefits towards a tiny minority.

Over 85% of all personal wealth is held by whites, who control an even bigger percentage of all productive property. Per-capita social spending on housing, medical services, education, and pensions is five times higher for whites than for blacks. There are few jobless whites; those who can’t find jobs usually end up as part of the huge and parasitic government bureaucracy.

Meanwhile, black unemployment is now around 4.5 million and expected to reach around 40% of the black working population by 1991. With the collapse of the "group-areas" laws meant to restrict most blacks to distant homelands, vast squatter camps containing 7.5 million people have arisen near major cities. And while the number of squatters is always growing, a great many blacks with legal housing have neither running water nor electricity.

White schools have more than 270,000 vacancies, and last year, 24 such schools were closed for lack of students. Meanwhile, black schools lacked space for 159,849 students, and in many such schools poorly educated teachers are responsible for five or six classes of over 50 students each. A third of black children under 14 are underweight, and half the rural black population suffers from malnutrition.

In the countryside, blacks hold only 13% of the land. Very large farms dominate the agricultural sector, but few are successful: As recently as 1983, only 27.5% of the farms produced 72.8% of gross farm income.

**Staking A Claim**

All of this represents a massive waste of human resources—and great potential for development. Unfortunately, South Africa’s rulers already have a plan for the post-apartheid economy which would leave their huge conglomerates and their private wealth intact. Their new policies favor an unregulated export economy, favoring international capital and expensive technology rather than internal investment, job creation and human-resource development.

South Africa's business elites have a willing partner in the deKlerk government. Squeezed by sanctions and eager to transfer national assets before the black majority takes power, the government has begun a program of sweeping privatization. It is attempting to sell off approximately $117 billion (R300 billion) in public services and utilities, holdings which account for 29% of gross domestic product.

At the same time, private corporations, such as De Beers, which controls the world’s diamond business, have begun transferring legal ownership of their holdings abroad.

In response, black workers have escalated their efforts to stake a claim: three times as many strikes have occurred in the first half of 1990 as in the first half of 1989, over 46% in the public sector. In some squatters camps, civic organizations are insisting that basic needs be met. In Benoni near Johannesburg, for example, 700 squatter families took possession of what was legally "white land," then demanded and won development loans and planning assistance from the town council.

But simple redistribution of the wealth away from whites toward blacks will not be enough to solve massive economic problems. Thus representatives from across the democratic movement have begun an open debate over how the economy should be directed in the future.

**Key Issues**

Some of the most provocative ideas are coming out of COSATU’s economic trends group. One member of this group, Alec Erwin of the National Union of Metal Workers (NUMSA), has stimulated considerable
debate by arguing that, rather than focusing on nationalization, South African progressives should begin with a careful examination of the overall structure of the economy.

Apartheid, along with the state’s protectionist policies, he says, have produced a deformed “high-cost/low-wage/low-employment economy” with bleak prospects. Manufacturing now combines a low level of technology, cheap black labor, and low productivity to produce expensive consumer goods that only the white minority can afford.

Moreover, the new government would institute broad health and welfare policies, while ensuring that the environment be respected. It would encourage a range of collective and partnership-based enterprises. Nationalization (or re-nationalization if there has been privatization) should first take place in such sectors as public works, transportation, and telecommunications, all of which require costly redirection toward neglected black areas. Above all, the government would rely on a democratic political life to unleash the nation’s energies.

David Lewis of the COSATU Economic Trends Group adds that the current drive to denationalize public assets, along with a push for deregulation of industry, is well on its way and must be combatted. The nub of the deregulation drive, he says, is eliminating legal protections of worker rights, such as safety and minimum-wage regulations.

In June, COSATU and the African National Congress produced a joint outline of policy proposals for a post-apartheid economy. The statement contains a similar, if not so precise, endorsement of a mixed economy with effective government controls on capital flows and investment planning.

The policy paper stresses important principles such as union rights, racial and gender equality, and environmental protection. It also advocates land redistribution, national pensions, unemployment insurance, job training programs and low-cost housing development. It commits the future democratic state to avoiding “an over-centralized, commandist approach to economic policy” and raises the importance of local decision-making through municipalities and mass-based organizations.

By considering both big questions of the future and pressing immediate needs, the democratic movement means to stay one step ahead of its present economic overlords.

Update: the threat of a general strike against the LRA this October forced the DeKlerk cabinet to agree to reform the law. But the reform has yet to pass Parliament. COSATU’s two-year campaign against the LRA remains in force. Stay tuned.

COSATU’s Pressing Issues

Responding to the harsh conditions of South Africa today, COSATU has pledged a multi-issue campaign for economic rights. The current priorities call on unions to:

- combat privatization;
- establish a national minimum wage;
- reform the Unemployment Insurance Fund;
- secure paid child care leave;
- restore industry-wide bargaining;
- conduct shop-floor discussions to forge a Workers’ Charter, a bill of rights for labor in the post-apartheid constitution;
- repeal the anti-labor provisions of the 1988 Labor Relations Act (LRA).
Sanctions Victory In New York!

The law included the first labor rights clause of any sanctions legislation, recognizing the right of South African unions to six-months advance notice when a company disinvests and their right to good faith negotiations over the terms of withdrawal.

In addition, the new anti-apartheid law closes loopholes in previous legislation. Companies doing business in South Africa cannot do business in New York City—and that now includes business done through licensing, franchise and distribution agreements, or through subsidiary or parent companies.

Food and medical corporations are no longer exempt from the law. Banks will be selected by the City according to a new rating system which measures their level of disengagement from South Africa. Ratings include whether banks have withdrawn operations there or are extending any prior loans.

In New York, the labor movement deserves special credit for pushing the bill through, after more than a year of delays in the City Council. The labor rights clause was specifically developed through consultations between South African unions and the LCAA member unions, led by Stanley More than a million New Yorkers turned out to celebrate Nelson Mandela’s visit last June. From Bed-Stuy to City Hall, to Harlem and Yankee Stadium, we united with one message: Keep the pressure on!

Our voices were heard. In July, the City Council passed a new, tougher sanctions law against South Africa. Passage of the bill, and its unique labor rights provision, received considerable notice in South Africa. It was the first new sanctions legislation since Mandela’s release and clearly signaled to the South African government that the anti-apartheid movement has no intention of letting up.

Following New York’s example, Chicago also passed a tougher sanctions resolution at the end of the summer, with the Illinois Labor Network Against Apartheid ensuring a labor rights provision was included. Since then, the Xerox Corporation announced it is ending its distribution agreement in South Africa, acknowledging the new pressure brought by U.S. city governments.

LCAA joins the ticker-tape parade welcoming Nelson Mandela to the City.

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