Negotiations Suspended As Violence Escalates

"The Government Must Go!" Says COSATU; Call to Mass Action

The African National Congress (ANC) suspended participation in the multi-party Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) at the end of June in the wake of escalating violence and the government's continued complicity in it. The move followed less than a week after the brutal massacre of 42 people in the Boipatong township. On June 17, about 200 Inkatha vigilantes poured into Boipatong and systematically butchered men, women and children in their homes. Dozens of survivors confirmed that the attackers were transported to the township by government security forces, who further participated in the massacre by shooting at fleeing residents.

Mass Action

The break-down of negotiations was provoked by the massacre, but the process had already stalled because of the government's persistent resistance to majority rule.

The second round of talks in the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) ended on May 15 in a deadlock. While the government and the African National Congress had reached some agreement on plans for an interim government, negotiations broke down because of the minority government's refusal to give up veto power in some areas of an interim government. The goal is to preserve economic and political power for the white minority in a future state and undermine the principle of a unitary South Africa based on one person, one vote.

The ANC and its allies responded with an extensive and intensive plan of mass action to pressurize the government and demand an interim government. The mass action campaign, which includes stayaways, boycotts, sit-ins and a general strike, started on June 16, Soweto Day. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) had already threatened a strike over the issue of an interim government.

At a June 29 funeral service for 37 of the Boipatong victims, COSATU General Secretary Jay Naidoo led the group of 25,000 mourners in a thunderous chant of "DeKlerk must go!"

Maintaining Apartheid

Throughout the negotiations, the government appeared to move towards ending apartheid at the same time that it firmly maintains political and economic control.

The much celebrated whites-only referendum in March provided a clear example of this pattern. The referendum results were announced on March 18 and showed that over two million white voters, a 69% majority, said "yes" in a national vote on reforming apartheid. The vote excluded all 26 million black South Africans, so it was hardly the "birthday of a new South Africa," as DeKlerk claimed. Yet, it was widely seen as a clear mandate from whites to continue negotiations toward a transition government and a new constitution.

That same day, however, DeKlerk

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PRETORIA CONCEDES ON LABOR RIGHTS

In South Africa, government promises regarding labor rights are about as reliable as the New York subway system. But South African labor has one invaluable weapon: the desire of the government and business establishment for international respectability.

In February 1992, for example, an International Labor Organization (ILO) fact-finding and conciliation commission held hearings in South Africa on a wide range of issues. The visit took place after the government first insisted on severe limits to any investigation. Then, increasingly aware that this would represent a serious diplomatic gaffe, the government agreed to allow the panel "to deliberate on labor matters in general." The report of the ILO panel, which could spur further reform, has yet to be made public.

A key area that COSATU pressed the ILO to investigate is the absence of labor rights for agricultural workers.

Laboria Minute

Labor had originally encouraged the ILO to send a delegation to South Africa in 1988 to investigate union complaints against proposed draconian amendments to the Labor Relations Act (LRA). Those amendments were scrapped in 1990, in an agreement called the Laboria Minute, under enormous pressure from a determined, two-year labor campaign.

COSATU then began an effort to broaden the scope of any ILO investigation. The federation was particularly concerned about basic rights for farm, domestic, and public-sector workers and for workers in the homelands. The extension of labor rights to these workers had also been agreed upon in the Laboria Minute.

The withdrawal of government opposition cleared the way for the three-person ILO delegation to take up those issues during its two-week visit. COSATU also asked the ILO to investigate basic freedoms of association and assembly, as well as the ongoing political violence. The federation presented extensive evidence of violence aimed at unions, particularly in the bantustans. The violence has greatly inhibited union organizing and actions, and in fact has undermined existing labor rights.

In a dispute at BTR-Sarmcol in Bo- phuthatswana, for example, the entire National Union of Metalworkers' (NUMSA) membership was fired and scabs, mostly members of Inkatha's United Workers' Union of South Africa (UWUSA), were recruited. It has since been revealed that UWUSA is a state-controlled organization, funded by police in order to stymie COSATU. The dispute is yet unresolved.

About Face

In the 1990 settlement, labor also forced the government to promise to reform the National Manpower Commission (NMC). The NMC was to be democratized, and its recommendations were to be strengthened to carry considerable weight with the Manpower Department and Parliament. COSATU and labor federation NACTU agreed to participate in the NMC under these conditions.

Labor joined the NMC as debate over agricultural workers was already under way. With labor's active involvement, the NMC—which also includes representatives from the government and the private sector—decided to call upon the government to extend basic labor rights to farm-workers.

After these discussions, the government dragged its feet on restructuring the NMC to give it more power, causing COSATU to withdraw from that body in October 1991.

As of February 1992, the government seemed reluctant to keep its pledge regarding agricultural workers for fear of massive farmer desertion from the National Party—perhaps hoping to leave this step to an interim government. But Pretoria also feared that failure to extend rights to farm-workers wouldn't go down well with the ILO.

Then in early March, new Manpower Minister Piet Marais, in what the South African Weekly Mail termed a "remarkably conciliatory" meeting with labor, made an about-face and pledged to extend the Basic Condi-

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Expanding labor rights to domestic workers, farmworkers and workers in the homelands is a major goal of COSATU's.
James H. Bell
1943-1992

James H. Bell, a founding sponsor of the New York Labor Committee Against Apartheid and a long-time anti-apartheid activist, died on April 1, 1992, after a year-long battle with lung cancer. Jim Bell was the Political Action Director of District 65 UAW and the President of the New York chapter of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists. He also served as security director for Jesse Jackson’s campaign in 1988 and David Dinkins’ mayoral campaign in 1989.

In 1990, Jim coordinated Nelson Mandela’s historic New York tour. The unprecedented outpouring of support for Mandela and the ANC was the crowning achievement of many years of anti-apartheid work.

We will miss Jim dearly. He was able to visit South Africa in June 1991 to witness the first ANC Congress held in South Africa since its unbanning, and he lived long enough to see white South Africans vote for reform. His own contribution to the struggle against injustice will endure much longer.

Labor Rights

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tions of Employment Act (BCEA—much like our NLRA) and the Unemployment Insurance Act to farmworkers this spring. Marais also agreed to an urgent meeting of all parties to discuss the restructuring of the NMC.

By May 1992, COSATU and NACTU stated that they would undertake mass action if these and other reforms covering domestic workers and public servants were not effected by July.

Pressure from farmers to frustrate reform continues. But BCEA rights would likely provide a 48-hour work week (it’s 46 for other workers) and a 9.5 hour working day, overtime pay, a ban on employment of children, 14 days of annual leave, right to a minimum notice of one month, and a minimum wage for piece workers. Some unemployment insurance is also likely.

COSATU points out that this legislation still leaves much to be desired. It fails to protect farmworkers from arbitrary dismissals; a broad definition of “farming activities” would actually reduce the coverage given to some now regarded as “industrial workers,” including those in processing plants; workers would receive only one month’s notice of layoff; and protection against victimization for union activities is inadequate.

Obviously, COSATU and NACTU hope to rectify these shortcomings in the future, but the BCEA reforms would represent a major gain. And a restructured, more powerful NMC also relates to one of COSATU’s major demands: that there be a National Economic Negotiating Forum in which government, industry, and labor would discuss and plan the shape of the economy for post-apartheid South Africa.
With help from the U.S. labor movement, South African workers won a significant victory recently when the Philadelphia-based Crown Cork & Seal Company agreed to rehire all 196 members of the South African Metalworkers (NUMSA) fired in South Africa last September. Until U.S. trade unionists brought massive pressure to bear on the parent company, Crown South Africa was only prepared to discuss rehiring 10 workers. Unfortunately, just days before Crown Cork yielded to union pressure and announced its decision to rehire all the workers, a Crown shop steward, David Radebe, was murdered by Inkatha vigilantes.

The Africa Fund spearheaded a campaign in the U.S. to pressure Crown Cork. In February, it brought NUMSA Regional Secretary Bethuel Maserumule to the U.S. to meet with U.S. unionists. Many American Crown workers are represented by the Machinists (IAM) and the Steelworkers (USWA). Both unions were eager to help when Maserumule informed them of Crown Cork’s union busting and complicity with apartheid violence, and their intervention proved to be the key to the successful campaign.

**Union Busting in Alrode**

Crown Cork’s wholly owned subsidiary in Alrode, outside of Johannesburg, fired its entire union workforce after Crown workers supported a September 16-17 stayaway against state-sponsored violence. The company then replaced the NUMSA workers with scabs, most of whom supported the government-backed Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP).

The NUMSA workers live in the Thokoza and Katlehong townships east of Johannesburg where over 300 people had been killed or wounded in three weeks of violence beginning September 8. The attacks included death squad assassinations, indiscriminate massacres on commuter trains, ambushes at area factories and armed invasions by hundreds of Inkatha members.

Finally, the Crown workers joined thousands of other workers in the September stayaway, to protest apartheid terrorism and to protect their families from a rumored Inkatha attack. NUMSA shop stewards alerted the company to the protest, but when the workers returned to work, the company attempted to discipline them by suspending workers on the nightshift.

Fearing for their lives if they left the factory alone in the darkness, the workers requested that the suspensions take place the following morning. The company said no and, when the workers refused to leave, charged them with holding an illegal sit-in.

When the workers protested the suspensions, Crown fired the entire workforce of 196 union members.

**International Labor Solidarity**

NUMSA rallied support both within South Africa and abroad to pressure Crown Cork to reconsider. In the U.S., trade unionists at all levels responded to the call for solidarity and quickly built up momentum.

Machinists and Steelworkers led the effort. Both USWA Vice President Leon Lynch and IAM Vice President George Poulin joined Maserumule in meetings with Crown Cork management, and demanded that the NUMSA workers be reinstated. IAM members picketed Crown plant gates and vowed to take further actions if necessary. Many U.S. unionists saw the dispute as an issue of “permanent replacements”—an issue all too familiar to American workers.

In Washington, Maserumule met with AFSCME Secretary-Treasurer William Lucy, who is the national president of the Coalition of Black
Trade Unionists (CBTU). Local anti-apartheid labor committees in Philadelphia, Chicago, the Bay area and New York mobilized support as well.

In a letter to Crown CEO William Avery, New York LCAA Co-Chairs Stanley Hill, Cleveland Robinson and Edgar Romney called “nothing less than support for the forces of apartheid.” Other LCAA unions sent letters as well, including District Council 1707 AFSCME, UAW Local 259 and Local 375 DC 37/AFSCME.

Union representatives on the New York State Teachers Retirement Fund, the 15th largest shareholder in Crown Cork, also protested the company’s actions. Labor’s friends in Congress, like Representatives Ron Dellums and Maxine Waters, promised their help as well.

Back in South Africa, NUMSA took its case to other COSATU affiliates and the civic organizations in the black townships. The union mobilized for a corporate campaign against Crown Cork products—aluminum cans. NUMSA made a study of which products were packaged in Crown Cork containers and prepared for a boycott. Trucks delivering cold drinks to factories were turned away by NUMSA members; the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) supported NUMSA as well. At Crown Cork, the scabs proved incapable of maintaining production, and the company had to order large stocks of cans from a competitor.

Faced with a crippling boycott at home and quickly escalating pressure abroad, Crown Cork caved in, agreeing to rehire 100 fired workers immediately, followed by a preferential recall of the remaining 96. However, the company has refused to rehire 14 workers, claiming they were guilty of violence during the dispute. These cases have been submitted to an arbitration procedure.

In a letter after the settlement to Edgar Romney, Maserumule declared, “We believe it is your mobilization programs that spelled danger to the company, resulting in it making the offer. Obviously the struggle is not yet over until all our members remaining outside are rehired. However, we see the offer as enabling us to set foot in the plant to rebuild our organization and help us identify opportunities and issues to advance our fight for all to be rehired.”

To keep the pressure on Crown Cork, you can write to CEO William Avery and ask him to promptly rehire all the workers. To contact him:

William J. Avery, CEO
Crown Cork & Seal Company
9300 Ashton Rd.
Philadelphia, PA 19136
TEL: 215-698-5100
FAX: 215-698-7050

While NUMSA Regional Secretary Bethuel Maserumule was in the United States to organize support for the Crown Cork workers, he met with members of the New York Labor Committee Against Apartheid. This interview was conducted just before he returned to South Africa in mid-March.

LCAA: What precipitated the stayaway that led to the firing of the Crown Cork workers?

Maserumule: We became aware of what seemed to be a well worked-out strategy to eliminate our union. Our members were repeatedly attacked on their way to work. Together with other COSATU affiliates, we decided to demand from the employers that workers all start work and knock off at the same time so we could travel to work in groups. The employers, while not taking any further steps against the violence, permitted this arrangement.

Then the attacks spread to other areas. At the railway stations, thugs would take hold of workers’ feet and hit their heads against the platform as the trains were moving away. This became the final blow.

The timing of our stayaway wasn’t arbitrary. We were informed by police and other sources of plans to attack us on a certain day. The stayaway was planned so workers could stay home and protect their families.

LCAA: Did your employers try to combat the violence against their workforce?

Maserumule: At first, we were sure that they would. We knew the employers could command a massive police presence when they wanted to. They could certainly get the police there to attack our strikers and put down our protests. But, in fact, they did nothing to stem the violence against workers.

In a plant organized by one of our sister unions, Inkatha members stormed in and occupied their factory, driving out the union members. The occupation lasted two weeks. After Inkatha left the factory, they lay in wait to attack the union members. Five members were murdered outside the factory gates. At no time during the occupation and the murderous attacks that followed did the company call for the police.

We think Crown Cork and other employers are using the violence as a way to get rid of our organization. During the last round of negotiations, the company complained that union workers were too “expensive.” They did everything they could to provoke us into a strike. We refused because in South Africa, workers jobs aren’t protected even after a legal strike. Then they used the stayaway as an excuse to get rid of the union.

LCAA: Strikers’ jobs aren’t protected in the U.S. either.

Maserumule: Yes, I’ve just found out about the UAW strike at Caterpillar. I’ve contacted the Caterpillar union in South Africa, where I used to be one of the organizers. The stewards there will protest to the management and demand that Caterpillar accept the contract established by pattern bargaining. The members are also planning a factory demonstration culminating in a march.

Our members feel that what’s happening in the U.S. proves the company is capable of mistreating workers and they themselves won’t be exempt. Their action of solidarity is viewed from the angle of seeing themselves.
The violence in South Africa continues to be one of the biggest obstacles to political freedom.

The Economic Transition

In addition to the program of mass action in the political arena, COSATU continues to pursue crucial economic questions. COSATU and the smaller labor federation NACTU (National Council of Trade Unions) are raising economic demands for the transition from apartheid, recognizing that political restructuring alone will not bring justice to South Africa's black majority.

The central demand is for a National Economic Negotiating Forum, joining labor, business and government to work out transitional economic policies. The business community has agreed to join the Forum. But the government is again holding out and proceeding unilaterally with the privatization of public services, special deals for corporations, and its austerity budget.

Among the many issues at stake are job creation; fair taxation; investment; productivity; pension and provident funds; keeping utilities and human services in the public sector; the nationalization of key industries like mining and finance; small enterprise promotion; and even a social accord. Another central concern is establishing a collective bargaining structure and labor rights across all sectors of the workforce.

COSATU is also breaking new ground for unions worldwide. It is proposing that decisions like participation in the international General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) require union participation.

These economic issues are not marginal to the democratic future of South Africa. The apartheid system has produced a terrible legacy of deprivation and the greatest degree of inequality of any country in the world. Blacks, who comprise 87% of the population, share only 11% of the national income. In South Africa today, there are 20 million people dispossessed from their land, 7 million homeless, 16 million living below subsistence levels, and 50% unemployed.

Undoing the apartheid system will take an incredible effort. The unions are prepared to continue the fight on every front, from the workplace and the community to the national negotiating table and the streets.
The tripartite alliance of the ANC, COSATU and the SACP has continued to call for the maintenance of economic and financial sanctions against South Africa until a representative interim government is in place. So long as the architects of apartheid are in power, they argue, the pressure of international sanctions are needed to force the government to negotiate.

Western governments, however, are rapidly abandoning sanctions in order to "reward" DeKlerk for his reform gestures. The European Community lifted most of its sanctions in 1991, and in April 1992, lifted its oil embargo against South Africa as well. The United States lifted most sanctions in July 1991, just eight days before Pretoria admitted to funding Inkatha's violent campaign against democratic forces.

In February 1992, the U.S. lifted the Export-Import Bank restrictions on American Cyanamid to let Cyanamid's neighbors know about its practices. The protest was just the latest round in a four-year struggle by South Africans and Americans to change Cyanamid's labor and environmental policies. For Cyanamid's South African workers, represented by the Chemical Workers' Industrial Union (CWIU), the main issue has been control over the company's pension fund. CWIU is seeking a multi-employer provident fund that would allow workers to take a lump-sum payment if they leave the company.

In addition, Cyanamid's environmental practices have jeopardized communities in both the United States and South Africa.
New Sponsors, 
New Coordinator 
for LCAA

In 1991, three new labor leaders joined LCAA as sponsors. We are pleased to welcome Marc Dudzig, the President of OCAW Local 8-149; Sonny Hall, the President of TWU Local 100; Ray Markey, President of Local 1930, DC 37, AFSCME; and Laura Unger, the President of CWA Local 1150.

In January 1992, Marion Pitts joined LCAA as the new staff Co-Coordinator. Marion has been active in the anti-apartheid movement since the 1980’s, when she was a leader of the successful divestment effort at Rutgers University. She was Deputy Security Coordinator for the Nelson Mandela New York visit and worked on the Sun City Project with the Africa Fund in 1986. In addition, she has worked with New York City unions in other coalitions, including the April 30, 1991, demonstration against New York State budget cuts.

Marion works for LCAA on Mondays and Wednesdays at the committee’s new headquarters at ILGWU Local 23-25. You can reach her at (212)929-2600.

Kate Pfordresher, who led LCAA as Co-Coordinator for four years, is now a Business Representative for Local 375, DC 37/ AFSCME. She continues to be active in the committee’s work.

Educational Videos Available

Three new videos about South Africa are available for education, outreach and meetings.

Hlanganani: A Short History of COSATU (30 mins.) utilizes COSATU leaders and members to relate the conditions and events that helped forge COSATU. They also critique their own activities and make projections for the future. Hlanganani is produced by Video News Service in association with COSATU.

Fighting for Change: Women Facing the Challenge of a New South Africa (30 mins.) shows black South African women of all classes and varied occupations who live in rural areas, towns and cities. These women face the triple oppressions of race, class and gender, and they are implementing programs to help themselves. The video is produced by Globalvision.

Stop the Violence (14 mins.) graphically shows the perpetrators of the current political violence and their victims. Dumisani Kumalo, Projects Director of the Africa Fund, introduces the video and recommends action that can be taken to help stop the violence. Stop the Violence is produced by the Africa Fund.

Hlanganani and Stop the Violence are available for $20 each from the Africa Fund, 198 Broadway, New York, NY 10038, (212)962-1210; please add 15% for postage and handling. Fighting for Change is available for $75, plus $5 for postage and handling, from Globalvision, 215 Park Ave. South, New York, NY 10003, (212)260-2022.

LCAA also owns a copy of each video. If your union is interested in arranging an educational meeting with LCAA to show one of the videos, please contact Marion Pitts at Local 23-25.