GENERAL STRIKE!
COSATU Demands Role in the Economy, an Interim Government

More than 3.5 million South African workers staged the biggest strike in the country's history on November 4 and 5, 1991. Organized by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU), the strike was called to demand that national economic negotiations, parallel to political negotiations, begin immediately. COSATU and NACTU workers as well as community groups throughout South Africa together brought the country to a standstill. It was an awesome display of power, and an amazing testament to the leadership of the labor movement in the anti-apartheid struggle.

The immediate cause of the strike was a new tax that had been imposed by the government, but at the heart of the strike was COSATU's insistence that the government stop its unilateral restructuring of the economy. “This government has absolutely no right, being unrepresentative, unilaterally to do anything in this country,” COSATU General Secretary Jay Naidoo told the South African Labour Bulletin in November. “Macro-economic negotiations are now on the agenda and no one can get away from that.”

The VAT Campaign

Last year, the government imposed a new value-added tax (VAT) on goods and services. COSATU and others immediately objected that the VAT was taxation without representation. It was imposed by an undemocratic government, and disproportionately burdens working and poor people. COSATU asked the government to postpone its planned October 1, 1991, implementation until broadly agreed changes could be made.

The government proceeded with the October 1 implementation, and COSATU set plans for the strike. Besides negotiated changes in the VAT, the strike demands included a stop to all unilateral government industrial restructuring; the establishment of a national forum for negotiations on economic issues; legislative amendments that would fulfill the agreements reached in negotiations with employers and the state; and an interim government.

Push for an Interim Government

Government actions are increasingly entrenching inequalities and preempting decisions of a future democratic state. Whether through privatization or legislative changes

Continued on page 6
Forward to a Democratic Economy

Apartheid is as much an economic system of exploitation as a political one—and as elsewhere in the world, economic and political democratization are inseparable. COSATU, which has always called for a democratically planned economy, has taken the lead in recognizing that economic reform cannot wait until a new government is in place.

The Laboria Minute

In October 1990, COSATU and NACTU signed the Laboria Minute with employers (represented by SACCOLA) and the state. The historic agreement was the result of a two-year campaign by COSATU against the 1988 anti-labor amendments to the Labor Relations Act (LRA). As a consequence of the Laboria Minute, Parliament acted to remove those amendments in February 1991.

The Laboria Minute also specified that basic rights should be extended to farm, domestic and public sector workers, as well as workers in the so-called homelands. It called for the restructuring and democratization of the National Manpower Commission (NMC), an advisory body to the government. It also established that unions should be consulted before any labor legislation goes to Parliament.

In light of this agreement, COSATU agreed to participate in the NMC on an interim basis, to participate in its restructuring and to negotiate about the extension of rights to farm, domestic and public sector workers. The government, however, has failed to honor any of these agreements, forcing COSATU to withdraw from the NMC in October 1991.

National Negotiating Forum

In addition to achieving a historic victory by changing labor law, the Laboria Minute also provided a new and important model as a negotiating forum. Direct talks between labor, capital and the state were a significant step in the direction of democratic reform of the economy. (The unity of COSATU and NACTU in the negotiations was also an important development.)

Subsequent to the Laboria Minute, COSATU proposed that the state and SACCOLA enter into a national negotiating forum with COSATU and NACTU to discuss broader economic issues. In particular, COSATU wanted to address issues of job loss, job creation programs and job training. Other issues would follow, but these were the areas of most immediate concern. Both SACCOLA and the Minister of Manpower agreed to the idea initially, and a working group to set up the forum was established.

SACCOLA and the state have since reneged on the agreement for a forum. In response, COSATU has launched a campaign to demand a national negotiating forum. The November general strike was part of this effort, an effort to stop the government from continuing to make unilateral decisions about economic restructuring.

Workers' Charter

In its campaign for economic reform and the development of democratic structures for economic planning, COSATU has pursued several approaches. In addition to the national negotiating forum, COSATU has done extensive work in studying and discussing ways that a democratic economy could be fostered under a future government. COSATU's Economic Trends Group has looked at everything from investment redistribution to nationalization to health and welfare policies in preparing for the future (see the Fall 1990 issue of Labor Against Apartheid).

Economic conferences have been held (most recently in June 1991), draft papers have been circulated and joint discussions have taken place with the ANC. As ever, COSATU has sought the broadest possible participation by its rank-and-file membership. Economic issues figured prominently in COSATU's fourth national congress in July 1991.

One project that has been very important in this process is the proposed "Workers' Charter." COSATU has been working intensely with its members on a series of proposed constitutional articles that would protect basic labor rights. In many ways, the Workers' Charter epitomizes COSATU's economic and political vision.

The rights COSATU is calling for include the right to organize and form independent unions without victimization; to bargain collectively; to strike and picket; to be protected against unfair dismissal; and to have a safe work environment. Equally important are a series of political rights: union independence from government, employers and political parties; a democratic, accountable government, including the right of referendum; and equality between men and women, including concrete steps to achieve it. That these articles on political freedom are included in a document dedicated to workers' rights underscores COSATU's commitment to linking political and economic democracy.
Nurses Continue Struggle for Recognition, Patient Care

For over two years, hospital workers in South Africa, led by the National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU), a COSATU affiliate, have been engaged in a campaign to win recognition and end discrimination in health care. During November 1991, two nurses from NEHAWU came to the United States to build international support for their campaign.

In 1990, a series of strikes by nurses and other hospital workers swept South Africa. The workers had three central demands. First, that apartheid be eliminated in health care, that patient care be improved. Second, that the hospitals recognize the union; and third, that the racial imbalance in wages and benefits be redressed.

Disciplinary charges were brought against hundreds of striking nurses by the South African Nursing Council (SANC). As of yet, they have not been dropped. The accused nurses could lose their jobs, nursing registration and subsidized housing. SANC and the apartheid South African Nursing Association (SANA) have been very active in the effort to prevent the hospital workers from organizing. The struggle over the hospitals has been an intense one because it is central to the fight to preserve minority privilege in South Africa.

Public sector workers in South Africa, including health care professionals, do not have collective bargaining rights. The extension of union rights to public sector workers has become a major priority of COSATU.

The NEHAWU nurses tour included stops in Chicago, New York, Washington, San Francisco, Seattle and Atlanta. Thami Skenjana and Khumbu Mtinjana met with some state affiliates of the American Nurses Association; attended the American Public Health Association convention; visited AFSCME's Washington headquarters; spoke at several labor conferences and met with local unions; and did programs with the Illinois Labor Network Against Apartheid and the Bay Area Free South Africa Labor Committee.

In New York, they met with LCAA unionists at DC 37 AFSCME Local 420, where they met with the Executive Board and President Jim Butler, and at Local 1199, where they participated in a weekend retreat with 375 members.

The tour helped raise the visibility of NEHAWU's campaign and especially its effort to organize nurses, who have been singled out for repression. In fact, since her return, Thami Skenjana has been subjected to increased intimidation and harassment. Much stronger union-to-union ties were established during the tour, and these links will be vital for NEHAWU as it continues its campaign.
Since then, hundreds more have been murdered. Wholesale attacks, in which gunmen open fire in shops and township streets or slash and hack train commuters, complement targeted assassinations of activists and their families. The perpetrators include trained hit squads, white attackers and elements of the police (SAP) and security forces (SADF). Burned offices, assassinated leaders, fear and chaos have taken a devastating and immeasurable toll on democratic organizing.

Democratic organizations now feel that in many respects there was greater freedom of political activity in South Africa before the ANC and others were unbanned on February 2, 1990, than there is today.

**Overwhelming Evidence of Government Involvement**

The revelation and admission in January 1991 of the government funding of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the SADF involvement in the train massacres confirmed claims the ANC, COSATU and others had made for years. It left no doubt about the government's intention to subvert the opposition, and it erased any remnant of credibility that Chief Gatsha Buthelezi and the IFP had left.

Yet the “Inkathagate” scandal was neither the first nor the last evidence of the government sponsorship of the violence. For almost two years now, dozens of independent observers and hundreds of eyewitness accounts have confirmed police and military support of Inkatha. COSATU and ANC officials have warned the police of specific attacks planned by Inkatha, but nothing was done to stop them. The police have consistently disarmed Inkatha's victims while refusing to disarm Inkatha members. They have driven vigilantes to and from some of their attacks, and provided covering fire for them.

The most frequent victims of the attacks are workers, in particular union members. Many of the attacks have been right in factories and industrial areas. It is instructive to note that when the Inkathagate funding emerged last summer, most of the money had been given not to the IFP directly, but to the Inkatha-affiliated labor organization UWUSA. UWUSA, as it turns out, was actually set up by the SADF in 1986 to disrupt COSATU organizing. Clearly, the apartheid forces understand that worker solidarity is vital to the strength and success of the liberation movement.

Workers have been forced to show their membership cards, and if they were not Inkatha members, they were assaulted. Striking workers, and even workers simply singing freedom songs, have been attacked. Workers have been forced to resign from their organizations and join IFP/UWUSA, and even to participate in the vigilante attacks.

**The Third Force**

Government responsibility for other forms of violence has also been established.

Evidence that elements of the SADF have been directly involved in creating a “third force” similar to the South African-backed RENAMO movement that has killed over 100,000 people in Mozambique began emerging in 1990. Since then, information detailing the security force role has snowballed. Nelson Mandela and others have called it simply “overwhelming.” SADF has armed and trained vigilantes who carry out the train massacres and other seemingly “random” attacks. Former security officers have stated not only that the SADF armed vigilantes, but also that they fashioned a campaign based on the South African destabilization effort carried out in Namibia.

White vigilante attacks have increased as well. There are over 70 separate right-wing and paramilitary organizations in South Africa, groups committed to violently maintaining apartheid. This network is separate from but deeply intertwined with the state security apparatus, and by several estimates, 70% of all South African police are supporters of far-right parties.

Official, “legal” repression has continued as well. The Internal Security Act and other security statutes remain on the books. Detentions without charge continue to this day, as do political trials. The police continue to use live ammunition for crowd control. And over 50 townships have been declared “unrest areas,” areas where the police have complete immunity, since the state of emergency was lifted in 1990.

**Numerous Peace Initiatives**

Numerous peace initiatives sought by the democratic opposition in the last several years have been frustrated. In January 1991, Mandela and Buthe-
lezi met and agreed to a peace pact. The violence, however, continued. In April, the ANC demanded that the government act to curb the violence. They presented, and carried out, a threat to suspend the negotiations on May 9 if the government refused to do anything. In June, religious and business leaders helped arrange a peace summit. In August, the government, the IFP and the ANC and its allies agreed to a landmark peace agreement, which was signed on September 14, 1991.

The September National Peace Accord is the most serious attempt yet to curb the violence. It agreed to establish, among other things, commissions to probe the causes of the violence; codes of conduct for political parties and other organizations and for the security forces; special courts to deal exclusively with cases of political violence; and a National Peace Committee to oversee the implementation and enforcement of the accord.

Despite early hopes that this new accord would stop the violence, it has continued unabated. One hundred thirty people were killed the week before the accord was signed, 25 in the week after, and over 100 within the first month it was in effect.

The conclusion drawn by COSATU and others is that the only way to stop the violence is to remove the government from power. Accordingly, the democratic opposition has stepped up its demand for an interim government. Since the government fuels and orchestrates the violence—even while it sits and negotiates with the same people it is assaulting—there can be no hope for peace as long as it retains power.

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**A Letter from South Africa**

The LCAA received the following report from a union friend.

**AUGUST 27, 1991**—It's difficult to characterize what's happening in South Africa right now. Township violence has escalated in the past 18 months. Quite clearly the police are behind much of this. And, of course, Inkatha—funded by the state—has had a substantial hand in the violence. Clearly, however, many of the problems are rooted in the very poor conditions in the townships: people competing for everything from access to drinking water to the right to use taxi ranks and routes. What we're faced with is a massive development problem in the townships.

Part of this problem will be solved by organisation. COSATU, in particular, is turning its attention to development projects. Housing is a priority in this regard, as are attempts by COSATU to set up producer co-ops in the rural areas. But these projects require trained leadership and major financial resources. There is a real need for anti-apartheid organisations to turn their attention to this reconstruction process.

Everybody here was really disturbed to see the US Congress still handing out money to Inkatha when its complicity in the violence and its access to the state's coffers has been so clearly established. Surely this money would be better spent by enhancing the development projects that COSATU and its allies are struggling to establish.

COSATU has also played a major role in trying to curtail the political violence. They have not done this by merely telling their members to refrain from violence. Rather through a process of power and negotiation—a combination at which COSATU is uniquely experienced—they have been major players in bringing the state, the ANC and Inkatha together in a series of commissions that have drafted a Peace Accord [the September 14 accord].

COSATU is also trying to extend this model of militant negotiation to the economy as well. Here what COSATU is trying to do is to extend the collective bargaining process into the sphere of economic policy, thus giving the unions a key role in the formulation of economic policy.

We're all aware that we have to move from an organisation of defence and opposition to one of power and government. COSATU intends having the workers in the forefront of a post-apartheid government.
General Strike

Continued from page 1

or through measures like the VAT, the state is clearly working to preserve minority power and privilege. In addition, the ongoing campaign of violence and terror sponsored by the state against the anti-apartheid movement has also made clear that the government itself is the primary obstacle to peace and democracy.

In response, COSATU and other democratic organizations have intensified their demand for an interim government.

In addition to an interim government, the democratic opposition has called for an all-party congress as a forum to set up a process for electing a constituent assembly. A democratically elected constituent assembly would be the body that draws up a new constitution.

As of press time, the major parties had agreed on a time and place for an all-party congress. The ANC, the government, the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and many other organizations set a date for December 20 and 21, 1991, for the congress. The process towards negotiated change, it appears, is moving forward. The government has also relaxed its staunch opposition to an interim government of any kind.

Keep the Pressure On!

The obstacles to the emergence of a democratic state in South Africa, however, are formidable—and will remain so at least until the architects of apartheid no longer control the government. International pressure, including the force of sanctions, continues to be essential to ensure change. The ANC and its allies support a phased-out end to sanctions linked to specific steps taken towards a democratic government. Once an interim government has been established, for instance, the lifting of trade sanctions would be appropriate. Financial sanctions could be lifted if an interim government requests it. Some sanctions, most notably the arms and oil embargoes, would remain until a new constitution is in place and a new government has been elected.

Anti-apartheid forces are adamant, however, that no sanctions should be lifted as long as the current government is in power. The ANC, COSATU and others have been sharply critical of efforts to prematurely end economic pressure on South Africa.

In April, the European Community moved to lift its sanctions, a move later blocked by Denmark. In July, the Bush Administration cynically declared the conditions in the 1986 Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act fulfilled, and disingenuously said it had no choice but to lift sanctions. COSATU condemned the move.

Despite clear directives from the democratic opposition, the erosion of South Africa’s economic isolation continues. In September 1991, South Africa’s first public bond issue since 1985 successfully attracted investors from Germany and elsewhere. The Lotus Development Corp., an otherwise relatively enlightened company, has announced plans to sell its products in South Africa.

Local Efforts

Despite the setbacks in the international arena, the myriad of local anti-apartheid statutes in the U.S. should prevent a surge of premature investments in South Africa. One hundred fifty local ordinances impose a variety of requirements on companies doing business with those entities. These include 28 states, 100 cities and 24 county governments.

Here in New York, local anti-apartheid activists have vowed to oppose any weakening of the tough local sanctions law passed in 1990 through the work of the Labor Committee Against Apartheid and others. Democratic organizations in South Africa have also urged Americans to hold the line on local sanctions as an important means of pressure.

But doing so has become increasingly difficult in light of the widespread promotion of the “new” South Africa. President Bush has praised South African President F.W. deKlerk as a “forward-thinking man”; the New York Times routinely refers to apartheid in the past tense (and credits the National Party for its alleged dismantling); and there is a growing popular perception that South Africa is firmly on an irreversible course to democracy. Clearly the most important task for anti-apartheid forces here is to provide accurate information about the situation in South Africa in order to “keep the pressure on.”
Illinois Labor Network Hosts Township Activists

Last summer, the Illinois Labor Network Against Apartheid hosted a six-week tour for two community activists from Alexandra Township in South Africa. Mzwanele Mayekiso, brother of NUMSA General Secretary Moses Mayekiso and an organizer for the Alexandra Civic Organization, and Mary Ntinjane, education coordinator of the 5,000 member Alexandra Women’s Congress, were guests of the Chicago Sister Communities program.

The activists, who battle daily on what they term “the front line of resistance,” traveled throughout the state and met with their Illinois counterparts in organizations concerned with housing, transportation and health service delivery and education. They also met with many union groups. They attended the UAW publications and communications conference, a Steelworkers health and safety conference, several events sponsored by AFSCME District Council 31 and many other union activities.

More recently, the Illinois Labor Network has continued its “Hand of Labor” campaign, and met with visiting NEHAWU nurses (see page 3).

AFL-CIO and COSATU Ties Growing

“The AFL-CIO calls on the South African government to reveal the full extent of its covert manipulations intended to destabilize organizations and pervert negotiations to its own ends,” an AFL-CIO Executive Council statement declared on July 31, 1991. It also condemned President Bush’s premature lifting of sanctions, andconfirmed its support for COSATU.

The statement was an indication of the growing ties between the two federations. In February 1991, COSATU General Secretary Jay Naidoo addressed an AFL-CIO Executive Council meeting. The AFL-CIO praised South Africa’s labor movement as having “fostered democracy in the dark days of apartheid...and led the struggle against an unequal and unjust South Africa.” Naidoo called the February session “very fruitful.” He also met with members of the New York Labor Committee Against Apartheid during that visit.

In another sign of the federations’ closer ties, AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Thomas Donahue represented the AFL-CIO at the COSATU Congress in July 1991.

Shell Gets Canned in NJ

The Shell Oil Company will not be allowed to operate service stations along the New Jersey Turnpike after its current contract expires on April 1, 1992, because its parent company, Royal Dutch Shell, has petroleum and mining operations in South Africa that support the apartheid system.

The removal of Shell from the Turnpike’s rest stops represents the most significant government action to date in a five-year international boycott by labor unions and civil rights groups.

The Turnpike contract is worth $50 million in revenues. Governor Jim Florio cited the urging of anti-apartheid groups in his decision not to renew the contract, as well as a 1985 New Jersey law that requires the divestiture of state money from companies that do business in South Africa.

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Paperworkers in US, SA Connect

Last year, paperworkers from South Africa and the United States established solidarity ties and exchanged information. The Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers’ Union (PPWAWU) and the United Paperworkers’ International Union (UPIU) found an immediate common cause. In a June 1991 letter to PPWAWU, UPIU President Wayne Glenn commented, “our two organizations represent union members who are employed by many of the same companies...As corporations increasingly become multinational and extend their operations around the globe, it has become more important than ever for trade unions to continue to build international solidarity.”

As it turned out, one of the companies employing both South African and American paperworkers, International Paper (IP), was exploiting its workers on both sides of the Atlantic in remarkably similar ways. In both cases, IP used temporary workers to replace union jobs, introduced a continuous shift process forcing workers to work holidays and maintained an unsafe work environment.

When the IP CEO declared at the May 1991 shareholders meeting that the company played a positive role in South Africa, the American unionists were able to get up and correct him by citing these unfair policies, as well as the company’s racist promotion policy in South Africa.

Support from its sister union has been especially important to PPWAWU because it has been particularly targeted in the government’s violent campaign against democratic organizations.

South African Labour Bulletin

South Africa’s leading labour journal!

The SA Labour Bulletin is read by workers, shop stewards, organizers, students, academics and political activists in South Africa, and around the world. For 16 years, the Labour Bulletin has been closely associated with the democratic trade union movement, and has provided invaluable information and analysis. Members of the New York City Labor Committee Against Apartheid rely on the Labour Bulletin regularly.

The Labour Bulletin would like to greatly increase its overseas subscriptions for two reasons:

1. The international trade union movement has played an important role in supporting South African unions. The Labour Bulletin would help deepen the links needed to make that support possible.

2. Solidarity Subscriptions from abroad provide vital funds that enable the Labour Bulletin to reach South African workers.

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