



# News from the Steelworkers

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## **AFRICA FUND, STEELWORKERS AND MACHINISTS NEGOTIATE REINSTATEMENT OF SOUTH AFRICAN WORKERS FIRED BY AMERICAN FIRM**

PITTSBURGH -- Joint efforts by the United Steelworkers of America, the International Association of Machinists and The Africa Fund have persuaded Crown Cork and Seal Co. to reinstate 196 black South African workers who had been fired for protesting apartheid violence, the USWA announced today.

"This settlement is a significant victory for the South African Labor movement," said Leon Lynch, USWA vice president for human affairs. "The workers were fired for nothing more than protesting state-sponsored political violence. The USWA, the Machinists, The Africa Fund and fair-minded people everywhere are pleased that the company has moved to rectify this injustice and end the suffering imposed upon the workers and their families. This settlement is a significant victory for the South Africa labor movement."

George Poulin, general vice president of the IAM, called the agreement a vindication of the principles of trade unionism. "This is what unionism is all about, helping brothers and sisters everywhere to exercise their God-given rights without fear of oppression or intimidation from either the state or transnational corporations," Poulin said.

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The reinstatement agreement was signed today in Alrode, South Africa, by the company and Bethuel Maserumule, regional secretary of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA). It calls for 100 workers to be returned to their jobs immediately, with the remaining 96 given preferential recall rights. The company will provide \$185,000 for workers who choose not to return.

The workers were fired Sept. 22 for participating in a two-day strike protesting apartheid violence in which 300 people were killed or injured.

The fired workers, all of them NUMSA members, constituted the company's entire work force. They were replaced by non-union scabs. Following an attempt to negotiate the dispute at a meeting with company officials in December, six of the fired workers and three NUMSA officers were arrested on company complaints of "intimidation." The settlement called for dropping of the charges.

Crown Cork and Seal is headquartered in Philadelphia. The USWA and the IAM, who represent Crown Cork and Seal hourly workers in the United States, interceded on behalf of the South African workers at the request of Maserumule and the anti-apartheid Africa Fund.

Under sponsorship of The Africa Fund, Maserumule visited the United States in February, seeking help to overturn the firings from the USWA, IAM, and other trade unions, and political and religious leaders.

Jennifer Davis, executive director of The Africa Fund, said the settlement goes far beyond its terms.

"With the repeal of Federal sanctions last July, Crown's local managers clearly thought the pressure on U.S. companies in South Africa was off and they decided to bust the union," Davis said.

"But the tremendous response to NUMSA's call for solidarity, particularly by the Machinists and the Steelworkers but extending throughout the U.S. anti-apartheid movement, shows the American people will not tolerate corporate complicity with apartheid's violence, or corporate attacks on black workers. We can and will keep the pressure on for justice."

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Initially, the company refused to even discuss the dismissals, then said it would consider reinstatement of 10 workers. But, faced with the prospect of unified union opposition and a national day of protest scheduled for March 30, it changed its position at a meeting in Philadelphia on March 19 arranged by Lynch. Attending were Lynch, Poulin, Maserumule, Mike Fleshman of The Africa Fund and William Avery, chairman and CEO of Crown Cork and Seal.

Lynch had earlier written to Avery, asking for his personal involvement in the matter and warning that conditions had deteriorated dramatically at the company's Alrode subsidiary. Lynch's information came from a meeting he had with NUMSA officials and some of the fired workers in Johannesburg on Jan. 15.

"While this specific injustice appears to have been resolved," Lynch added, "we hope we can now convince Mr. Avery to end another union-busting campaign the company has underway closer to home, at its plant in San Juan, Puerto Rico." The USWA has been asked by workers in San Juan, previously represented by an independent union, to become their bargaining agent, Lynch said.

"Despite the workers' unanimous desire to become members of the USWA, the company is attempting to coerce them to reverse their decision by threat and intimidation in clear violation of U.S. labor laws. The USWA will work just as diligently to assure that the workers in San Juan receive justice as it did to restore the jobs of the workers in Alrode."

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