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(labor donated)
Labor in South Africa

The New York Labor Committee Against Apartheid (LCAA) works in solidarity with the South African labor movement to advance workers' rights and to end the apartheid system. The leading labor federation is the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), formed in 1985, with over a million members in fourteen multi-racial industrial unions. The National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) is a second anti-apartheid federation with 150,000 members.

South African workers must fight on many fronts: black workers earn one-tenth the wages paid to whites, the majority are forced into migrant labor status, and employers have the full backing of a police state. By building strong shop floor organizations and staunchly democratic unions, the South African labor movement has been able to challenge these conditions, improve wages and labor standards, withstand severe repression, and grow dynamically over the past ten years.

Since the State of Emergency was imposed in 1985, the labor movement has played an increasingly central political role as well. Unions have spearheaded protest campaigns, community organizing and coalition building. With groups like the United Democratic Front now banned, the unions remain the only democratic national organizations able to function openly.

The price of resistance to apartheid is high. More than 8,000 unionists have been detained under State of Emergency decrees, hundreds have been murdered by the government and vigilante violence, tens of thousands have lost their jobs in workplace actions.

International labor solidarity can and does make a difference. By supporting our brothers and sisters in South Africa, we are strengthening progressive activism within our own labor movement and hastening the day when South Africa will be a free and just society.

1988-89 Highlights

- The LCAA leads an effort to include labor rights in new NYC sanction laws, recognizing the right of South African workers and their unions to advance notice of corporate withdrawal and the right to negotiate the terms of withdrawal. These provisions will set a crucial new standard for responsible disinvestment.

- The Free Mayekiso Campaign contributed to the April acquittal of Moses Mayekiso, general secretary of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), charged with treason for engaging in township organizing. The LCAA worked with the UAW's national campaign to hold rallies, local meetings and a postcard drive among thousands of New York union members.

- Working with church and community groups, the LCAA represents labor in the Shell Boycott and Mobil Disinvestment campaigns. Annual demonstrations on Sharpeville Day and Soweto Day have targetted Shell and Mobil headquarters here. In May 1989, Mobil announced its intention to withdraw from South Africa.

- The LCAA works with union councils and locals to develop grassroots anti-apartheid programs. Recently, we have assisted workers at Bellevue hospital launch a Workers Monitoring Campaign. Similar campaigns, and exchanges with sister unions in South Africa, are underway.

- The LCAA facilitates exchange visits between unionists here and in South Africa. Recent tours by the SA Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) have deepened our work on sanctions and bilateral union relations. Recent forums have featured the Amalgamated Clothing & Textile Workers of South Africa (ACTWUSA) and NUMSA activist Khola Mayekiso.

- The LCAA publishes a tri-annual newsletter Labor Against Apartheid, distributed to local unionists and to anti-apartheid labor groups across the U.S. and in South Africa.