

# South Africa Labor News

Published by the Free South Africa Labor Committee  
San Francisco Bay Area  
Number 3, March-April, 1989



## South Africa's Black Unions Fight On, Despite Facing Prison and Repression

The activity of South Africa's Black trade union movement is continuing to rise, despite an increase in government actions to repress it. Last year almost one million workdays were lost in strikes, especially by four major unions. Fourteen strikes by the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa cost 246,000 lost days. Seven strikes by the South African Railway and Harbor Workers Union cost 107,000 lost days, and 1,500 workers were fired.

Four strikes by the South African Municipal Workers Union cost 126,000 lost days, and 4,000 workers were fired. Over 10,000 members of the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union struck the Natal Provincial Administration, and over 3,000 were fired, and hundreds arrested. All these unions are affiliates of the Congress Of South African Trade Unions.

South Africa's apartheid government has moved against COSATU and the rising labor struggle, with detentions, treason trials and executions. Government representatives have declared that COSATU's Living Wage Campaign is "a communist plot." Employers are continuing to apply the amended Labor Relations Act, which makes many kinds of union activity, especially political and solidarity actions, illegal.

### THE MOVE AGAINST THE MINeworkERS

A particular objective of government repression is the  
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## United Public Employees Local 790 Reaches out to Soweto's City Workers

As municipal workers in Soweto continue the struggle for their right to a union, and against the apartheid government of their community, the Bay Area's largest public worker union, United Public Employees Local 790, SEIU, is reaching out to help. The South African Municipal Workers Union, the union for Soweto city workers affiliated to the Congress of South African Trade Unions, has been fighting for its survival since it was founded almost two years ago.

In four strikes last year, involving a loss of 126,000 days of work, Soweto's city administration fired four thousand workers, and subcontracted city maintenance to private contractors. In February this year, 800 SAMWU members sat in at city offices to demand the rehiring of the fired workers.

Local 790's Human and Civil Rights Committee has written to SAMWU, with the help of Peter Mahlangu in the Toronto office of the South African Congress of Trade Unions. The committee is seeking to establish direct communication with SAMWU, and has proposed an extensive program of activity for the local's 20,000 members.

According to committee chair Jenny Donnelly, the committee has purchased a copy of *Changing this Country*, a 1-hour documentary by the International Labor Organization on South Africa's trade union movement, and will show it at chapter meetings. Local 790 members will be asked to donate one hour's wages to SAMWU, and will receive a button saying "I worked an hour against apartheid." The local will also sell bumperstickers and T-shirts with anti-apartheid slogans.

Donnelly says she feels a bond with SAMWU because it struck to prevent the Soweto city government from subcontracting out work. "Subcontracting is happening right here," she said, "in my city - Hayward. It affects all of us." Marshall Walker III, Local 790 vice-president, says the committee "has a network through all the chapters, and people are definitely in support of donating an hour's pay."

Business representative Joel Schaeffer has been assigned to help the committee, and assisted in organizing last fall's reception for SACTU General Secretary John Nkadimeng, held at the local office. Schaeffer notes that there has been a particular interest in the project by African-American workers "who see a connection between racism at home and abroad." One of those workers, Shirley Lavender of the Berkeley chapter, says that "we all want to reach out and help."

# Fighting for Union Divestment Rights

It has happened before to U.S. workers: one day you are working under union protection in a union shop; the next day the plant is sold and the new owner refused to recognize the union contract. The same thing is happening today in South Africa as transnational corporations use sham divestments as covers to break the unions.

But one South African union, the Chemical Industrial Workers Union (CIWU) has developed a strategy to fight back. And anti-apartheid U.S. trade unionists are learning to use sanctions legislation to help South African workers protect their unions.

The CIWU says that most divestments have been "corporate shams" that "ensure that profits are repatriated to the former owners by less direct and more devious means" such as technology, licensing, and franchising agreements.

The Sterling Drug Company divestment story is typical of the situation in South Africa. This American drug company was under pressure to divest its South African subsidiary. In July, 1987, the CIWU wrote Sterling and 40 other companies that were divestment targets employing CWIU members. The letters asked the companies plans and demanded good faith negotiations over the continuation of union protections.

Sterling denied any plans to divest. Yet within a few weeks, Kodak had purchased Sterling Drug and sold the South African affiliate to a South African drug company, Adcock-Ingram. This was a sham divestment because the new company would continue to produce and market the same product, for the price of a licensing fee to Sterling-Kodak.

After the CWIU was finally told of the change, the new Sterling/Adcock entity refused to meet to discuss the continuation of the collective bargaining agreement or workers' rights such as severance pay, pensions or benefits.

## OVERCOMING A CATCH-22

At a hearing before South Africa's Industrial Court, Ster-

ling/Adcock claimed no divestment had occurred and that the union should seek remedies from the parent Sterling Drug in the U.S. The latter, handing the CIWU a Catch-22 football, claimed to be no longer involved.

The CIWU responded to such phony divestments by asking 41 companies to jointly discuss the following demands:

1. prior notification of one year of divestment;
2. full information concerning the divestment, including financial data, and consultation with the union; and
3. no change in working conditions or union representation.

These demands are very similar to the "successor clauses" that U.S. unions negotiate to protect their members from plant closures and changes of ownership. However, the South African companies at first refused to negotiate. It was not until late in 1988 after the CIWU had taken all necessary steps to legally de-

clare a strike on these issues, that 24 of the companies agreed to negotiate individually, on a plant-by-plant basis.

These negotiations are now beginning. Those companies that have thus far refused to talk are, in the main, subsidiaries of such transnational giants as Shell, Mobil and British Petroleum.

## U.S. LABOR CAN HELP

The actions of U.S. unions can help these CIWU negotiations succeed. The New York Labor Committee Against Apartheid has taken the lead in strengthening sanctions legislation by supporting an amendment to the existing law.

"New York unions see this as an issue close to their hearts. There is an amazing level of support in New York - 40 local union leaders and the Central Labor Council have endorsed the changes," said Karen Pfordresher, a NYLCAA spokesperson.

The changes endorsed by the NYLCAA and now before the NY City Council include the following standard a company must measure up to if its products are to be purchased by the city:

1. six month advance notice of termination of investment, and
2. good faith negotiations over benefits, union rights and other issues of concern to the workers.

These points closely follow the standards found in the Dellums-Cranston Comprehensive Sanctions Bill which has been reintroduced into Congress. One other proposed feature of the New York City law deserves emulation in other cities. This change requires the city enforcement agency to respond to specific complaints from anti-apartheid groups about the divestment behavior of companies. Thus the agency is not over-burdened by having to investigate every company the city does business with -- instead it responds only to documented complaints.



Tebogo Mafole, who recently visited the San Francisco Bay Area, is the new head of the mission of the African National Congress at the United Nations in New York.

## UNIONS FIGHT ON, continued...

National Union of Mineworkers, which has successfully organized workers and mounted national strikes in South Africa's most economically important industry - gold, coal and diamond mining. Anglo-American Corp., South Africa's largest mining company, has withdrawn 38% of its recognition agreements at NUM mines, and closed four union offices on mine property.

One NUM member reported that "workers are paraded by mine security. They are questioned about whether it was them who signed up for the union. They are forced to sign and their signatures are compared with their membership forms. Workers are severely intimidated."

In one mine the company converted its public address system into an anti-union radio network called *Radio Reef*. Companies now demand that the union ask permission to hold meetings in the company-owned hostels where the miners live, and then deny permission. Where permission is granted, no one may criticize the company, no outside speakers are permitted, and no political issues can be discussed. Workers are punished for asking for stewards, and cannot visit workers living in other hostels.

The NUM is demanding that the compounds be abolished and family housing created, that wages be increased, that all workers be treated equally, the dismantling of mine police, and punishment for whites who assault Black workers.

### UNION MEMBERS ON DEATH ROW

At least seven union members are now on death row in South Africa. Four are transport workers, on death row for eight months. The Supreme Court in Durban found Stanford Ngubo, Johannes Buthelezi, Bethuel Sabelo and William Khuzwayo guilty of killing Retford Shezi during a 1986 bus strike.

Ngubo, Buthelezi and Sabelo are bus drivers and members of the Transport and General Workers Union. They were accused of hiring Khuzwayo, an unemployed TGWU member, to kill Shezi, who was shot while driving a bus during the strike. Despite major inconsistencies in the evidence, the court denied the four their request to appeal. Their only remaining hope is clemency from South African president P.W. Botha. The International Transport Workers Federation, to which TGWU is affiliated, has launched an international campaign to reprieve the four men.

Others on death row include William Ntombela of the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union of SA, and Tylevuyo Mgedezi and Lucky Nomganga of the NUM. Sixteen SARWHU members are charged with murdering strikebreakers during a 1987 railway strike. Twenty-five members of the Print, Paper, Wood and Allied Workers Union are also charged in an incident in which strikebreakers were killed in 1988. No scabs, strikebreakers, guards, police or management personnel are known to be even charged with crimes in any of these incidents.

Jay Naidoo, COSATU's general secretary, has explained "the need to view the killings in the context of the root causes of the violence...Often dismissal during a strike involves being sent back to the bantustans where the worker faces nothing but sheer poverty...Disruption and constant provocation by security forces has included the arrest of the most experienced and disciplined layers of union leadership in control of strike situations," Naidoo said.

### DETENTION WITHOUT TRIAL

Union members have also been hit especially hard by apartheid's emergency regulations, which include detention without  
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## ANC Statement Regarding Winnie Mandela

Disturbing news concerning Winnie Mandela have recently appeared in the press. Unfortunately, the crippling censorship from the South African government leads to one-sided "opinion" and "information" concerning what is really happening with Winnie Mandela.

In a press release on February 18, the African National Congress made a statement, from which the following are excerpts:

"Recently there have been serious developments pertaining to the activities of the group known as the Mandela Football Club, which have raised great concern within the mass democratic movement and struggling people as a whole... In the light of reports about its activities in the recent past, our organization, complementing the initiatives of leading personalities in the Mass Democratic Movement, tried to use its influence to bring about the disbanding of the group. Unfortunately our counsel was not heeded by Comrade Winnie Mandela. The situation has been further complicated by the fact that she did not belong to any structures, and therefore did not benefit from the discipline, counseling and collectivity of the Mass Democratic Movement...

"We have every reason to believe that the club was infiltrated by the enemy... for the purposes of causing disunity within the community and discrediting the name of Nelson Mandela and the organization of which he is the leader...

"But we should not forget what Comrade Winnie Mandela has gone through and her immense contribution to the liberation struggle. She has not only suffered the anguish of over a quarter century of separation from her husband, but has also experienced unending persecution at the hands of the regime, such as banishment, imprisonment, torture and sustained harassment over a period of more than two decades. Bearing the name of Mandela, and in her own right, she increasingly became one of the symbols of resistance to racist tyranny both at home and abroad."



**UNIONS FIGHT ON, continued**

trial. Over 50,000 people have been detained since 1985, including 15,000 children under 17. Over 2,000 people are currently in detention.

This policy provoked a wave of hunger strikes by detainees early this year, which forced authorities to release some prisoners. One prisoner who remains detained, however, is Donsie Khumalo, who in March was still in critical condition in solitary confinement in Die Moord Prison in Pretoria. Khumalo is the elected representative of about 75,000 workers in the Northern Transvaal, and a member of COSATU's central executive committee.

A COSATU statement declared that "Donsie has long been the victim of a security police vendetta," who accuse him of involvement in the Mamelodi rent boycott. "Donsie is adamant that the reason given for his detention is false...Over and above Donsie's repeated detentions is the almost continual harrassment that local police have conducted against him. Our COSATU offices in Pretoria are regularly raided by the police, Donsie's life has been threatened, he is often followed and his home is watched."



**The Free South Africa Labor Committee** is a group of trade unionists in the San Francisco Bay Area who have been active in the fight for divestment and sanctions against trade with South Africa, and in support of the South African labor and freedom movement. The Labor News committee includes Darryl Alexander, David Bacon, Michael Horowitz, Franck Pottier and David Shelton.

The committee would like to acknowledge the contributions of Barri Boone, Bruce Haldane and Annie Esposito, and especially the generosity of the Vanguard Foundation. Other donations will be gratefully received, and can be sent to the committee at Molders Union Local 164B, 8140 Baldwin, Oakland, CA 94621.

**MEETINGS:** The committee meets monthly, and will meet in May on Tuesday, May 9 at 7 p.m. at SEIU Local 790, 522 Grand Ave. in Oakland, and in June on Monday, June 5 at 7 p.m., at ILWU Local 10, 400 North Point in San Francisco.

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