Dear Friends:

Enclosed with this mailing is a new eight page report on Black Unions in South Africa by Sandy Boyer and a 1982 Southern Africa Literature list. A postpaid return envelope is enclosed for your convenience in ordering additional copies of the labor study and any other items on the literature list.

At a time when the white minority regime is subjecting the growing black trade union movement to sustained attack, The Africa Fund has issued the first US report on the black labor movement in South Africa. The report provides the concise and insightful analysis necessary to understand the critical role of the black unions in the unfolding struggle against apartheid.

Another new research study just issued by The Africa Fund examines the role of the largest foreign investor in the United States, Anglo American Corporation of South Africa Ltd: Investments in North America by Ruth Kaplan carefully and thoroughly traces the controlling interest the Anglo group holds in oil, banking, mining and other interests in corporations in the US and Canada, and raises questions about the policy implications of this massive investment by South Africa's largest corporation. This 35 page research report, recently featured in a lengthy article in The Washington Post, is available for $5.00 to individuals, $25.00 to institutions.

A third report traces the legislative campaign for divestment of $200 million in Connecticut public pension funds invested in corporations aiding racism in South Africa. A complimentary sample copy of the case study of the Connecticut campaign, involving state legislators, trade unions, church and community organizations is available on request.Bulk orders can be placed on the literature list.

Other new publications now distributed by The Africa Fund are: Divesting From South Africa: A Prudent Approach for Pension Funds by Litvak et al, published by the Conference on Alternative State and Local Policy ($5.95), Automating Apartheid, an extensive new study on US computers in South Africa by NARMIC ($3.50) and Working For Freedom; Black Trade Union Development in South Africa Throughout the 1970's by Luckhardt and Wall published by the World Council of Churches ($7.95).

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Sincerely,

Paul Irish
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Black Unions in South Africa

“Our strength is in the economy. We have the power to bring the economy to its knees.”

—Black Worker at General Motors, July, 1980

Black workers are on the move in South Africa. In spite of government repression, they are organizing independent black unions. They have forced companies like Ford, General Motors and Volkswagen to recognize their unions and negotiate substantial wage increases. The South African government sees black workers’ growing power as a threat to the apartheid system where 4½ million whites exercise unmitigated control over 23 million black people. Yet the very power of the workers’ movement makes the state wary.

The South African economy is totally and permanently dependent on black labor. This simple fact is what makes the emerging black trade union movement a threat to the white minority regime. How long apartheid can survive could well be determined by the ways in which black workers use their power.

Time is not on the side of the white minority. In the years ahead more and more Africans will be living and working permanently in the 87% of South Africa reserved for whites. Today whites make up only 16% of the South African work force; by the year 2000 only 7% of the workers will be white. Shortages of skilled and semi-skilled workers, technicians, and office workers are forcing employers to fill these jobs, previously reserved for whites, with black workers.

This absolute dependence on black labor makes the government’s policy of treating Africans as citizens of separate Bantustans or “homelands,” not as South African citizens, a cruel and cynical hoax. The Bantustans are barren reservations where it is impossible to eke out a living. Africans are arbitrarily classified as citizens of these Bantustans on the basis of their ethnic (“tribal”) ancestry, even if they have never been near the Bantustan in their lives.

HISTORY OF THE BLACK UNIONS

Since the 1920s black workers in South Africa have organized unions to fight for human dignity and a decent standard of living, but even in the better years, these unions have lived in the shadow of illegality. In the 1920s the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union organized nearly 100,000 people at its height. Industrial unions were organized in the Transvaal, Johannesburg and Cape Town areas in the 1930s and early 1940s.

During and immediately after World War II there was a wave of strikes by black workers. The most important was the African mineworkers strike of 1946 when 100,000 miners shut down 21 mines. The strike was brutally crushed by the South African police who killed twelve strikers and injured 1,200.

The South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), closely allied with the African National Congress, was formed in 1955 as a coordinating body for 19 unions with 20,000 members. By 1961 it had grown to 35 unions with 53,000 members. SACTU organized mass strikes over political issues in the 1950s and early 1960s. By 1964 it had been driven into exile by police repression that included detention without trial of virtually all its organizers. Five SACTU activists died in police custody. This repression made it impossible for SACTU to operate as a union movement inside South Africa, although individual militants have carried on the SACTU tradition.
The destruction of SACTU inside South Africa had a profound effect on the trade union movement, and it wasn’t until the early 1970s that a new generation of workers were able to bring about the revival of militant trade unionism. An estimated 100,000 workers struck in the Durban area in 1973. Many of the black unions which are active today got started in this period. By the end of the 1970s, many employers were being forced to give black unions de facto recognition. They would bargain with the union over wages and working conditions but would not sign a contract or formally recognize the unions.

LABOR LEGISLATION
The Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act

The growth of black union activity forced the government to realize that the old tactics of direct repression were no longer adequate to control the black work force, and the laws governing the labor force would therefore have to be revised. The

The government formed a commission chaired by Professor Nic Wiehahn, to make recommendations for reform of the laws governing black labor. The recommendations were incorporated in the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act of 1979, which offered black unions official recognition and the possibility of negotiating legally binding contracts for the first time.

To obtain official recognition unions must register with the government. But registration is regarded as a privilege, not a right. The Act creates an Industrial Registrar to rule on applications for registration, with broad, virtually arbitrary powers to grant or deny the applications. In deciding whether to grant registration he may consider “any factor which would serve to maintain peace and harmony in the undertaking, industry, trade, or occupation, and the national interest in question.” There is absolutely no obligation to recognize a union which has the majority support of the workers.

Even if unions are permitted to register, virtually all strikes by black workers remain illegal. In South Africa a strike is illegal unless the union has gone through a long and complex conciliation procedure which takes twelve to eighteen months. Black workers feel they cannot wait that long to resolve urgent grievances, and that the procedure gives management the opportunity to prepare to withstand a strike by recruiting strikebreakers, stockpiling supplies, and similar measures. Picket lines are banned under South African law.

Labor Relations Act

In August 1981, the South African parliament passed the Labor Relations Act of 1981 designed primarily to extend government controls over the unregistered black unions. The act permits interracial unions to register and all African workers to join unions for the first time. But it also increases the penalties for strikes, forbids union political activity, bars dues checkoff for unregistered unions, and imposes new obligations to file reports with the government.

The Act makes it a crime for unions to pay strike benefits for an illegal strike and increases the possible sentence for strikers to one year in prison and a $1,040 fine. The Act makes it illegal for an employer to allow an unregistered union dues checkoff without special government permission. Both registered and unregistered unions will now have to submit a bewildering array of reports to the industrial registrar on membership, finances, officers, union constitutions, union offices, union locals and their officers and more. Complying with these reporting requirements would divert time from organizing into keeping records and filing reports.

It is too early to tell whether many black unions will seek to register under the Labor Relations Act. Shortly after it was introduced in parliament a conference of independent black unions declared that “we must refuse to subject ourselves to control by anybody except our own members. We therefore resist and reject the present system of registration insofar as it is designed to control and interfere in the internal affairs of the union.” The unions declared that they would defy the ban on providing financial support to striking workers.

Fanie Botha, the government minister in charge of union registration, provided perhaps the best description of the labor legislation when he told a white audience “we are registering black trade unions in order to control their activities.” To date only two independent black unions have been registered. Others have had their applications held up. Many black unions rejected the entire registration system, feeling that it entangles them in an elaborate legal trap which prevents them from functioning effectively.
GROWTH OF BLACK UNIONS

The last two years have seen fantastic growth by the black unions. Union membership has increased more than 50%, to about 150,000 workers. Although exact figures are difficult to obtain, this means that the black unions have probably organized about 10% of black production workers and 3% of urban black workers.

Despite their small size, black unions have demonstrated considerable strength in major industrial centers like Cape Town, East London and Port Elizabeth and in important industries like auto and rubber. The Johannesburg municipal workers strike in July 1980 brought the potential power of black unions home to white South Africa. When 10,000 city workers struck for union recognition and higher pay, city services ground to a halt and garbage piled up in the streets.

The power of the black unions is illustrated by the dramatic yearly increase in the number of strikes and work stoppages, and in the number of workers involved. Strikes by black workers cost employers 67,000 work days in 1979, 175,000 work days in 1980, and 226,500 work days in 1981. The 342 strikes and work stoppages in 1981 represent a 65 percent increase over the 207 strikes of 1980. These are government compiled statistics and cannot be considered complete. The government may simply not hear of some strikes or stoppages. Others are not recorded because they do not reflect the growing use of actions that fall short of work stoppage such as slow-downs and refusals to work overtime which are aimed at pressuring management.

STRIKES

Numbers of strikes and work days lost to employers tell only a small part of the story. To illustrate the problems confronting black workers and their unions it is necessary to look carefully at specific strikes. Three of the most important were the Cape Town meat workers strike of the Western Province General Workers Union, the Volkswagen workers strike in Uitenhague, and the Johannesburg municipal workers' strike.

Meat Workers

The meat workers' strike began over an attempt to organize Table Bay Cold Storage, one of the few non-union meat companies in the Cape Town area. The Table Bay workers walked out on May 7, 1980, after management refused to even discuss the recognition of an elected workers committee and demanded that they resign from the Western Province General Workers Union. When union meat workers throughout Cape Town walked out for one day to support Table Bay strikers they were locked out and nearly 800 of them were fired.

The South African government swiftly intervened to help break the strike. Riot police were used to support the lock out. Three union officials and two voluntary assistants were detained for periods ranging from seven to ten weeks. Public meetings to support the strike were banned. Forty two Table Bay strikers were deported to the Transkei, an impoverished rural "homeland" or Bantustan where they had no hope of making a living.

The strikers received magnificent support from the African and "Coloured" (mixed race) communities. A little over $105,000 was collected to help pay the strikers $13 a week.

A national boycott of red meat was launched. A campaign to discourage scabbing was less successful, especially after public meetings were banned by the government. Particularly damaging was the failure of skilled "Coloured" workers to walk out. They would have been much more difficult to replace with unskilled and semi-skilled African workers. The result was that the meat companies were able to stay in production although at a reduced level.

After three months the strike was called off. In the whole three months only thirteen strikers went back to work. The union promised that "Even in view of the recent setbacks workers in general would not give up in their attempts to build up organization in the future."

Volkswagen Workers Win

The issue in the strike at the Volkswagen plant in Uitenhague was money. The United Automobile, Rubber and Allied Workers Union (UAW) was demanding an increase from $1.20 to $2.10 an hour.

The strike, which began in June 1980 with 3,500 Volkswagen planners...
workers, soon spread throughout the Uitenhague area. Goodyear Tire and Rubber and other plants supplying the auto industry struck for similar wage demands. Ford and GM workers threatened to go out unless the Volkswagen wage demands were met.

At the height of the strike 7,500 workers from 11 factories were out. Barricades were set up in Uitenhague's black townships. A mass march through the center of the city was broken up by riot police firing shotguns and tear gas.

Volkswagen was caught with no cars to sell at a time when there was a boom in auto sales. The company lost between $9.6 million and $11.2 million a week throughout the two month strike.

The Financial Times of London reported that West German unions were pressuring Volkswagen management to negotiate rather than fire the strikers. A German union official flew to South Africa to help mediate the strike.

The strike was finally settled when the company agreed to pay $1.55 an hour immediately, increasing to $2.10 an hour by January 1982. Ford and GM agreed to the same wage scale. As a result of the strike Volkswagen and Ford agreed to full time, company paid shop stewards for black workers — an unprecedented move in South Africa.

Volkswagen management also agreed to commission a study by a neutral party to determine what constitutes a living wage in the Uitenhague area. While the company has not agreed to pay this living wage, union leaders saw it as an important concession. They felt that whatever figure was arrived at, it would be much higher than present wages, and would become the starting point for future negotiations.

**Johannesburg City Workers**

The strike by Johannesburg municipal workers in July and August of 1980 demonstrated both the power of black workers and the lengths to which South African authorities will go to crush a strike. About 10,000 workers belonging to the Black Municipal Workers Union struck to demand recognition of their union and a wage increase from approximately $43 a week to $75.40. The poverty level wage in Johannesburg is $54 a week.

Garbage piled up in the middle of Johannesburg. Thousands of workers from power stations, the city zoo, the health department, the city treasurer's office, and the public libraries joined the strike. But because the municipal workers were overwhelmingly "migrant," they were especially vulnerable. Migrant workers are allowed in Johannesburg only as long as they have a job, and are forced to live in single-sex hostels.

Johannesburg City Councillor Janet Levein described the hostels as places "where 12 people sleep in a cubicle which has no door... They sleep on bunk beds and must cook where they sleep... Food is kept in cardboard boxes beside their beds."

The city administration reacted to the strike by firing everyone who would not go back to work. 1,265 men who refused to return to work were herded into a compound where they were kept overnight, 60 to a room. In the morning they were forced onto buses by police wielding clubs and rifle butts and sent to the barren reserves or "homelands." Joseph Mavi, the president of the Black Municipal Workers Union was arrested under the Sabotage Act.

The strike was successfully broken but it left behind deep resentment among the workers who went back to work under threat of losing their jobs. The Black Municipal Workers Union is still active and may be heard from again.

**PROBLEMS BLACK UNIONS FACE**

These strikes highlight some of the critical problems facing the black unions. First is the question of registration, and the unions have been divided on it. Some have rejected registration outright, arguing that it is simply a device to control and tame the independent black unions. Others, in spite of the problems, have sought to register in the belief that registration facilitates contract agreements with employers.

Dealing with state repression and replacing leaders who are jailed, banned (placed under house arrest), or forced into exile is a continuing problem, particularly for the more militant unions. Tozamile Botha, who led a successful strike at the Ford Cortina plant in Port Elizabeth, was detained, then banned, and finally fled into exile. During the 1980 meat workers strike in Cape Town the leaders of the Western Province General Workers Union, which organized the strike, were arrested and held in custody.

There are numerous other examples. In each case the union involved must replace key leaders often in the middle of the most crucial struggles. Unless the unions can develop a solid corps of secondary leaders capable of taking over in these emergencies this repression will take a very severe toll on the black labor movement.

A continuing problem which has been exploited by employers is the division between African and "Coloured" workers. The black unions are fighting to organize both groups. Although "Coloured" workers are a fairly small minority (1,023,000 "Coloured" workers to 7,537,000 Africans) they are often in the crucial skilled jobs which can make the difference between the enterprise closing down or staying open during a strike. To date the black unions are almost entirely African although they continue to fight for the right to recruit "Coloured" workers.

Within the black union movement there is a continuing debate on how closely the unions should work with community organizations and to what extent they should take up political issues. Some trade unionists see the possibility of building strength on a purely industrial basis, thereby gaining substantial improvements in the lives of black workers. They argue that

The black community organized a highly successful meat boycott to supp...
unions which take explicitly political actions are likely to be crushed by state repression. Other union leaders argue that black workers' problems cannot be divided into "industrial" and "political" components since they all stem from the apartheid system. These people also feel that a close alliance with community organizations lends the unions added strength.

**PARALLEL UNIONS**

The most fundamental division among unions organizing black workers in South Africa today is between so-called parallel unions—black unions set up and controlled by white unions—and independent black unions. The parallel unions usually amount to company unions brought in by the employer to prevent more militant independent unions from organizing. Parallel unions are allowed the use of company facilities denied to the independent unions, and in some cases company personnel directors call black workers together and tell them which union to join. Black workers report that dues are deducted from their wages for a union they never joined, which holds no meetings, and has no shop stewards.

The Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA) has taken the lead in organizing the parallel unions. TUCSA is the largest trade union federation in South Africa, claiming a total membership of about 370,000 workers, 209,000 "Coloureds" and Indians, 97,000 whites, and 62,000 Africans. TUCSA has had an on again off again attitude toward organizing African workers. In 1969, bowing to pressure from white unions and the government, it expelled its African affiliated unions. More recently TUCSA decided to set up the parallel unions with white unions organizing and negotiating for African unions. The parallel African unions are run by officials from the white unions "on loan" to them. TUCSA General Secretary Arthur Grobbelaar wrote that even after the parallel union has appointed its own staff and officials "the administration (of parallel unions) should continue to be subject to the overall supervision of the registered (white) union." The best known parallel union leader is Lucy Mvubelo, General Secretary of the National Union of Clothing Workers. She has received widespread international publicity for her defense of South African government policies.

The National Union of Clothing Workers is affiliated with the white Garment Workers Union, and black union members complain that it makes all important decisions. Anna Scheepers, leader of the white union, is reputed to veto any action of the black union she doesn't like. "She calls the executive in and lectures them like grade school children and then lets them go back and reconsider. Usually they do."

TUCSA's willingness to organize African workers is motivated at least in part by a need to protect the interests of skilled white workers who feel threatened by "cheap" black labor. Black workers have complained that when the white registered unions negotiate on behalf of the parallel unions they protect their white skilled workers at the expense of less skilled black workers.

TUCSA affiliates have been eagerly and successfully registering under the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act. Almost all of the black unions which have successfully registered have been parallel unions. They hope that by registering to represent as many black workers as possible they will prevent independent black unions from being registered.

**TRADE UNION FEDERATIONS**

**Federation of South African Trade Unions**

The Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) is the oldest and largest existing national federation of black unions. Founded in 1979, it includes ten unions with a membership of 95,000 as of December 1981, up from 59,500 the previous year. They have union recognition agreements with over 30 companies. FOSATU unions organize auto workers, metal workers, food workers, transport workers, chemical and textile workers, among others. FOSATU exercises considerable authority over its affiliated unions. It has developed a strong professional leadership which targets areas for organizing and strikes. They try to take on only those companies where they are confident of winning.

FOSATU has survived and grown in spite of serious government harassment. In 1976, twenty two key leaders were banned when they were beginning to organize what would become FOSATU. In 1980, the government prohibited FOSATU from raising money through donations, cutting off contributions from the international labor movement.

FOSATU unions applied for registration under the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act. They believe it is essential that unions include both African and "Coloured" workers in order to be strong enough to successfully challenge hostile employers. FOSATU felt that the advantages of registering would outweigh the new government controls, provided they could register as interracial unions. The advantages include making it easier to reach union recognition agreements with employers, the possibility that registration would provide some protection against repression, and access to dues checkoff. To date none of their applications for registration have been granted. It is unclear what effect the Labor Relations Act of 1981 will have on their applications.

The FOSATU unions have tended to concentrate on economic and shop floor issues to the exclusion of community or general political issues. They feel that this is the area in which progress can be made in South Africa today and that tak-
The third union federation organizing black workers is the Confederation of Unions of South Africa (CUSA). CUSA consists of eight unions with approximately 45,000 members, 14,000 of whom are paid up. CUSA grew out of organizing efforts in the Johannesburg area which began in 1974, and was formally constituted in Soweto in 1980.

There is little policy difference between CUSA and FOSATU. To date CUSA organizes only African workers. But this seems to have more to do with the relative importance of African and "Coloured" workers in different industries and areas of the country than from disagreements on basic strategy.

CUSA unions have applied for registration. Two CUSA unions, the South African Chemical Workers Union, and the Laundry Cleaning and Dyeing Workers Union, have been permitted to register. They are the only independent black unions which have been registered to date.

CUSA has close ties with the Western European labor movement. It has received financial help from the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the British Trade Union Congress.

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MAJOR UNIONS

In addition to the three national federations there are a number of significant independent unions including the African Food and Canning Workers Union, the General and Allied Workers Union, the Black Media Workers Association, the General Workers Union (formerly the Western Province General Workers Union), the Black Municipal Workers Union, the Motors Assemblies and Components Workers Union, and the South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU). Of these, SAAWU and the General Workers Union are the most important and deserve further description.

South African Allied Workers Union

SAAWU is probably the fastest growing black union in South Africa. Its stronghold is in East London where it grew from 5,000 to 15,000 members between March and August 1980. SAAWU says it has between 16,000 and 23,000 members.

SAAWU was formed in late 1978. It has been called "as much a mass movement as a union." It recruits mainly from mass meetings in the black townships, and from workers who come into the union office. It organizes everyone it can, rather than picking out specific target groups.

SAAWU's industrial strategy centers around organizing a union committee in each plant where it has members. When 60-80% of the workers have joined the union they ask management to recognize the union committee. This strategy has resulted in numerous strikes, most of which have been defeated after the employer fired the workers and hired scabs to replace them.

But SAAWU has also had some notable victories. A number of companies including South African Chlorides, Johnson and
General Workers Union and the African Food and Canning Workers Union. FOSATU joined these unions in condemning the arrest and promising a campaign to free them including active opposition to the South African government’s Bantustan policy. They said, "The pious attitude of the South African government that the Ciskei’s activities are independent of it are as hollow as the South African government’s claims to uphold trade union autonomy." The big question facing SAAWU in the future is whether it can maintain its rapid growth in the face of continued repression and employer resistance. In the long run repeated strikes which end in defeat when the strikers are replaced by scabs may be as damaging to the union as state repression. SAAWU has recently formed an unemployed workers branch which seems to be made up of members who have been fired for their union activities. They hope to be able to organize unemployed workers not to scab on future strikes.

**General Workers Union**

The General Workers Union, founded in 1978 as the Western Province General Workers Union, is the major black union in Cape Town and the Western Cape area. While open to all workers in the area it has been strongest in the stevedoring and meat industries.

The General Workers Union is overwhelmingly African, a weakness since "Coloured" workers are especially important in the Western Cape. African workers cannot get resident rights in Cape Town and employers are only supposed to hire Africans when there are no "Coloureds" available. The result is that "Coloured" workers are concentrated in the skilled jobs with Africans holding low paid unskilled or semi-skilled jobs.

The General Workers Union has rejected registration at least until they can register as an interracial union as a matter of right. They also feel that registration involves government supervision of internal union affairs that undermines the workers' control over their unions.

This union has always based its operations on democratically elected plant committees. When these committees are strong enough they seek recognition from management. Workers from organized factories often take the lead in bringing new plants into the union. Workers from unorganized shops are invited to attend the general membership meetings held every two weeks in already organized factories. They are encouraged to go back to their own shops and recruit the nucleus of an organizing committee. At this point they are also put in touch with the union organizers.

The General Workers Union has the same activist approach to community and political issues as SAAWU. They both have a close working relationship with the African Food and Canning Workers Union, one of the oldest and most militant independent black unions and a former SACTU affiliate.

There are two conflicting pressures shaping the response to the black unions. First is the need for a stable black workforce and labor peace in an economy ever more dependent on black labor. This is leading some of the country’s largest employers to advocate recognition of any union representing the majority of employees. They would like to see "normal" labor relations on the European or American model and fear that repression will only bring more unrest. The second pressure comes from the government’s fear that independent black unions, with the power to shut down the economy, would become a center for political opposition to the apartheid system. At least for the present the government seems to intend to contain, rather than crush, the black unions.

Within these constraints the unions have to deal with the questions of growth and future direction. Long term growth will probably depend on their ability to win concessions from employers. While results have been mixed, with many strikes lost, substantial progress has been made by a number of unions. Auto workers in Port Elizabeth have now won three strikes in a little over a year on issues of wages and reinstatement of fired workers. SAAWU is forcing union recognition agreements from a growing number of East London firms, including for the first time a South African company, Buffalo Timbers. The FOSATU unions now have over 30 union recognition agreements. Announcements that employers have agreed to recognize independent black unions have become a weekly occurrence. Improvements in wages and working conditions will quickly follow union recognition.

**THE FUTURE**

The black unions are exploring new areas of cooperation and solidarity. A unity conference of 29 independent unions was held in Cape Town in August 1981. Among the unions represented were FOSATU, SAAWU, the General Workers Union, CUSA, the African Food and Canning Workers Union, the Black Municipal Workers Union, and the Motor Assemblies and Components Workers Union. The unions agreed to support each other against government attacks and to reject the government’s trade union legislation.

The unions discussed ways in which they could give each other organizational and financial support and help with con-
sumer boycotts of companies whose workers are on strike. They set up regional solidarity committees to promote unity on the local level. The 205 trade unionists arrested in the Ciskei in September 1981 were returning from the first meeting of the solidarity committee in East London.

It is difficult to make hard and fast predictions about the future of black unions in South Africa. Much depends on government policy, and the white minority regime has not made up its mind about what to do with the independent black labor movement. At present the unions are allowed to exist but are subjected to strict government controls. These controls are designed to prevent the unions from becoming too powerful and beginning to play a political role. However, the regime has not absolutely ruled out action to crush the black labor movement through direct government repression. Every week brings new stories of trade unionists arrested, detained or banned by the government.

Every time workers stand up to their employers and win, it gives others new hope and confidence. The black unions are growing extremely rapidly and show every sign of being able to continue that growth at least for the immediate future.

Among the unions which have grown fastest are those that are the most militant and stress involvement in community and political issues. Continuing repression is forcing unions like FOSATU, which traditionally have been reluctant to deal with political issues, into actively opposing the government.

It seems likely that black workers will press their unions to take up political issues. This pressure arises out of the reality of workers' day to day lives. As a SAAWU leader said in a recent interview, "The exploitation does not end on the shop floor; it goes beyond the factories to the locations. In the locations we experience other forms of exploitation: rents, housing, the compounds, paying for children's education, and so on. It doesn't end on the shop floor and even the labor laws are being made by the politicians."**

If the unions respond to this challenge and play an active role in opposing the apartheid system they can become a powerful new force for liberation in South Africa. Black workers and their unions will be key to any struggle for freedom and human dignity in South Africa in the years ahead.

Written by
Sandy Boyer
The Africa Fund
February, 1982

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New Crackdown on Unions

As this review is going to press the South African government has launched a brutal crackdown on the black trade union movement. On February 5 Neil Aggett, the Transvaal Secretary of the African Food and Canning Workers Union, was found dead, hanging in his cell in security police headquarters.

He had been detained without charge or trial since November 27, when seventeen people closely connected with militant black unions were arrested. Many others had their homes and offices searched.

Two hundred thousand black workers throughout South Africa stopped work for half an hour to honor Neil Aggett on February 11. They were sending the white regime a message that they would stand by their unions and would not be intimidated.

The repression has been aimed at three unions in particular: The South African Allied Workers Union, The African Food and Canning Workers Union and the General and Allied Workers Union. The three are among the most militant and political of the black unions. SAAWU and the Food and Canning Workers have a close working relationship in East London.

SAAWU has been especially hard hit by the detentions, mostly made under the Terrorism Act, which allows indefinite incommunicado detention in solitary confinement without charge or trial. Virtually its entire top leadership, including the president, vice president, general secretary and treasurer are now in prison. By singling out SAAWU the government is clearly trying to crush what it sees as the activist wing of the black union movement. Judging by the massive protest against Neil Aggett's death, they are unlikely to succeed.

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Footnotes

3. Luckhart and Wall, op. cit., p.3.
5. Ibid., p. 16.
8. Ibid., p. 18-21.
9. Ibid., p. 3.
10. Africa Confidential, March 11, 1981.
15. The Citizen, August 8, 1980.
21. Ibid.
25. Africa Confidential, op. cit.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
30. SASPU National, September, 1981
34. Rand Daily Mail, October 31, 1980.
35. Ibid.
37. Rand Daily Mail, op. cit.
41. SASPU National, August, 1981.