

# Labor Against Apartheid

Summer 1986, Vol. 3, No. 3

The South African regime has jailed nearly 1,000 trade unionists from all levels of the independent union movement since the imposition of a new State of Emergency on June 12th. Detainees include COSATU president Elijah Barayi, the General Secretary of the Metal and Allied Workers Union Moses Mayekiso, and the General Secretary of the Council of Unions of South Africa Phiroshaw Camay, who was later released. Amon Msane, branch secretary of the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (a COSATU affiliate), was arrested at the Johannesburg airport on his return from a U.S. tour in solidarity with laid-off 3M workers in New Jersey.

The government has focused its police powers on COSATU demonstrating just how much a threat the new federation has become. The new emergency dates back to the May Day general strike led by COSATU. The stay-away was enormously successful, with 70-90% of Black workers throughout the country refusing to go to work—100% in Capetown and 93% in the mines. The demand to make May Day a national holiday was basically a demand for South African business to sever its alliance with the Afrikaner government. Other demands included union rights to organize, student rights in education, freedom of political activity, and an end to laws enforcing the migrant labor system. In the face of overwhelming labor discipline and solidarity, employers chose not to retaliate with mass firings and penalties as in past stay-away protests.

The stakes became higher when COSATU then joined with the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the National Education Crisis Committee to call for a second stay-away on June 16, commemorating the Soweto Uprising of 1976. The June 16 protest signalled the full entry of the labor movement into the political struggle and the consolidation of its growing ties with community centers of resistance. Clearly, the Botha government was acutely alarmed by both the organizational capacities and

## The Crisis Deepens



In New York City, 100,000 demonstrators joined the June 14 March Against Apartheid.

economic clout COSATU brings to the general movement.

The State of Emergency is a pre-emptive blow, intended to sweep away crucial layers of organizational leadership and to inflict high costs on any expressions of dissent. Police moved into action before the decree was announced, shutting down union offices and opposition newspapers. The emergency decree gave police and army total reign: detentions are unlimited, the names of those arrested may not be published, security forces are exempt from any legal liability in connection with arrests, convictions carry 10-year prison terms.

The blackout on news coverage shields the security forces, and of course, blocks worldwide witness to events. The government is hoping to control the images of conflict to suggest that violence stems from African sources, especially from tribal strife. More effectively, censorship makes communication between organized protest forces within South Africa extremely difficult.

Nonetheless, first-hand reports from South Africa have leaked out, indicating that COSATU and the United Democratic Front are primary targets of detention. Security forces have sealed off

the headquarters of COSATU, the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA), and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), in addition to raiding the South African Council of Churches. They have arrested hundreds of second-level and local leaders from at least 13 of the largest and most militant unions, including the mineworkers, auto workers, dock workers, food workers, clothing and textile workers, chemical and transport workers. Shop stewards, the heart of the labor movement, are especially hard hit. The Labor Monitoring Group, an independent research organization, reported in the June 27th *Weekly Mail* that unionists in the Natal region believe the government is trying to clear the way for UWUSA organizers.

How effective is the crackdown likely to be in slowing the organized struggle? On June 16, Soweto Day, the call for a national stay-away was universally observed according to all accounts—Soweto itself was a picture of silent defiance, while the streets of Johannesburg were empty.

In the following week, a new mobilization developed in the workforce. One report indicated that a

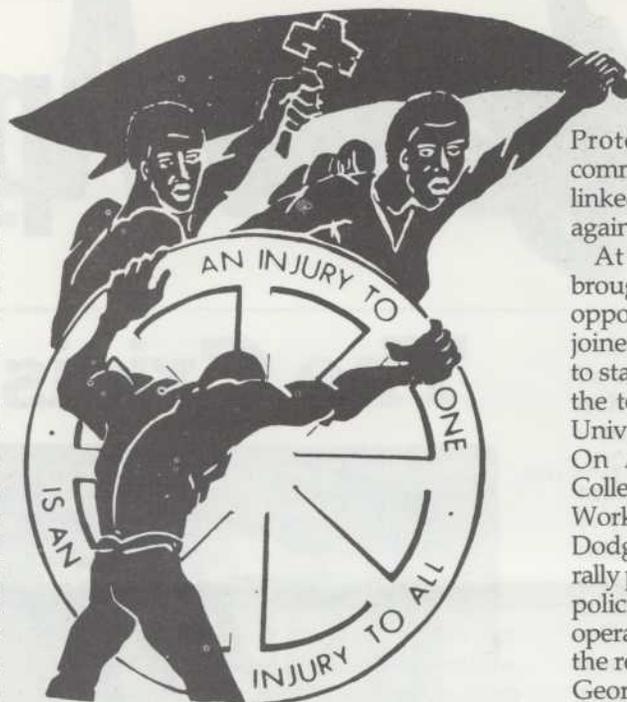
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# U.S. Students Spur Campaign for Divestment

The US press is expressing outrage at the news blackout imposed by the Botha regime, suppressing all independent coverage of events in the South Africa crisis. However, outrage is warranted here at home over the failure of the press to cover the wave of protest against apartheid that swept US campuses this spring.

The "Weeks of Action" campaign ran from March 21, the anniversary of the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre, to April 6, the anniversary of the execution of African National Congress freedom fighter Solomon Mahlangu. It involved thousands of students in anti-apartheid protests on over 100 campuses in 35 states. A central focus was the call for universities to divest their holdings in companies doing business with South Africa.

On fifteen campuses, students built shanty-towns to demonstrate the oppression of apartheid, prompting dramatic confrontations with administration and police who repeatedly attempted to demolish the shanties. In the course of these actions, over 300 students were arrested. Civil disobedience tactics also included sit-ins at administration buildings and blockades at college trustee meetings. Other actions included fasts, marches and picketing at the offices of



## COSATU

corporations with South African operations, notably Shell, Mobil Oil, IBM, Coca-Cola, and Citibank.

In addition, students held citywide rallies in Washington DC, New York, Atlanta and Chicago. A speaking tour of southern campuses was co-sponsored by the Africa Fund and CISPEs, opposing US policy in South Africa and Central America. A National Divestment

Protest Day held on April 4 commemorated Martin Luther King and linked anti-apartheid action to struggles against racism in this country.

At least two campus campaigns brought students together with unions opposing apartheid. At Yale, students joined union and community members to stage a sit-in on April 22, demanding the total divestment of \$400 million in University assets linked to South Africa. On April 4, students at Dartmouth College held a rally with the United Steel Workers of America outside the Phelps-Dodge headquarters in New York. The rally protested company's union-busting policies in the US as well as its mining operations in South Africa, and called for the removal of Phelps-Dodge chairman George Monroe from the Dartmouth Board of Trustees.

The Weeks of Action showed both the breadth and vitality of the student anti-apartheid movement. Several of the shanty-town actions persisted well into April. By the close of the semester, commitments for total divestment had been won at Northeastern, the University of Connecticut, the University of Wyoming and Duke.

In America, as in South Africa, we are learning that just because it isn't on the nightly news doesn't mean it isn't happening.

## Updates from South Africa

### Sarmcol Strikers Form Coops

The strike of 1,000 workers at the BTR-SARMCOL rubber plant at Howick in the province of Natal, South Africa, is now entering its fifteenth month, but workers are far from defeated. Despite the mass firing of the strikers by the British multinational, the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU), a COSATU affiliate, is pursuing its demand for union recognition and has helped strikers set up the SARMCOL Workers' Cooperatives (SAWCO) to provide alternative jobs and services in the community.

The SAWCO initiative began with a T-shirt cooperative, designed and managed by strikers. It has recently expanded to include a small agricultural coop, a food purchasing coop, a health screening clinic, and a cultural coop that has produced a play on the strike. There are studies underway to add four more

enterprises in sandal-making, wire-meshing, carpentry and coffin manufacture. The coops are all worker-controlled. Jobs are rotated to include as many strikers as possible. Those who cannot be employed by SAWCO or the few small employers in the area receive weekly food parcels from the union.

But SAWCO has not only aided the strikers' struggle for subsistence. It has given union members new skills and a new spirit of independence. SAWCO has also forged links with youth and women's groups, health professionals, and community organizations. Union leaders see the cooperative movement as an important vehicle for promoting economic self-sufficiency in Black townships and enlarging the labor movement's role in community development.

### The Impala Effect

When Gencor's Impala Platinum mines in the so-called homeland of Bophuthatswana fired over 20,000 striking workers last January, the company assumed its labor problems were ended. But it turns out that inexperienced replacement workers have cost Gencor 45 million rand in lost production and its profits are sharply depressed. Moreover, the National Union of Mineworkers has declared GENCOR an "enemy corporation" and promises to increase pressure on the company. Financial experts in South Africa have labeled GENCOR's backfired strategy "the Impala Effect"—a warning to other businesses that workers are not expendable and that mass firings can carry a steep price.

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## Focus on COSATU

INTERVIEW WITH DAVE LEWIS



Dave Lewis (at the right-hand side of picture) with other members of the General Workers Union at the COSATU founding convention.

The following interview was conducted in June with Dave Lewis, an organizer for the General Workers Union, an affiliate of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). Mr. Lewis, who participated in the formation of the new federation, is presently in the US as a visiting scholar in African studies.

**Q. What conditions prompted the formation of COSATU last year? Why had the time come for a single labor federation?**

**Lewis:** First of all, as organizing stepped up in South Africa, unions were coming into conflict with one another on the shop floor and were spending more time

arguing against each other rather than against the bosses. This led to the realization that a formal structure was needed for resolving inter-union disputes.

COSATU's goal is to create one national union for each sector of industry. This policy leaves unions in charge of their internal affairs, but where jurisdictional conflicts arise, there is now a regional structure for resolving them. If the national unions cannot sort it out, the COSATU executive committee would decide.

A second pressing reason for COSATU is the very large proportion of unorganized workers throughout the

country. Our experience has shown that the resources of a large federation were needed. For instance, in organizing sectors of the economy such as railways, agriculture or state services, the bosses were just too powerful for a single local union.

A third reason for COSATU is that unions found themselves increasingly involved in political campaigns. They began more and more to work together on campaigns like the fight against the new constitution, forced removals, rent increases and the like. Finally, we all felt the need for a clear worker presence within the mainstream of the political developments in South Africa.

**Q. What problems have surfaced as the unions in each industry start to merge under COSATU?**

**Lewis:** Unions had developed in their own separate ways, with their own structures and traditions, which workers felt strong attachments to. Unions were also isolated from each other regionally. But increasingly, people realize that these differences are not so great as to interfere with the main purpose. I think the largest difficulties lie in the merging of unions which are splits from earlier unions, or where merging unions are not the same size, so that smaller unions fear losing influence.

**Q. What proportion of workers are now represented by COSATU?**

**Lewis:** In South Africa, about 1.3 million workers are organized. This includes the white racist unions. COSATU has about half—650,000 members—and has great potential for growth because of its wide experience and industrial base.

Another union grouping is CUSA, the Council of Unions of South Africa. They lost about half their membership when their largest affiliate, the National Union of Mineworkers, decided to join COSATU. It's a pity CUSA is out. Everyone would have wanted them to be in. I think they will realize the need for a larger sphere of influence and resources. A third grouping is the Azanian Congress of Trade Unions, also rather small.



**Q. What is your view of the new union started by the Inkatha Movement, the organization of Mangosuthu Buthelezi, chief of the KwaZulu homeland? We have heard that Buthelezi is fueling vigilante activity against COSATU, the United Democratic Front, and activists in the townships. Is it true that his new union is headed by businessmen and KwaZulu government officials?**

**Lewis:** Anyone who really cares about workers must be quite angry about the formation of the United Workers of South Africa (UWUSA), which is headed by an Inkatha businessman with no union background. Their primary motive is not organizing workers, but to replace COSATU. I do not think they are succeeding. After two weeks, they claimed to have signed up 82,000 members. Anyone who has had experience in organizing knows that this is a preposterous figure. Nevertheless, there are places in the towns where pro-Inkatha bosses will put a lot of pressure on workers to join.

**Q. How much of a problem is tribalism?**

**Lewis:** The main problem is not one of tribalism. Rather, it becomes an issue in circumstances where the bosses purposely favor one group over another. Pitting one group against another is often used as a tactic of control. This can be overcome through the way that the union is organized. One must start by always seeing that workers feel at home at meetings and that more than just a single member of any given group attends meetings. This can lead to painfully long meetings, where everything must be translated into five or six languages, but it is necessary.

What may be more of a problem is the suspicion and mistrust among racial groups—colored, African and Indian—a problem also caused by apartheid laws. But racial divisions can be broken down, as happened on the docks in Capetown. When my union, the General Workers Union, started organizing dockworkers, there was real hostility between coloreds and Africans. The shop steward committee has been able to deal successfully with many of the problems

and the most recent stewards elections were significant in that workers no longer voted along color lines. The problem is deeper among Africans and Indians in Durban, where Inkatha is organizing on racial lines.

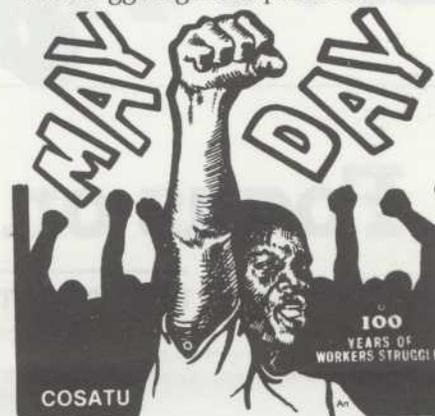
**Q. What can American unionists do to support the South African non-racial unions?**

**Lewis:** American trade unionists can develop close links, such as those between COSATU and the Labor Committee Against Apartheid. That is the first priority. Secondly, unions can continue to support the general anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, which of course will benefit COSATU as well.

In addition, unions here in the United States can make an effort to let people know about the activities and role of unions in South Africa. Trade unions in South Africa are not solely interested in better wages and working conditions. This is an important aspect of their duties, but they are also part of the larger, political movement for a free South Africa. Labor and freedom struggles cannot be separated.

I must say I am very disturbed by some recent reports in several South African papers that the AFL-CIO is considering assisting the Inkatha front, UWUSA. This would be a very grave setback in relations between any American trade unions and the South African unions.

We must recognize the fact that there exists a certain amount of mistrust on the part of South Africans towards the intentions of American trade unions. I think time will overcome many of these suspicions and differences, since many US unions are extraordinarily active in the struggle against apartheid.



However, should the AFL-CIO support an organization such as Inkatha, which was specifically set up to challenge the major South African union federation, the results would be disastrous. Not only would this further impair relations between the AFL-CIO and COSATU, but it would harm relations between all American unions and COSATU. If there is any indication that assistance may be given to Inkatha, I think that unions here in the United States should organize very strongly to oppose it.



## Pass Laws: Reformed or Rewritten?



Magubane

Little else symbolizes the horror of apartheid as forcefully as the pass laws, imposed in the 1950s and recently abolished by the South African government. Is Botha's reform a signal that apartheid is yielding on policy, even as it steps up its repression of protest? To answer, we must understand what purposes the pass laws have served.

Passes are identity documents that Black people in South Africa have been forced to carry under penalty of arrest. The pass stated where the holder could work, live and travel. A pass specifying that the holder was employed at the Ford Motor Company in the city of Port Elizabeth meant that he or she was not entitled to take up a job in Johannesburg. In fact, that Black resident of Port Elizabeth could only visit another city for up to 72 hours—to stay longer meant imprisonment.

And under the pass laws, millions of Black South Africans went to prison. Thousands of others were sentenced to work as parolees for white farm owners. Families were broken apart. In South Africa, the "pass raid" evokes images of

policemen forcing their way into homes (no warrant required) to separate children from parents, wives from husbands—all because a family member did not have a pass or have the right pass.

The pass laws demonstrated that apartheid is a system of racial oppression, but also a system of economic exploitation. By restricting the freedom of Africans to work or live where they wanted, the pass laws controlled the supply of labor and held workers hostage to their employers. The people who suffered most heavily were those designated to live in the barren rural reservations called "bantustans" or "homelands." These homelands are part of apartheid's grand design. They are considered independent countries under apartheid, thereby isolating large parts of the African population, denying them citizenship, and forcing them into migrant labor status.

The residents of the homelands can only come to the city if they have work. And they can only get work through government labor bureaus which assign

jobs for 12-month terms. The young men given permission to work go off to the city or work site alone, living in single-sex dormitories, leaving behind the women, children, and old people.

Workers cannot change jobs, except by returning to the homeland for a new work assignment. If a worker loses his job, then his presence in an urban area becomes illegal. If a worker goes on strike, he risks losing his job, his bed in the dormitory, and his permit to remain in the city. He also risks being listed at the labor bureau, never to get another job. Needless to say, the pass laws that helped enforce these regulations were a formidable weapon of intimidation for employers.

So it is little wonder that pass laws have generated great resistance from the people of South Africa, most memorably in the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960 where 69 people were killed protesting them. Nor is it surprising that the new labor federation of South Africa, COSATU, made the abolition of the pass laws a founding demand. Last November, COSATU president Elijah Barayi declared that if pass laws were not repealed within six months, COSATU members would lead a pass burning campaign.

In May, as the deadline loomed, the South African government announced with great fanfare that the pass laws were repealed. Clearly, they wished to avert a direct challenge to the labor system. And they wished to convey to the world an image of reform.

In reality, the abolition of the pass laws means that other laws now govern the supply of labor. The eight million Africans living in the homelands still do not have citizenship in South Africa, so immigration laws will be used to control their access to jobs and their migrant labor status. Furthermore, workers can only change their city of residence, and seek new jobs, if they can establish that they have obtained housing at their destination. The acute shortage of housing in the segregated Black townships makes relocation a slim chance.

That the apartheid government had to abandon the pass laws, a powerful symbol of white supremacy, is tribute to COSATU's organizational strength and the fear inspired by its proposed pass burning campaign. However, the changes remain symbolic: immigration laws will replace the pass laws and housing will regulate the flow of people to the cities. More than anything else, the changes in the pass laws show that South African workers cannot expect freedom from Botha's reforms.

NY Labor Committee  
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wave of wildcat strikes by union members had reached over 100 stores, seven pharmaceutical plants and eight chemical factories demanding the release of shop stewards and that companies take an active role against the apartheid government. The National Union of Mineworkers launched a consumer boycott while up to 2000 miners struck the De Beers diamond mines in protest.

Business leaders seriously affected by the strikes were said to be pressing for meetings with the Minister of Law and Order. The chairman of the Pick 'n Pay store chain appeared on the MacNeil-Lehrer Report on June 19, claiming business had nowhere to turn in trying to negotiate peace with the workers, since their leadership was largely in jail. It is a measure of the depth of the crisis that business is increasingly trapped between the government's refusal to dismantle apartheid and labor's resolve to challenge the system.

The pressure is increased with the renewed call for international sanctions and divestment. In the past month, both Canada and Denmark passed legislation to cut off trade and investments with South Africa. In the US, the House stunned the Reagan Administration by passing the Dellums Bill, a strong sanction measure which the president has vowed to veto. However, it will be increasingly costly for Reagan to stonewall sanctions as the Congressional elections approach. Commonwealth leaders also made a forceful plea for sanctions in the wake of the crackdown. And massive Soweto Day demonstrations in New York, London, Paris and Rome have put Western governments even more on the spot.

What seems clear from these developments is that the State of Emergency will not end the crisis of apartheid or break the momentum of resistance that has been building over the past two years. Simply put, the people of South Africa are too mobilized,

their leadership is too deep, and the world is too aware. Whether the immediate situation continues as a stalemate or leads to intensified confrontation, the apartheid regime cannot govern. It can only terrorize, a condition made plain by Botha's new laws giving unrestrained power to security forces when the state of emergency is lifted.

But terror cannot run an economy, as both business and COSATU know well. With critical national contracts in the mining and metal industries up for negotiation this summer, the stage is set for a new round of economic and political struggle.

The NYLCAA calls on New York-area unionists to demand the release of South African trade unionists by sending letters and telegrams to the South African Ambassador J.H.A. Beukes, 3051 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008. AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland has made a similar appeal nation-wide.

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