

South Africa Labor News



Published by the Free South Africa Labor Committee
San Francisco Bay Area
Number 7, October 1990



147

ANC/COSATU Condemn Inkatha-Police Violence

In the last three years, over 3,000 Black South Africans have been killed, mostly in Natal Province, in a campaign by KwaZulu bantustan Chief Gatsha Buthelezi against the liberation movement. Specially targeted have been members of the Congress of South African Trade Unions and the United Democratic Front.

Since the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of

the African National Congress and other liberation organizations, violent attacks by vigilante gangs of Buthelezi's organization Inkatha have spread to the main industrial townships around Johannesburg. COSATU has called the attacks "an orches-

trated reign of terror by Inkatha and elements of the security forces, particularly the South African Police. The violence...has been pre-meditated, planned and brutally executed against defenceless civilians."

COSATU notes that it warned authorities before attacks took place. "Despite this nothing was done to stop them. On the contrary, the police have consistently been seen to be siding with
(continued on page 7)

Mandela Receives Hero's Welcome in Bay Area

In This Issue:

**From Lusaka -
Exclusive Inter-
view with SACTU
Leaders on
COSATU Merger**

**John F. Henning &
Curtis McClain
Hail Nelson Man-
dela & the ANC**



Exclusive Interview:

SACTU Leaders Hail Trade Union Unity in South Africa -

The trade union movement in South Africa has reached new heights. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), with 1.5 million members, is the largest and most powerful trade union federation in the history of that country. While COSATU is only five years old, it is the latest phase in a nearly 70-year history of multi-racial labor organizing within South Africa.

The predecessor of COSATU was the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). Unlike its heir, SACTU was not allowed by the South African government to organize openly and legally. Founded in 1955, the organization immediately became popular. But by the early 1960's, the government had either jailed, executed, exiled or driven underground most of the SACTU leadership. Despite its hardships, the federation was able to boast a membership of more than 50,000 at the height of its operations. SACTU eventually moved its headquarters to Lusaka, Zambia, where it remains today.

The similarity of the names of the two organizations is no coincidence. As SACTU had before it, COSATU has a multi-racial constituency. And like SACTU, COSATU is also closely allied with the African National Congress. Perhaps most significant is the fact that SACTU leaders played a major role in the creation of COSATU. Earlier this year, SACTU announced that it would "phase out," and that its members would join COSATU.

Two people who have helped to make labor history in South

Africa are Mark Shope and Eric Mtshali. Comrade Shope is the head of SACTU's Education Department, and served as general secretary of that organization from 1961-74. He came to SACTU originally from the Laundry, Cleaning and Dyeing Workers Union. He was the leader of SACTU during a critical period, the first years of its underground existence.

Comrade Mtshali is the deputy head of SACTU's International Department. While living in South Africa, he worked as an organizer for the South African Railway and Harbour Workers Union, the Milling Workers Union, and at various times organized workers in the shoe, clothing, textile, transport and road construction industries.

Both Shope and Mtshali were forced to leave South Africa during the early 1960's, along with many of their SACTU associates. They have since lived

Lusaka in August by David Shelton, co-chair of the Free South Africa Labor Committee.

Q: How have the South African labor movement's activities differed in recent times from the era in which they took place underground?

MS: Well, the activities of today are not underground. They have to be open, because the government has created the Labour Relations Act, which to a limited extent gives the trade union movement freedom to operate.

Q: That was during the late 1970's?

MS: It was 1979-81. It's not like in the past, when the African trade unions were not allowed to operate, or were not registered. The African workers were divided into two groups on sex grounds. The African men were regarded as pass-bearing natives in terms of the Industrial Conciliation Act of

to operate from underground was not an easy task...all these years, our goal was the formation of a trade union center

in various places in Africa and Europe, gaining an important perspective on the international labor scene. They now reside in Lusaka, and work at SACTU's headquarters. In the following interview, Shope and Mtshali reflect on some of the goals of organized labor in South Africa, and remember the time when those goals appeared much harder to achieve.

They were interviewed in

1924. Therefore, they were not defined as employees under the law, while African women, because they were not carrying passes, were defined as employees in terms of the Industrial Conciliation Act. Now, the ICA has been amended, and the African workers are now under the Labor Relations Act, and are included in the definition of employee.

Now, to operate from underground was not an easy task,

because organizers or officials of the union could not say, for instance, that they belonged to SACTU. Saying that invited banning, that is, stopping them from operating as union officials. So, today things are much better. It is true that the Labor Relations Act has got some restrictions, but it's not like it was before.

EM: First of all, it was unusual to have trade unions operating underground. We had to work in the specific South African conditions of illegality. The regime made it impossible for us to function legally, so we were forced to go underground. It had its own problems, because a trade union organization has to take up the grievances of the workers to the bosses. It was a trial-and-error method during the early

federation came from us, and we introduced it to the comrades at home. So, we had to stand by our own principles. We decided that we've done, maybe not enough, but a lot. We felt that now we could phase out and fuse into COSATU. We had to call the COSATU comrades and discuss this with them, and this was welcomed by them. Of course, there were no problems, because they knew we were a party in the formation of COSATU itself.

Q: What is the significance of the merger of COSATU and SACTU, and what has COSATU gained from the merger?

MS: COSATU will have in its midst some experienced trade unionists who have trade union training, which a number of the

ing people belong to a class, and the trade union movement is a class organization. If the movement allows itself to be coopted into government structures, it loses that position of defending the workers. It must maintain financial independence as well. A trade union movement which relies on government funding, or employer funding, cannot make a decision in the interest of its members.

The policy of SACTU from its very foundation has been that we would like to see in South Africa one industrial union and one national federation. We don't believe in the division of workers where you have many different federations within a country.

In South Africa there were many federations, and we needed to bring them together. We haven't succeeded in doing that entirely, but we are proud to say that we have one very big federation - the biggest in the history of South Africa.

As you know, South Africa is a country with an apartheid system. White workers have a federation of their own. We want to persuade even the whites that it is important for South African workers to speak with one voice all the time. There is no need for us to be divided on the racial question. We shouldn't allow such a thing to continue.

I think the developments inside the country are definitely encouraging this kind of thing. I mean that there is a promising climate of one day South Africa having a government that represents all South African people.

Q: Do you mean that the current negotiations are making

the trade union movement in South Africa has more than 70 years of history; it's the oldest trade union movement on the continent of Africa

days. But finally we managed to devise a method of operating underground.

The whole idea behind it was to finally form a legal trade union federation. All these years, since we started in the late 1960's, our goal was the formation of a trade union center. We knew though SACTU was still popular, it was going to be difficult to give the name SACTU to the new federation. The regime would have immediately clamped down on it. So we helped to form COSATU, and COSATU became a powerful organization. There was no reason why we should compete. The whole idea of one country, one

COSATU comrades do not have. We think they can assist COSATU. COSATU will have organizers who are politically trained on certain issues, for instance on economics, or on the role of the trade union movement within the national liberation movement.

We say that the movement must remain independent at all times - independent of the government, independent of employers, and independent of political parties. We believe that the trade unions, from their very foundation, have been organizations of the working people. Their role is to oppose exploitation. The work-

Call for Sister-Union Solidarity with U.S. Unions

SACTU Interview, cont.

this possible?

EM: We are "phasing out" to make sure we are fusing into COSATU. The trade union movement today in South Africa will benefit from the experience of SACTU during the 35 years when we were functioning both legally and illegally. What we have learned during our stay in exile, I'm sure our comrades need at home, especially the young generation.

The present generation of trade unionists at home is not aware of the history of the trade union movement. I'm sure some of them think that the union movement in South Africa started with the formation of COSATU, and yet the trade union movement in South Africa has more than seventy years of history. It's the oldest trade union movement on the continent of Africa. Our experience in South Africa is very rich, and we need to impart that experience to the younger generation of workers.

It's an experience that is not only based on trade unionism, but on the linking of both political and trade union work. With us in South Africa, there is no way that politics can be separated from the trade unions. That is a luxury which our people cannot afford. If we keep workers out of politics, the politicians will give us two cents today, and take it away tomorrow through legislation.

Q: What kind of assistance is COSATU seeking from European and U.S. trade unions?

MS: Every newly-formed organization has different problems. Among other things, it has a shortage of staff, a problem of training new activists. Even meeting office expenses is a problem. Our friends, both in Europe and America, should assist us in trying to get funds in

meeting some of these expenses.

We are thinking in the near future of building a trade union college. In the history of the movement of many countries this has been important. In Britain there is a trade union college, and in France and other countries there are trade union schools. We think that it's time that some sort of trade union school should be built in South Africa.

EM: We also want active support for all the campaigns conducted by the mass liberation movement, headed by the African National Congress. If we call for a boycott of South African products, the workers in the U.S. must support it. Part of U.S. capital is invested in South Africa. Unemployment in the U.S. is therefore partly caused by the fact that American capital, which should be creating jobs in the U.S., is invested in South Africa, simply because there is cheap labor there.

Q: Would COSATU welcome a

unemployment in the U.S. is partly caused by American capital, which should be creating jobs in the U.S., invested in South Africa, simply because there is cheap labor.

"sister union" program between South African unions and their U.S. counterparts?

MS: We believe that it's important for American and South African unions to have a closer relationship. If South African workers have a close relationship with American workers, they will be able to appeal to their class brothers in the United States to pressure their same employers. In the South African railway system there have been two strikes, for

instance, in 1987 and 1990, very bloody strikes. South African railway workers need a way to appeal to their American class brothers for support during those strikes.

EM: We have been thinking about this idea for a very long time, and we think it would be very useful if it were implemented. We have not worked out how it should function yet. At first we thought it would assist in the non-alignment policy of COSATU - that is, their policy of not affiliating with any international trade union organization.

When I go home, I'll be going back to work in the South African Harbour and Railway Workers Union (SARHWU). If SARHWU were linked to similar unions in the United States, or in any other country, it would mean establishing bilateral relations with that union. They could assist us in education, or maybe even in fundraising.

Our unions are still poor. They're coming out from underground after many years, so we're still having problems. Perhaps South African unions could be

invited to make fundraising tours in countries where we have these types of relations. For education purposes, it would be valuable to learn the experiences of unions in countries where we have sister unions.

Q: What if you don't agree with the political philosophy of a would-be sister union?

EM: I want to make an example. When the U.S. invaded Panama, maybe some unions in

the U.S. supported the policy of their government in that invasion. We may feel that it was an invasion that was uncalled-for. But we don't have to discuss it or agree. What he have to discuss is cooperation, such as in the fields of education or solidarity.

Q: Which U.S. union would make a proper match for SARHWU?

EM: In the U.S. there are two separate unions - railway workers and harbour workers, or long-shoremen. I'm sure we can link

We need to make sure that almost every industry is organized, and to make sure that the trade union movement really represents the interests of the workers. The minute we forget that, the trade union movement will go to pieces. It would be an organization with no life in it.

EM: I also think the future is bright. As you can see, COSATU is growing by leaps and bounds, and within the next five years or so, South Africa will be free. Therefore, we hope that the trade union movement for the first time

the major problems in the development of the trade union movement in South African has been the problem of racism. South Africa has institutionalized racism. So, with the elimination of apartheid, it will mean that workers of all races can come into a single trade union federation. A single federation in South Africa would be a very powerful force with which any future government would have to reckon.

We are not looking forward to having a trade union organization for whites, and one for Black people, but one single federation which will bring together workers of all races. The problem facing the workers in South Africa, as in other parts of the world, are the multinational corporations. These powerful multinational corporations must be weakened, so we need a united working class force. Otherwise, there is no way to fight them, because they can't be fought with a divided working class.

So we view the ending of apartheid and racism with great interest. That is why we are fully participating in the ANC. We are members of the ANC because we're interested in ending racism. We're interested in a democratic and non-racial South Africa. If that is to be formed, it requires the full participation of workers of all nations, regardless of their political affiliations.

we are not looking forward to having a trade union organization for whites, and one for Black people, but one single federation which will bring together workers of all races.

up with longshoremen. I think we can also link up with unions that represent railway workers in the States. The whole idea is not to interfere with the policies of each union, but to find what is common between us. As our unions are relatively new after many years of suppression, there are a lot of things that we'll definitely need from U.S. workers.

Q: How should a sister-union program be implemented?

MS: Some way should be found to contact South African unions industry by industry. When we meet our colleagues from COSATU inside South Africa, we'll tell them that we raised this question with you. Then we'll work out a plan to implement it.

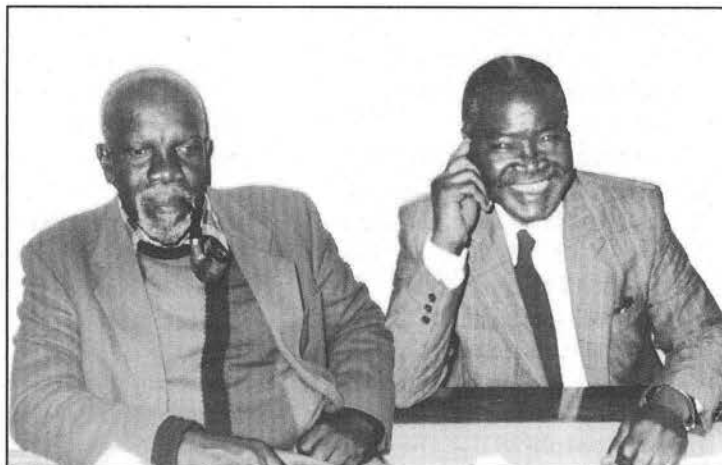
Q: What is the future of the trade union movement in South Africa?

MS: It's quite bright. The limited legality which it has now is a step in the right direction.

in many years will be functioning under very favorable conditions. The movement has a big role to play in South Africa, in order to take up the problems facing the South African working class.

COSATU itself has a big problem of uniting workers in South Africa regardless of their ideological or political affiliation, and of building a non-racial trade union movement. That means bringing to the fore even the white unions today, who regard themselves as the "chosen race." It's important for them to know that their future is with the Black workers, not in isolation as whites.

One of



Eric Mtshali and Mark Shope

Henning and McClain Give Labor's Respect to Mandela

The following remarks were made by John F. Henning, executive secretary-treasurer of the California Labor Federation, AFL-CIO, at a labor reception for Nelson Mandela and COSATU vice-president Chris Dlamini, slightly edited for length.

Nelson Mandela has caught the imagination of the American people. There can be no question of that. The greater question is, has he caught the conscience of the American people? He is a man of candor, needed in a time of duplicity in our relationship with the other nations of the world, particularly so now.

When he met with the President of the United States, or when he spoke to masses in other rallies throughout the country, he never once abandoned the idea that it was the natural right of the Blacks of South Africa to use armed resistance if democratic requests were denied.

Now I ask, who is the President of the United States to guard the conscience of the American people? The United States government under other presidents sent armed forces all throughout Latin America to secure the protection of American capital. All through the twentieth century it became the adventure ground for the military.

General Smedley Butler, the ultimate macho of the United States Marines said in retirement: "We were nothing but the hired guns of Wall Street." So who are we to have the boldness and the temerity to tell a man who I regard as a person of invincible innocence, that he has no right to urge his people to use the force of arms?

With the memory of the Contras in Nicaragua still in our minds, not to mention Panama or the adventures of Reagan, how can [the White House] be so presumptuous to wring their hands and say, "now speak for democracy but don't use the force of arms?" Well, they can't shove that down the throat of the Black millions of South Africa. They never can. They never will.

This is perhaps the last expression of the contest between white imperialism and Black nationalism on that continent. At the time of the first world war and the second world war, when our presidents were asking Americans to die in the name of democracy, they were in alliance with the butchers who held all of Black Africa in serfdom and slavery.

Nelson Mandela presents the virtues of his people to the world. He who suffered for 27 years in a white man's jail because he called for the freedom of his people, represents the best of democratic tradition. But it will be of no avail if, after the glory and enthusiasm of this moment passes, the government in Washington stands, as it has always stood, against colored rebellion and crumbles before the appeals of the white powers of the world.

This nation was founded in armed rebellion. And this nation knows something about white imperialism. The first Blacks were brought to this country in the year 1619. We sustained that system [of slavery] after independence. The scars on our conscience are there for all of history to see. So, let us trust that, if and when the peaceful processes of intelligent, rational dialogue fail and the Blacks of South Africa return to

armed resistance, let us trust that the labor movement, the liberal movement, the Black movement, the minority movement of this country and all people of conscience will rally behind Black rebellion.

At the same reception, Curtis McClain, secretary-treasurer of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, made the following remarks:

There is an old song, very unfashionable now, which ends with the line, "the international working class shall save the human race." If there is any case where the workingclass has been the backbone of the human struggle for freedom, for decency, it is in South Africa.

Why is Nelson Mandela in Oakland, a free man, receiving such tumultuous applause and love? Why do we know in our hearts that 1990 will be the year of the final destruction of apartheid? After Sharpeville, after Soweto, after all the mass arrests, murders, repression, why today, are we uplifted?

It is at least in part, and maybe a very large part, because of the Black South African working class that we today can celebrate the coming end of apartheid. It was this struggle more than any other - of the miners, the longshoremen, the health workers and others - that provided a strong organizational base for South Africa's freedom movement. The formation of the Congress of South African Trade Unions was really the first death knell for this racist system.

We in the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union take a small degree of pride, along with many other unions, in the support and aid we give to these working brothers and sisters in South Africa. We all share in the coming victory.

Inkatha Violence, cont.

Inkatha in these attacks. Furthermore, the police have been implicated as having initiated independent attacks on those who are perceived to be opposed to Inkatha.

"There are clearly powerful elements in the state who want to demonstrate that while the ANC may have declared a ceasefire, apartheid elements are still able to wage war against the people." The ANC also accuses South African security forces of involvement, and "calls for the immediate and visible disbandment of the various state murder squads, such as the CCB, the Askaris, Koevoet and other mercenary groups such as Battalions 32."

COSATU outlines four objectives which the apartheid regime is pursuing through the campaign of killings in the townships. It hopes to make Inkatha a major political force, despite polls in which only 2% of South Africans give it any support. Meanwhile, pro-apartheid forces, especially in the security services, want to destabilize peace negotiations, make it impossible for the anti-apartheid opposition to function, and "to create the impression that the oppressed people, far from being united, are divided along tribal

lines."

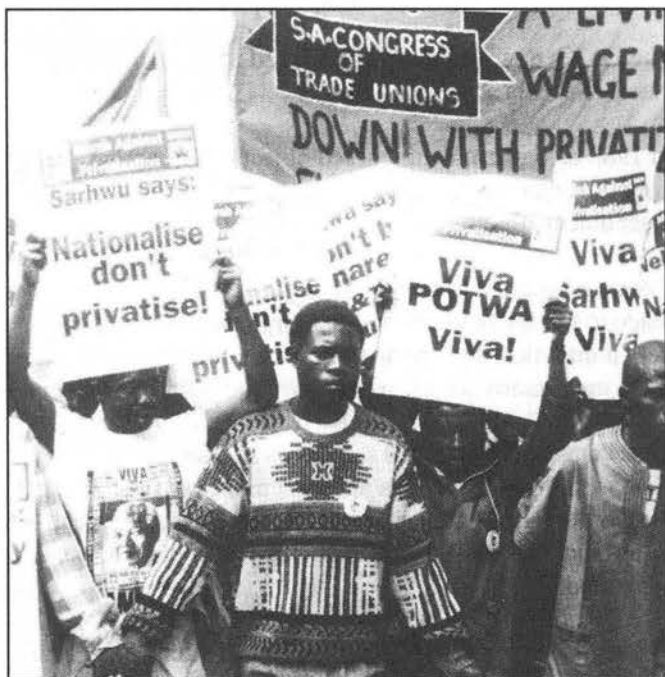
The ANC National Executive Board pointed to the overall political goals which the de Klerk regime is pursuing through Inkatha violence. "While the South African government is evidently committed to political change in South Africa, it is becoming clear that it would prefer that change occurs on terms most favorable to itself...The government has adopted a two-track policy which, on the one hand, accepts the need to negotiate a settlement of our country's problems while, on the other hand, devising stratagems to weaken the ANC and other democratic formations...with the hope that it will generate a climate of insecurity, fear and terror, and thus make a decisive majority of our people more amenable to an authoritarian regime." Anti-apartheid organizations in the U.S. urge unions and union members to write to South African President F.W. de Klerk and U.S. Secretary of State James Baker, demanding the disarming of Inkatha vigilantes, the repeal of the State of Emergency in Natal, and ending police violence against anti-apartheid activists in collusion with Buthelezi.



Members of the South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union on strike against the O.K. market chain, protesting low wages and union busting.

Advisory Board, Free South Africa Labor Committee

- John F. Henning, executive secretary
California Labor Federation, AFL-CIO
- Owen Marron, executive secretary
Alameda Co. Central Labor Council
- Walter Johnson, executive secretary
San Francisco Labor Council
- Art Pulaski, executive secretary
San Mateo Co. Central Labor Council
- Chuck Mack, secretary-treasurer
Teamsters Joint Council 7
- David Aroner, executive director
Social Services Union Local 535, SEIU
- Barbara Byrd, labor studies coordinator
San Francisco Community College
- Sherri Chiesa, president
Hotel and Restaurant Employees Local 2
- Andy Cirkelis, business agent
Teamsters Local 921
- Ignacio DeLaFuente, international representative
Glass, Molders and Plastics Workers
- Joe Fahey, president
Teamsters Local 912
- Pat Ford, executive director
United Service Employees Local 616, SEIU
- Fernando Gapasin, business agent
Amalgamated Transit Union Local 265
- Jim Harford, president
United Transportation Workers Local 1741
- Geraldine Johnson, president
Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, No. Cal.
- Phyllis Johnson, president
Hotel and Restaurant Employees Local 28
- Joanne Jung, organizer
United Public Employees Local 790
- Calvin King, president
Glass, Molders and Plastics Workers
Local 1648
- Joe Lindsay, business agent
Warehouse Union Local 6, ILWU
- Bill Lloyd, business representative
United Public Employees Local 790, SEIU
- Tom Lupher
Longshore Local 10, ILWU
- Marie Malliett, president
Communications Workers Local 9410
- Larry Martin, international representative
Transport Workers International Union
- Jose Medina, director
Instituto Laboral de la Raza
- Leo Robinson, chair
So. Africa Liberation Support Committee
Longshore Local 10, ILWU
- Jim Ryder, president
Warehouse Local 6, ILWU
- Joel Schaeffer, business representative
United Public Employees Local 790
- Joan-Marie Shelley, president
United Educators of San Francisco
- Frank Tanner, vice-president
Communications Workers Local 9410
- Ron Teninty
Teamsters Local 315
- Dave Welsh, executive vice-president
Letter Carriers Local Branch 214
- Bobby Williams, international representative
CWA Region 9



South African postal workers protest against the apartheid government's plans to privatize the Post Office

If you would like to receive this newsletter and other information about the activities of the Free South Africa Labor Committee, please complete and send in this coupon:

Name _____

Address _____

_____ Phone _____

Organization _____

Enclosed is a donation of _____

Phone for more information:
(415) 549-0291 or 223-5756

This issue of South Africa Labor News was edited by David Bacon. Thanks for material made available by David Shelton, Franck Pottier, Aubrey Grossman and CISTUR, and for photos contributed by David Shelton, Chuck Idelson and COSATU's Campaign Bulletin.

Free South Africa Labor Committee
c/o Glass, Molders & Plastics Workers
Local 164B
8140 Baldwin
Oakland, CA 94621

BULK RATE
U.S. Postage
PAID
Oakland, CA
Permit No. 2153

Address Correction Requested
Return Postage Guaranteed