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Dear Friend,

I am writing to recruit your support for the South African Congress of Trade Unions ' (SACTU) North American office. As you may know, the South African trade union movement has grown exponentially over the decade. In the midst of one of the world's most repressive and racist regimes, unions have managed to harness the raw courage of Black workers and to channel it into mature trade union organizations such as the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). As a result, South African trade unionists are as prominent in the struggle against apartheid as they are in the fight for decent wages and working conditions.

Much of the success of the current unions can be attributed to the persistent and dedicated underground organizing of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). Founded in 1955, SACTU abandoned the traditional stance of organizing unions along color lines; instead it identified the struggle as one of both black and white workers. SACTU also openly declared that the trade union struggle was intertwined with the struggle against apartheid. In the 60's SACTU was banned shortly after the African National Congress (ANC). Many SACTU leaders were imprisoned and killed; others were forced into exile. Yet some SACTU activists remained in the country and continued underground organizing. In the 70's a new wave of trade unions emerged as a result of SACTU's brave efforts.

I have enclosed an article written by Peter Mahlangu, the current North American SACTU representative; if you're unfamiliar with South African trade unions, it is a useful blueprint of the current movement.

In exile, SACTU plays a vital international role; it functions as the official voice of South African labor outside the country. Many of us who support the efforts of South African trade unionists rely on SACTU for direction and information. The regime's news embargo makes it literally impossible to learn about the daily arrests, detainments and other political atrocities; communication with unions is often difficult and discouraged by the regime. Because SACTU is in direct contact with COSATU, it is able to provide first-hand information about the current status of the struggle. It coordinates international labor efforts to pressure the regime when South African trade union leaders are imprisoned or detained. And it constantly clarifies what the democratic trade union movement asks of its friends, i.e. sanctions against the South African regime.

In North America, SACTU performs these important functions in a modest office in Toronto that it shares with the ANC. Peter and Nompoti Mahlangu run the office, respond to requests for information and have made themselves available for innumerable speaking engagements. They must sustain these efforts on very little money. Up until now, they have relied on donations from our Canadian brothers and sisters to run the office. Their help has been generous but it has not been enough to meet the needs of the office.

It is our turn to lend support to SACTU's work in North America.

There are several ways that you can help SACTU.

- o *First*, you can make a personal contribution to SACTU (checks can be made payable to SACTU); send whatever you can afford - no donation is too small. I've enclosed an envelope to make it easy for you.

- o *Second*, you can reproduce this letter and article and pass it along to friends who might be interested in supporting SACTU; we'll make this a labor "chain letter" since none of us have inexhaustible resources to do huge mailings.
- o *Third*, if you belong to a union or organization that is interested in supporting anti-apartheid activities, invite Peter to speak on the movement. He is a terrific and inspiring speaker. (And, if possible offer him an honorarium for speaking).
- o *Fourth*, encourage your unions and organizations to make contributions to SACTU

This is a critical time for the trade union movement in South Africa. The South African regime has not been shy in displaying its displeasure with COSATU and militant Black trade unionism; it is close to outlawing the organization.

With a little support from us, the SACTU North American office can help us orchestrate our response to this and other outrages of the South African regime. We can't let the pressure up.

Please do not hesitate to call me at (415) 642-5507 during the day or (415) 482-5636 in the evenings if you have any questions or if you want to chat (I'll be happy to tell you about our Free South Africa Labor Committee). You may also call Peter or Nompoti in Toronto at (416) 465-7386; they can provide you with the most accurate and up to date information.

Thanks for your time and ear.

In Solidarity,

Darryl Alexander

encl.

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THE CURRENT POLITICAL AND LEGAL STATUS OF UNIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

*Peter Mahlangu**

I am an ordinary worker who became part of the trade union movement in the early 1970's when South Africa was hit by a wave of strikes which eventually spread to the whole country. My experience of apartheid is a practical one. I never read about it in books. Instead, I am a direct product of that system.

HISTORICAL SKETCH

I would like to begin by stating that trade unions in South Africa are as old as trade unions in North America. While black trade unions in South Africa were not legally recognized until 1979, black trade unionism dates as far back as 1919 when blacks were organized within the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICWU)¹ which, at its peak, had 100,000 members. In the 1940's, many black unions existed and received guidance from the Council of Non-Euro-

* Mr. Mahlangu is the SACTU Representative in North America.

1. A glossary of acronyms follows:

ANC	—	African National Congress
CAWU	—	Construction and Allied Workers Union
CCAWUSA	—	Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union of South Africa
CNETU	—	Council of Non-European Trade Unions
COSATU	—	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CWIU	—	Chemical Workers Industrial Union
FAWU	—	Food and Allied Workers Union
ICWU	—	Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union
ICFTU	—	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
NACTU	—	National Council of Trade Unions
NEHAWU	—	National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union
NUM	—	National Union of Mineworkers
NUMSA	—	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
NUTW	—	National Union of Textile Workers
NUWU	—	National Unemployed Workers Union
POTWA	—	Post Office and Telecommunications Workers Association
PWAWU	—	Paper, Wood and Allied Workers Union
SAAWU	—	South African Allied Workers Union
SACTU	—	South African Congress of Trade Unions
SADWU	—	South African Domestic Workers Union
SARHWU	—	South African Railway and Harbour Workers Union
TGWU	—	Transport and General Workers Union
UDF	—	United Democratic Front
UWUSA	—	United Workers Union of South Africa

pean Trade Unions (CNETU) which had emerged in 1941 as a coordinating body of black trade unions under progressive leadership.

However, in 1948 the Nationalist Party took power in South Africa. As a result, apartheid was officially enshrined in the Constitution and racial discrimination was legalized for the first time. Immediately, the new regime systematically sought to crush all resistance. The Suppression of Communism Act resulted in the banning of the Communist Party of South Africa in 1950, followed by the banning of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1960. Government opposition to the labor movement was central to apartheid's philosophy and practice.

The South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) was formed on March 5, 1955, immediately after the Trades and Labour Council dissolved as a result of the Council's refusal to include black trade unions. SACTU embraced two important principles: (1) "nonracialism" and (2) political trade unionism. SACTU has continued to lead principled struggles against exploitation and oppression and has been unwilling to compromise with apartheid—even though the cost has been great.

Many in SACTU's leadership were killed, imprisoned or harassed. Among those killed was SACTU national executive member Vuyisile Mini who was hanged on a framed-up charge in 1964. Additionally, Wilson Khayinga, Zinakile Mkaba, Caleb Mayekiso and Looksmart S. Ngudle were sentenced to long-term imprisonment and died in detention under mysterious circumstances. Many of those who escaped this brutal victimization either went underground or into exile.

In 1973, South Africa experienced a series of strikes that began in Natal and then spread to the whole of South Africa. A new generation of progressive and democratic community-based unions arose out of these strikes. I was part of those struggles as a member of the South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU) which organized workers in trains and buses on the way to and from work. In South Africa, we have a long union tradition of organizing our people whenever the opportunity arises.

The government ultimately recognized black trade unions in 1979. One demand was that the unions register with the government. This demand was met with great resistance from the unions which argued that the little that had been gained was secured only at a great cost over decades. Why should we willingly give in to the govern-

ment's demands? Eventually most of the unions did register, however, since the government had the inherent right to check union books.

More significantly, the government committed a grievous tactical error by legally recognizing black trade unions because it unleashed a powerful force which has the potential to destroy the apartheid regime. The following developments will illustrate the growing labor movement, its political dimensions and significance.

FORMATION OF COSATU

In 1980, we embarked on discussions in Cape Town which ultimately led to the formation of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). Historically, union organizers had been engaged in fierce labor battles against very strong multinationals from highly industrialized countries including Britain, the United States, Germany, Japan and others. Because our general workers' unions were fragmented, we did not pose a threat to the corporations. Aware of this fragmentation, the corporations argued that they didn't know which union to recognize in their factories because usually more than one union was organizing the same workforce. In order to take advantage of union legalization and to counter such management tactics, we had to act quickly to form unions on an industry-wide basis.

The main internal problem in the Cape Town and subsequent talks was the refusal of some union leaders to relinquish their union's identity or to give up their members to other unions. Some leaders feared that well-organized unions were plotting to take over their membership. Some organizers even tried to present tailor-made constitutional drafts, but these were rejected outright by the "feasibility committees" set up by workers to organize a union federation. Eventually, COSATU was founded in December 1985. However, some unionists withdrew at the last minute because of concerns that they would not enjoy leadership positions.

External difficulties arose with international labor organizations like the AFL-CIO, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the Afro-American Labor Centre. These organizations consistently sought to create divisions between us, especially among the young trade unions. Many wanted the trade unions in South Africa to become clones of the well-known unions that had developed in the Western countries. But these international organizations are concerned about the inclusion of their political agenda within the labor movement. Thus, they tell black union members in

South Africa to keep out of politics and to be concerned only with "bread and butter" issues.

In our situation, we cannot afford to separate our "bread and butter" struggle from the overall struggles of our people. As blacks, we are affected by pass laws, a migrant labor system, political control, the Group Areas Act and all other laws which undermine our existence as a people. We cannot and *will never* build a trade union movement isolated from the struggles in the townships and throughout our country. Thus, we are building a trade union movement quite distinct from that in North America. We are fighting apartheid and the vicious exploitation of our people by Western corporations. As workers in South Africa, we clearly understand the strategies of those South African and international business and labor interests which seek to divide permanently the labor movement in our country.

Today, three different union federations have come into existence. COSATU, which espouses a nonracial policy, is the largest organization, with more than 750,000 workers. The National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU), formed on the racist principle of excluding white activists from leadership positions, has a membership of approximately 300,000. The third federation is the United Workers Union of South Africa (UWUSA), Gatsha Buthelezi's pseudo-union created to counter COSATU and collaborate with the apartheid system. Its membership is less than 100,000.

I do not forecast a long existence for UWUSA and NACTU. These bodies are destabilizing forces and are susceptible to outside influences that inhibit the growing trade union movement which is fighting for genuine freedom. When outside South Africa, some of their leadership claim that the ANC and SACTU are dividing the people. This is not true. SACTU and the ANC did not pull out of the unity talks that eventually resulted in the formation of COSATU.

UNION ACHIEVEMENTS

Let me address what has been achieved. One of the initial resolutions of COSATU emphasized the role of the working class and the workers in the struggle against the apartheid system. Our fundamental principles are "one union in one industry" and "one federation in one country." According to records of the Second National Congress of COSATU held in July, 1987 in Durban, the following unions have affiliated with COSATU on an industry-wide basis:

<u>Union</u>	<u>Membership (1986 est.)</u>
1. National Union of Mineworkers (NUM)	340,000
2. National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA)	130,796
3. Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU)	65,278
4. Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (CCAWUSA)	56,000
5. South African Railway and Harbour Workers Union (SARHWU)	34,411
6. National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW)	30,538
7. Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU)	29,291
8. Construction and Allied Workers Union (CAWU)	26,291
9. Paper, Wood and Allied Workers Union (PWAU)	23,310
10. Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU)	18,281
The following are municipal sector unions:	
11. South African Domestic Workers Union (SADWU)	9,402
12. National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU)	9,197
13. National Unemployed Workers Union (NUWU)	(formed in 1987)
14. Post Office and Telecommunications Workers Association (POTWA)	(formed in 1987)

Although we have faced many problems, we have made great strides toward meeting our goal of "one union in one industry." Since the formation of COSATU, we have been involved in a number of strikes. The significance of these strikes, among other things, has been a tremendous increase in union membership and public support. For instance, CCAWUSA began its strike with about 23,000 members, but ended the strike with more than 56,000 members. Moreover, CCAWUSA signed a contract which included maternity leave

for six months and significant other benefits. Another strike was led by SARHWU workers who developed solidarity within the community and mobilized township people to participate in support of the railway workers. Community supporters sabotaged trains and introduced a "go slow" campaign which caused the general workforce to report late and leave early due to the shortage of transport.

The latest major strike was carried out by NUM. NUM has been able to organize workers from diverse social backgrounds who speak different languages because they come from Mozambique, Swaziland, Lesotho, Malawi, Botswana and the so-called bantustans. The significance of NUM's success is its ability to organize people who have no political interest in South Africa except to make a few rands to feed their desperate families facing starvation in drought-stricken Mozambique or in the frontline states. At the beginning of the strike, NUM had about 296,000 members; at the end, 340,000 members had actively participated. Where did these other 44,000 members come from?

It is important to understand what black workers are faced with in South Africa. Life is so difficult that it would be futile for us to go into this struggle half-heartedly. We are fighting for survival as a people and fear becoming slaves in our own country. Moreover, we have learned that it is very easy for people to say they will withdraw their labor and thus bring the system to a standstill. However, to go out and actually shut down South Africa necessitates tremendous sacrifice, conviction and unity.

Our ultimate goal is the dismantling of apartheid and its replacement by a democratic, non-racial system which will benefit all working people in our country. Therefore, the labor movement has moved beyond merely challenging the regime's labor policies. Specifically, the labor movement has identified itself with the historical documents which were adopted by our people. The Freedom Charter, prepared in Kliptown in 1955, outlines the future government structure of South Africa. This Charter has been adopted by most unions. However, it was characterized by our foes as a communist document supposedly drafted in Moscow. What our foes overlook is the fact that the demands in the Freedom Charter stem from the aspirations of the masses of our people.

NUM took the lead in adopting the Freedom Charter, followed by a number of COSATU-affiliated unions. The Congress of COSATU has also adopted the Freedom Charter. Such gains are a reflection of where the labor movement and the masses of the South

African people are heading politically. Indeed, the government and powerful economic interests recognize this threat and have recently enacted unjust laws to retard the growth and power of the union movement.

LABOR UNITY

Our experience has taught us that labor unity is the primary prerequisite for our ultimate success. However, we do not want unity based on false agreements—it must be based on principle. For example, labor solidarity with progressive student organizations is premised on the coordination between workers' and students' struggles. Students must understand the broader role of the workers and vice-versa. There had been problems when students went out on strike in 1976 against the use of Afrikaans as the language of instruction at school. Working class parents and students were at loggerheads because students didn't understand why their parents were not supportive of their demonstrations. Today, we have a different situation. Unions conduct classes with students to make them more aware of the labor movement and the need for cooperation. At a recent COSATU Congress, a student representative gave a powerful speech which reflected a deep understanding of the role of the unions. He also advised the workers to be careful of pseudo-marxist intellectuals whose theories only undermine the efforts of the workers.

Many people have mistakenly argued that COSATU has replaced SACTU since COSATU emerged out of SACTU underground structures and other trade union organizations. SACTU's existence is not dependent on COSATU's existence nor vice-versa. COSATU is only two years old and needs to accommodate people of many different political persuasions. SACTU has already taken sides politically, worked hand-in-hand with the liberation alliance and accepted the ANC as our people's political leadership. SACTU has committed itself to the political struggle to eliminate apartheid totally.

The on-going role of SACTU is important in South Africa. Since 1948, the government has systematically eliminated opposition. All extra-parliamentary organizations have been banned, one after another. The banning of the Communist Party in 1950 was followed by the banning of the ANC in 1960, heavy-handed repression of SACTU and the banning of more than fifteen organizations in 1977. Presently, the government has its sights on COSATU and the United Democratic Front (UDF). There is no hope that both of these organi-

zations will legally be in existence in another two years.*

SACTU believes that it would be detrimental to our people to fold due to COSATU's emergence. Who can guarantee the people of South Africa that COSATU won't be banned tomorrow? More than 800 trade unionists have been detained during the two recent states of emergency. Some workers have been killed and others have disappeared. COSATU House, which served as COSATU's headquarters, has been rendered uninhabitable because of two powerful bombs. These same tactics have also been used against SACTU and many other progressive organizations in our country. Taking all these facts into account, SACTU will not desert the people. We intend to replace the apartheid system with a system which guarantees freedom of association and a free and democratic government for all people of South Africa, regardless of color or creed. After all, an injury to one is an injury to all.

THE DEMAND FOR SANCTIONS

Our people have consistently called for the isolation of the apartheid regime. Chief Lutuli, ANC president until 1967, called for the isolation of South Africa back in the 1960's. That call has been repeated again and again by an ever-increasing number of organizations. Today, SACTU, COSATU, the ANC and the UDF are echoing this call for mandatory punitive sanctions against South Africa. We fully understand the repercussions that sanctions will have on us. We know this means the withdrawal of capital and, thus, unemployment for our workers. Rather than remaining perpetual slaves under apartheid, we are prepared to suffer and to sacrifice in order to become permanently free.

We have questioned the logic of those who claim that the presence of multinational corporations plays a positive role in influencing the government to change. We have analyzed companies like Ford Motors which has operated in South Africa since 1925 and yet has never done anything positive to alleviate our suffering. Instead, multinationals have helped the regime to oppress us by, among many ways, producing military armaments and instructing their security police to respond with violence whenever our people make legitimate demands.

The Margaret Thatchers of this world have never been mandated

by our people to speak on our behalf. In fact, Britain is South Africa's leading investor and exploiter of our people. There are more than 300,000 British citizens who have taken our jobs and enjoy the fruits of apartheid. Ronald Reagan supports the UNITA bandits in Angola who kill civilians in southern Africa—and we are asked to overlook his support for the contras in Nicaragua! Moreover, the C.I.A. has also been a disruptive force working against the interests of our workers.

Suddenly, these leaders are worried that sanctions may adversely affect the black workers in South Africa. Since when have we been so special to them? If they were genuinely interested in our freedom their economic strength could end apartheid. We have been forced to conclude that our freedom and destiny lies in our own hands. As our struggle sharpens and escalates, we need more and more political, moral and material support from our true friends. We need your support now like never before.

* Indeed, on February 24, 1988, the UDF was banned along with sixteen other anti-apartheid organizations and COSATU was barred from all political activity.—Ed.