

# APARTHEID

## A GUIDE FOR NALGO MEMBERS



## Foreword

The word 'apartheid' is familiar to most people. Most of the nations of the world, including Britain, have expressed their abhorrence, in word if not in deed, of the system. It has been repeatedly condemned as a 'crime against humanity' by the General Assembly of the United Nations. South Africa featured prominently in the headlines in Britain during 1984, a year which culminated in the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the veteran and outspoken anti-apartheid campaigner, Bishop Desmond Tutu. However, it was in 1985 that the true horror of apartheid was brought home to people all over the world, when, under a state of emergency, the regime sent the South African army and police into black townships, in a desperate attempt to crush resistance to its policies.

NALGO itself has built up a comprehensive anti-apartheid policy over the years, and has adopted African National Congress members Nelson and Winnie Mandela as honorary members, in a gesture of support for the liberation struggle in South Africa.

Yet many members remain unaware of what apartheid *really* means to the average black South African, how it differs from simple large-scale racism, and why NALGO should concern itself with issues that appear, on the surface, to be so far from home.

So, what is apartheid? This booklet attempts to answer the question in simple terms. I hope that it will not only help NALGO members understand the policies adopted by the Association, but also serve as a reference document for those actively involved in campaigning for the elimination of the evil that is apartheid.

John Daly  
General Secretary

## How is apartheid enforced?

There are two main instruments of apartheid which stand out as being particularly important. The Population Registration Act and the Group Areas Act, as well as numerous other supporting measures.

Under the government policy of 'white development', South Africa is divided into a territorial area reserved for white control and ten fragmented areas of land known as townships, set aside for the Africans. The area controlled by the Whites, who make up 20% of the total population, amounts to 70% of the land. Townships and reserves of black industrial and urban areas, all major sources of revenue and the best agricultural land. Africans comprise 70% of the population but are allowed to occupy only 10% of national territory. The South African government argues that under this system Africans are able to exercise normal political, social and economic rights in their allotted townships. Instead, four of the townships - Transkei, Ciskei, Bophuthatsane and Venda - have been declared 'independent' by the African authorities. This 'independence', however, is not recognised by any other nation of the world.

There are important white areas in South Africa in order to give the various population groups a standard of living which is not too far below that of the white population.

Bishop Tutu, Nobel Peace Prize winner 1984:  
'Apartheid is not a domestic issue for South Africa. It is a threat to world peace.'

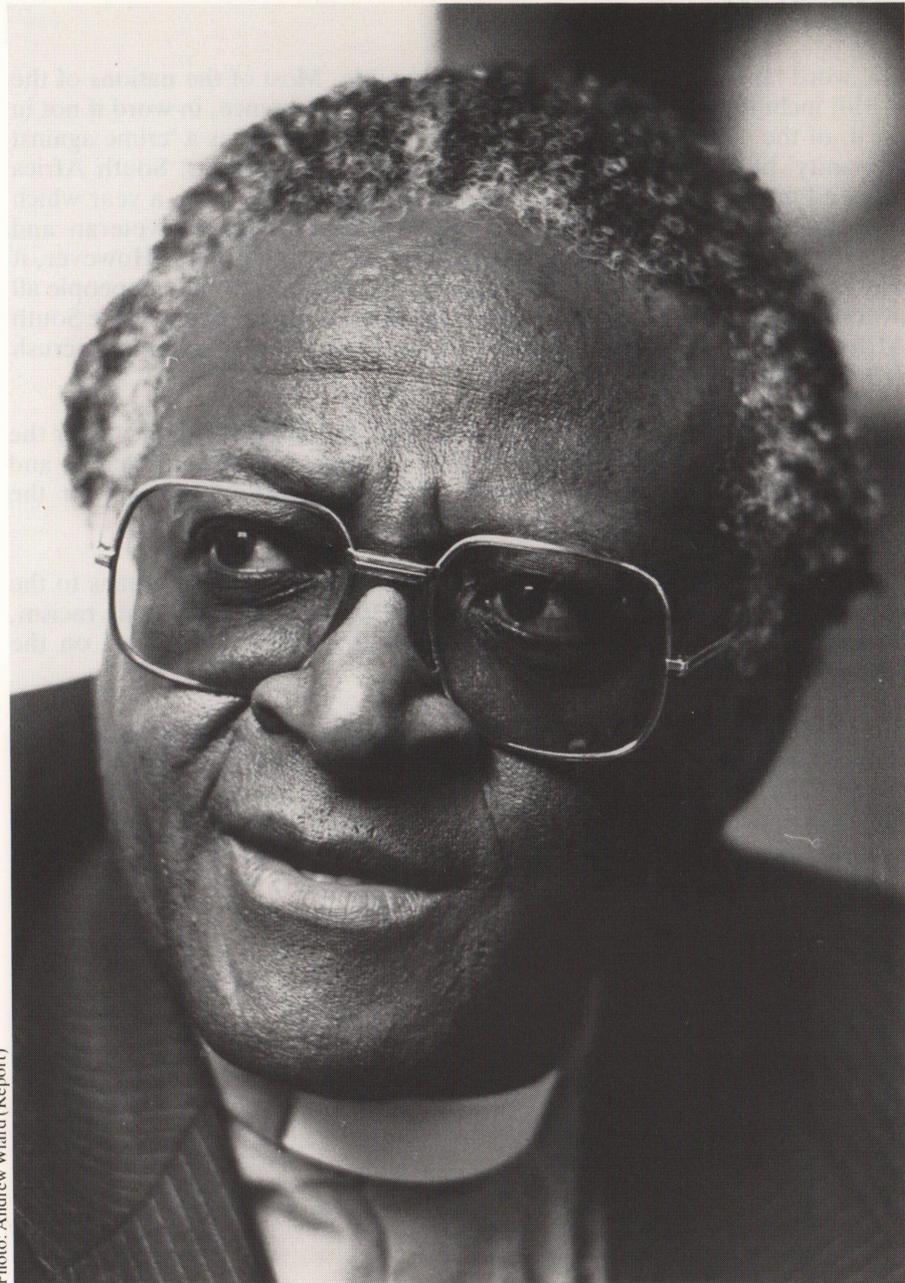


Photo: Andrew Wiard (Report)

## APARTHEID- A GUIDE FOR NALGO MEMBERS

If you were an African living in South Africa today, you would not be able to:

- vote;
- choose where to live or work;
- travel in the train compartments set aside for Whites.

In some areas your children could run a 55% risk of dying in their infancy.

These are only examples. The policy of apartheid would affect every area of your life.

### So what is apartheid?

"Apartheid" is an Afrikaans word meaning "separateness". It was first coined as a political term in the middle of this century, but the racial segregation and domination it defines date back much further, to the seventeenth century when the Dutch and then the British colonised the region. From the outset, Whites have been able to dominate the Africans, thanks to their superior military strength and the way in which the White minority has developed the South African economy into one which serves Western interests.

Racial discrimination also occurs in many other countries, but what makes the situation in South Africa unique is that there *it is an institution*, systematically and legally applied. The whole South African population is classified, by law, into a number of rigid racial categories – Whites, Coloureds, Indians and Africans.\* It would be your racial classification, and not your individual merits or qualifications, which would determine your rights, where you live, the education and training you would receive and the employment opportunities open to you.

Apartheid is not, however, based exclusively on delusions of racial superiority, such as those fostered by Hitler and the Third Reich. Apartheid today is a system of assuring the White-dominated South African economy of a cheap labour force which has virtually no rights and can be manipulated at will.

### How is apartheid enforced?

There are two main instruments of apartheid which stand out as being particularly iniquitous, namely the "Homeland", or "Bantustan" system and the Pass Laws, as well as enforcement by repression generally.

Under the government policy of "separate development", South Africa is divided into a territorial unit reserved for White control and ten fragmented areas of land, known as bantustans, set aside for the Africans. The area controlled by the Whites, who make up 20% of the total population, amounts to 87% of the whole territory and includes all main industrial and urban areas, all major mineral reserves and the best agricultural land. Africans constitute 70% of the population but are allowed to occupy only 13% of national territory. The South African government argues that under this system Africans are able to exercise normal political, social and economic rights in their allotted bantustan. (Indeed, four of the bantustans – Transkei, Ciskei, Venda and Bophuthatswana – have been declared "independent" by the South African authorities. This "independence", however, is not recognised by any other nations of the world.)

\* These are terms most widely used in South Africa to describe the various population groups. Apartheid terminology refers to 'Blacks' (Africans), 'Asians' (Indians) and 'Coloureds'.

In practice this policy has resulted in the millions of Africans who live and work in the "White areas" being regarded as aliens in the land of their birth. Most have only the remotest connection with their bantustan, to which they were appointed according to their racial sub-classification. Although the African, Indian and Coloured groups are further divided into linguistic and ethnic sub-divisions, there is, ironically, only one White category, despite the fact that there are two major linguistic communities among the Whites - Afrikaans and English - as well as several minority groups.

The Bantustan system has turned the African worker into a commodity to be used and abused according to the needs of the White economy. Only those workers required at a given time are allowed temporary residence in the White areas. The unemployed and other 'burdens on society', such as the young, old and infirm, are conveniently and ruthlessly confined to the bantustans.

The control of the South African authorities over the movement of African labour is consolidated by the so-called Pass Laws. If you were an African over the age of 16 and outside the bantustan areas, you would have to carry a pass book. This would immediately identify you to any official, and show at a glance whether you had any right to be in that area, whether or not you were employed, if your taxes were up to date, etc, etc. If you were an African woman, there would also be a section for the consent of the commissioner of your district and of your parent/guardian/husband, agreeing to your working or living in another area. All these personal details would be kept on computerised record in Pretoria, as would also be your fingerprints.

A typical bantustan.

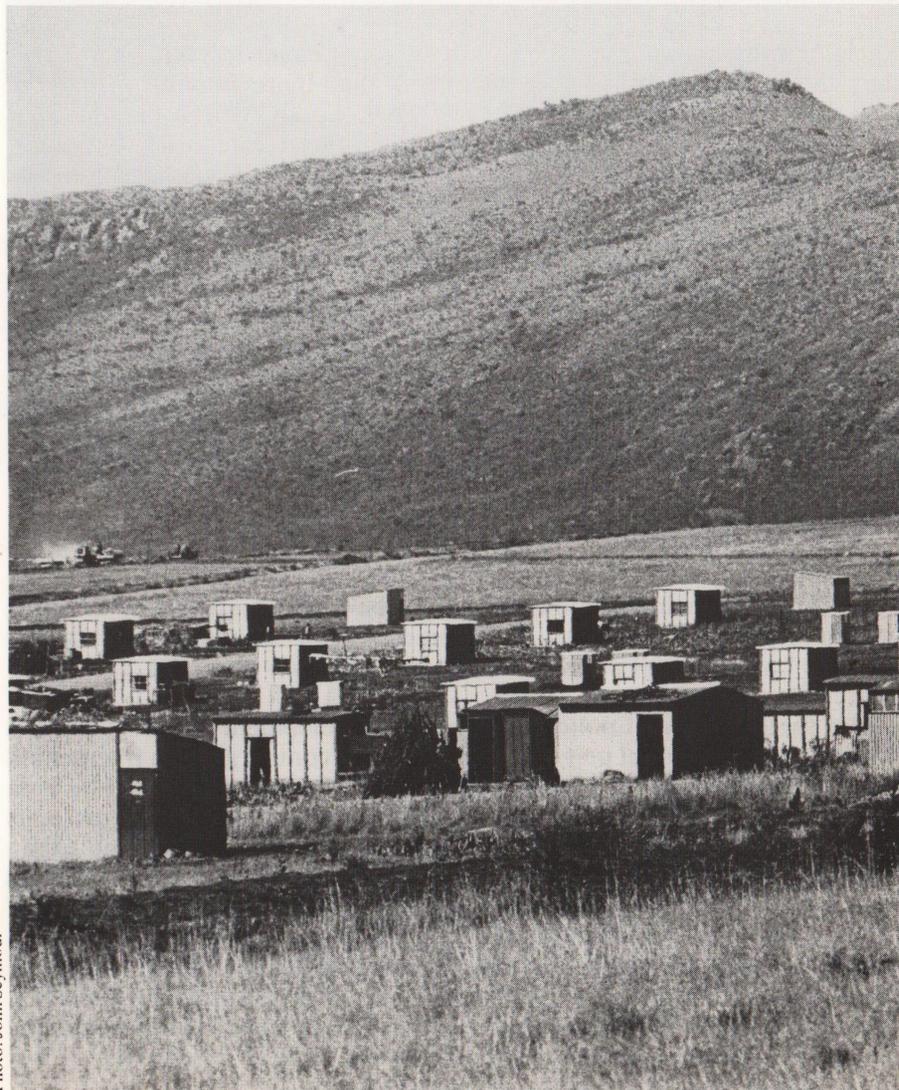


Photo: John Seymour

If you were a migrant worker found to be illegally present in an urban area, you would be forcibly removed to your bantustan, fined an amount you would most likely be unable to pay, imprisoned or directed through the official labour bureaux to badly paid work, usually on a farm. Nowadays you would most probably be forced to live in a township if your permit were to be granted. If "fortunate" enough to find a job in a White area, you would have to leave your family behind in the bantustan, as families of migrant workers are forbidden to join them. You would not see them again for long periods, usually 49 weeks each year, as length of service is a major requirement for the granting of concessions and holidays are frequently regarded as a break in service.

## Security laws

The apartheid system relies for its survival on the use of force, backed by a vast array of security laws. These confer such wide-ranging powers that the regime is able to act against any form of effective opposition, including, of course, trade unions.

The most notorious is the 'Internal Security Act' passed in 1982, which consolidated and expanded on previously existing security legislation. Under it, the Minister of Law and Order has powers to declare organisations illegal, to compile lists of officers, members and active supporters of organisations declared illegal, to ban individuals or place them under house arrest, to ban meetings and gatherings, to ban newspapers and other publications, to detain witnesses for political trials and to hold in indefinite preventative detention anyone whom the regime claims may in the future commit a 'crime' against the state. In many cases, the authorities are under no obligation to reveal the whereabouts of a detainee, or even if s/he is being held at all. Such detainees have no access to lawyers, families or friends, and may not, in many cases, be quoted or referred to in publications.

Among the new provisions introduced by the Internal Security Act were the catch-all offences of 'subversion' and 'intimidation'. 'Subversion' can be any action aimed at, among other things, 'causing or promoting general dislocation or disorder'; 'prejudicing the production and distribution of commodities or the supply and distribution of essential services or the free movement of traffic'; causing 'feelings of hostility between different population groups' (!); encouraging or aiding any other person to commit any of the acts listed.

Anyone convicted of subversion can be imprisoned for up to 20 years. 'Incitement', punishable by imprisonment for up to five years, is defined as any act which encourages or aids another to protest against any law or to support any campaign for the repeal or modification of any law, or for a change in the administration of the law.

Other laws used to enforce repression include the Intimidation Act of 1982, which has been used against trade unions in particular, the Aliens Act (allowing the relocation to an 'independent' bantustan of any African whom the authorities consider to be a citizen of that bantustan), and the Riotous Assemblies Act.

All the bantustan areas have their own security laws, modelled on the central body of legislation described above.

In many cases, opponents of the regime have been accused of common law offences, such as sedition, treason, arson and damage to property.

These laws are used against, among others, the independent trade union movement, whose history is outlined below. As an example, all outdoor meetings (with certain exceptions such as funerals, which are still subject to restrictions) have been completely banned since 1976. In 1984, indoor

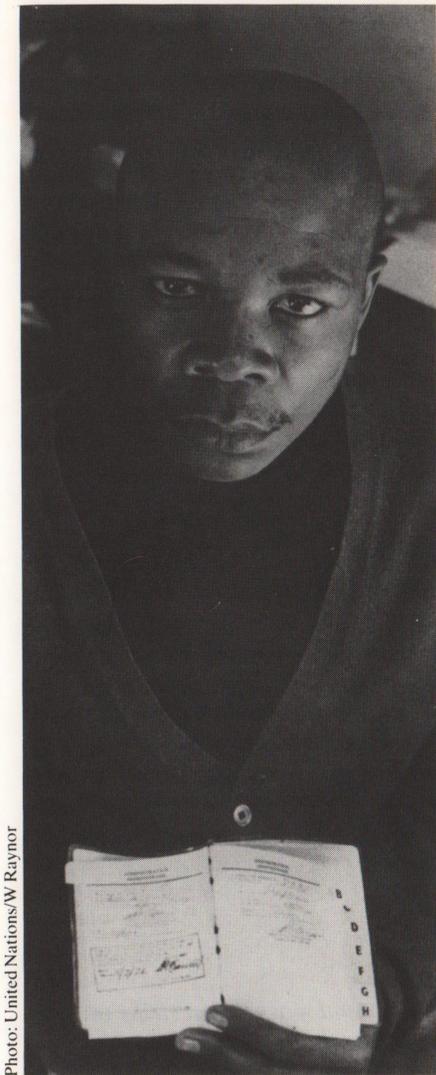


Photo: United Nations/W Raynor

An African with his passbook - one of the most hated symbols of apartheid.



political meetings were also banned in a number of areas. In effect this means that in many places it is illegal for trade unions to meet.

From time to time the regime finds that even this arsenal of legislation cannot prevent the South African people from demonstrating their hatred of the system. In 1985, massive civil protests in African townships led to the imposition of states of emergency in selected areas throughout the country. These remove even the limited restrictions that exist on the actions of the security forces, making them effectively able to act without restraint and kill with impunity, since the emergency laws grant them complete indemnity from any criminal or civil proceedings.

## What about trade unions?

In such a society, a genuinely free and independent trade union movement as we understand it cannot exist.

Until 1979 Africans were barred by law from membership of the registered unions and were thus excluded from the official system of labour relations and collective bargaining. "Liaison" or "works" committees provided representation for South African workers in theory. However, in practice these proved to be totally ineffectual and were rejected by the workers as being both unrepresentative of their demands and as the employers' substitute for trade unions.

Africans had long formed their own de facto unions, and these grew in strength and support in the 1970's, after the authorities had attempted to stamp them out. It was, indeed, this inability to eradicate the unions which prompted the government to amend labour legislation in 1979 and 1981, in an attempt to bring the non-racial trade unions into the official system as a means of controlling and weakening them.

Municipal workers on strike in Johannesburg, July 1980.



Photo: Anti-Apartheid Movement

Since 1979 racially mixed unions have been officially permitted, and Africans allowed to join registered trade unions. However, for many black trade unionists the very act of registration implied acceptance of an oppressive industrial relations system, which remained fundamentally unchanged, then as today. Many black trade unions chose to remain outside the official system, with the consequence that in 1981 the apartheid regime introduced new legislation requiring even unregistered trade unions to comply with the controls demanded of registered trade unions. The Act also removed explicit references to race, although in practice these continued to operate, and introduced new restrictions on trade union powers and activities.

Although these amendments appeared at first sight to embody the right of freedom of association, they have proved otherwise in their practical

application. A large number of workers in agriculture, domestic service, education and, indeed, state and local authority services are excluded from the provisions of the Act, which also provides for official intervention in trade union affairs, prohibits union assistance to and from political parties and severely curtails legal strike action. The authorities have had increasingly frequent recourse to security legislation since Africans were admitted to the official system. Many leaders have been arrested, detained, tortured or banned in the authorities' attempts to end strikes and undermine the development of the trade union movement. A number have died in detention, a notable example being Dr Neil Aggett, of the Food and Canning Workers Union, who in February 1982 was the first white trade union leader to perish in police custody.

The right to strike for African workers has formally existed in South Africa since 1973, but is so restrictive as to have little practical content. Only three of the 1,400 recorded strikes by African workers between 1973 and 1981 were declared "legal". Striking in "essential" services is forbidden, and the definition of the word "essential" is broad and can be altered to suit the government's purpose. Picketing and "incitement" to strike are banned by law, as is also to give financial assistance to workers involved in an "illegal" strike.

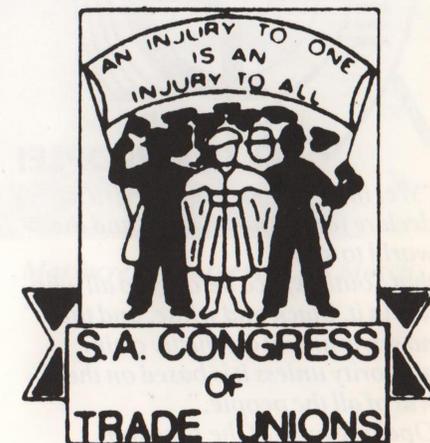
Again it is the migrant workers who suffer most. In law African workers become unemployed if they strike, and can therefore be forcibly evicted from the urban areas and sent to the bantustans. This effectively restricts the power of migrant workers to defend their pay and conditions by industrial action. Bantustan authorities also "screen" Africans before recruiting them to work in the White areas, in order to eliminate potential strikers.

That Africans do strike, nonetheless, and that employers are finding it increasingly difficult to replace dismissed strikers suggests a high degree of organisation. There are today several trade union umbrella organisations, with almost exclusively African membership, committed to fight apartheid, such as the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA), the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), and the South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU). These are all based on the principles of democratic, non-racial trade unionism pioneered by the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) in the 1950's. The Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUSCA) is the largest confederation, (comprising 330 thousand African and White workers) but it organises "parallel" segregated unions and has close relations with the government. The South African Council of Labour is an extreme right-wing Whites-only organisation.

SACTU, the first non-racial union co-ordinating body referred to above, was founded in March 1955, and committed to struggle on both economic and political fronts against all forms of oppression and exploitation. The organisation is a member of the Congress Alliance and a signatory to the Freedom Charter (see below). Success in mobilising workers on both trade union and political fronts met with severe repression in the early 1960's when hundreds of activists were banned from trade union work, banished, imprisoned and murdered. SACTU was forced to operate both illegally and underground as well as openly and legally to build the strength of trade unions, and sees its task as organising the unorganised workers into trade unions, creating unity between diverse forces, and generally guiding, influencing and persuading the trade union movement along a revolutionary course.

## Resistance and liberation struggle

The history of resistance is as old as the history of colonial occupation and white minority rule. Constant repression of majority dissent has never succeeded in crushing resistance, but has changed the conditions under which it has operated and the forms it has taken.



## African National Congress (ANC)

The African National Congress (ANC) was formed in 1912, two years after the passing of the Act of Union, by which Britain handed over power to the White minority population.

The ANC was and remains a national mass political movement formed to organise African resistance to White rule. From the beginning, it based its work on the rejection of tribal divisions, and worked together with the Indian and Coloured communities, with the aim of forging national unity between all oppressed groups. During the period up to the 1940's, it established its position and influence, undertaking a series of campaigns against specific issues such as the Pass Laws and Land Acts.

Following a period of growing militancy and awareness in the 1940's, the ANC adopted a Programme of Action in 1949. This called for mass action in the form of protests and demonstrations and coincided with the coming to power of the Nationalist Party, the architect of institutionalised apartheid as we know it, which proceeded in the following years to create a set of laws to codify and perpetuate racial segregation and domination. There followed, in the 1950's, a period of mass peaceful resistance to apartheid, its instruments and laws, particularly: the defiance campaign against unjust laws; the campaign against the 1953 Bantu Education Act; resistance to the Bantustan authorities; and the campaign against the Pass Laws, in which vast numbers of people took part in protests, demonstrations and the burning of pass books. Thousands of people were harassed, arrested and imprisoned in the course of these non-violent protests.

## Freedom Charter

During these turbulent years the 'Congress Alliance' was formed, uniting the different forces of opposition under the leadership of the ANC, including the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). The **Freedom Charter** was adopted on 26 June 1955 at the 'Congress of the People', a historic gathering at Kliptown attended by nearly 3000 delegates. It embodied a programme for a non-racial unitary democratic state, and remains the guiding inspiration of the ANC's political and military programme today.

## Sharpeville and the aftermath

The campaigns of the '50's came to a head in Sharpeville in March 1960 when 65 people were shot dead by police, while participating in a peaceful demonstration against the Pass Laws. Demonstrations and strikes erupted across the country in protest at the massacre. Twenty thousand people were arrested and two thousand detained without trial under a State of Emergency, and the ANC and the Pan Africanist Congress (a breakaway movement from the ANC) were banned. Henceforth, the ANC was forced to operate underground. A year later, there were further mass arrests and detentions in anticipation of protests at the declaration of the White minority Republic of South Africa, and a long period of severe repression followed, in which detention without trial, torture and imprisonment were widely used.

## Armed struggle

By 1961, mass non-violent protest and passive resistance over several decades had failed to bring about any basic change in the apartheid system, and had been ruthlessly crushed. The liberation movement was reluctantly forced to the conclusion that armed struggle was inevitable if freedom was to

be achieved. This decision was finally precipitated by the repression following the Sharpeville killings and the banning of the mass organisations of protest.

The armed wing of the ANC, Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation) was formed. Its military operations today are directed towards the machinery of the administration of apartheid (police stations, administration boards, etc) and strategic installations. Combatants are trained to avoid loss of civilian life, and this is always emphasised by captured freedom fighters during trials. The breadth and strength of the support for the armed struggle within the African community is evident in the way that the fighters are able to evade capture, despite the obvious and extreme dangers, and in the mass-turnouts and ANC flags and colours which appear in great numbers at the funerals of freedom fighters.



Photo: IDAF

Massacre at Sharpeville, 21 March 1960.

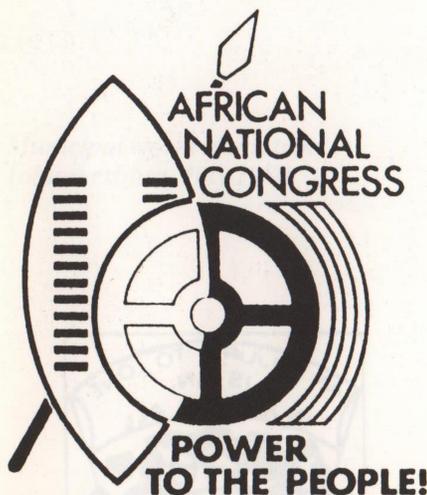
## Political resistance - 1970's to the present day

In the 1970's, new organisations arose to fill the legal vacuum left by the banning of the ANC and PAC, now underground. One of the most notable was the South African Students Organisation, one of whose founders was Steve Biko, who died in police detention in 1977. News of his death intensified nationwide protests already in progress during '76 and '77 against the education system, and led to a further period of repression and detentions, and the banning of 18 more organisations. The emphasis shifted to grass roots and community-based action and, once again, new broad-based organisations emerged to replace those that had been banned. This has included the establishment of non-racial trade unions, in defiance of government attempts to suppress them, notably under new apartheid legislation which severely restricted their powers and rights (see above).



Photo: Eli Weinberg

*"Every effort to isolate South Africa adds strength to our struggle": Nelson Mandela, leader of the ANC and honorary NALGO member.*



*"We, the People of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know: that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people."*  
Opening lines of the Freedom Charter.

Nevertheless, the non-racial unions have continued to fight for the right to negotiate directly with employers, and have had tremendous success in mobilising mass support and extracting recognition of their right to exist from the apartheid authorities, – even if this has taken the form of legislation which aims to absorb and incapacitate them.

Since 1979, organised opposition has tended to consist of sustained campaigns on specific issues. Protest groups have increasingly formed common links in the knowledge that all inequalities in South African society, whether in housing, transport or the workplace, are commonly rooted in the institutional system of apartheid rule.

*Fatima Meer, veteran activist, addresses a Transvaal Indian Congress meeting during the anti-election campaign.*



Photo: Cedric Nuun

## United Democratic Front

One of the most exciting and encouraging developments of recent years was the formation in August 1983 of the **United Democratic Front**, a broadly-based non-racial alliance.

In accordance with the trends described above, this organisation was founded to campaign against the Koornhof bills, which aim to strengthen the Pass Laws, and, in particular, against changes to the South African constitution. The main effect of these changes was to introduce for the first time separate chambers of parliament for Indians and Coloureds, but, significantly, *not* for the African majority.

This move, although heralded by Prime Minister P W Botha as a considerable liberalisation of South African politics and society, was in fact no more than a cosmetic sop designed to contain and coopt the Coloured and Indian populations and dissuade them from joining forces with the Africans. The number of seats and so-called division of power are such that any decision taken by either one or both chambers can be reversed by the White authorities. Furthermore, the decision to go ahead with the new parliamentary system was taken by referendum of the White population only, i.e. the people who would be most directly affected were not consulted. The UDF attempted to reveal the true nature of the constitutional con-trick and to mobilise and coordinate opposition from all racial groups and sectors of society.

The three co-Presidents of the UDF are Albertina Sisulu and Oscar Mpetha, veteran anti-apartheid campaigners and ANC activists with a history of detentions and banning orders, and Archie Gumede, one of the refugees in the Durban consulate (see below). The inaugural meeting of the UDF was attended by over 12,000 people representing some 400 organisations, and a Declaration issued at the launch reflected many of the ideals expressed 18 years earlier in the Freedom Charter.

The first real test of the UDF's strength and support came in the period leading up to and during the constitutional elections themselves in August 1984. The threat to the authorities of its boycott campaigns was proved by the mass arrest of UDF leaders on the eve of polling, the success of the campaigns themselves by the low turn-out at the polls. In the elections to the Coloured Chamber, the House of Representatives, a mere 18% of those eligible turned out to vote. The figures for voting to the Indian Chamber, the House of Delegates, were equally damning: roughly 14% of the potential Indian electorate cast a vote.

This overwhelming rejection did not, however, dissuade the authorities from their intentions: Prime Minister P W Botha was declared State President in September 1984 and the two new Houses came into operation in January 1985.

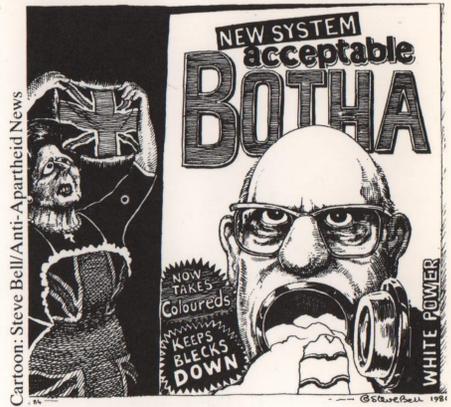
Neither, however, did such blatant disregard of the people's will deter the UDF from their protest. A major feature of their post-election campaign was the so-called Durban 6 affair, during which six leading members of the UDF and other associated organisations sought sanctuary in the British Consulate in Durban. Although the six were escaping detention-without-trial orders, the main aim of their action was to gain international publicity for their cause. When the men eventually left the Consulate, three on 6 October and the remaining three on 12 December 1984, all but one were arrested and later charged with high treason. This was just the latest of a series of strategies to crush the UDF. In all, sixteen leading members of the UDF and associated organisations were arrested to face the high treason charge, and at the time of writing, it is anticipated that hundreds more may be called to give evidence against them. If they refuse, as would seem likely, they too could be imprisoned for 4-5 years.

The regime may well believe that it is possible to cripple the UDF by thus removing its leadership, a far easier task than to ban the organisation and all members outright. However the level of grass-roots involvement in and commitment to the UDF are so great that new leadership is constantly emerging to ensure its continuation.

## Women

Black women in South Africa face what has been called a 'triple yoke' of repression: as black people, as workers, and as women.

African women in particular are confronted with discriminating laws and



Cartoon: Steve Bell/Anti-Apartheid News



Photo: IDAF

*Zinzi Mandela, younger daughter of Nelson, delivers a message from her father to the South African people in Janulani stadium, Soweto, 10 February 1985.*

practices specifically geared towards them, as well as with the psychological and social stress caused by the apartheid-enforced break up of married life and families. The movement of African women is even more restricted than that of their menfolk. With few exceptions, they are unable to seek work in the 'White' urban areas where industry and employment are concentrated. Vast numbers are left to fend for their families in the barren bantustans, separated for long periods from their husbands. Those who are able to find work in the 'White' areas (eg in domestic service) are the first to be 'deported' to the homelands because their work is not regarded as economically productive. The attitude of the apartheid regime towards women is best summed up in the words of one of its spokespersons which date from 1959, but still ring tragically true today: 'This African Labour Force must not be burdened with superfluous appendages such as wives, children and dependants who could not provide service'.

The problems of high prices, lack of creches, high rents, poor educational and health facilities weigh particularly heavily on women, since it is they who are largely responsible for looking after their families.

The treatment and conditions of women prisoners are also often substantially worse than those of their male counterparts, and women have been refused some of the concessions won by men in prison – books, regular visits, the right to study, etc.

Because of their 'triple burden', African women have always played a prominent part in the struggle against apartheid. The best known and most powerful demonstration of their strength was in 1956, when 20,000 women flooded into Pretoria from all parts of the country to demonstrate against the introduction of passes for women. Women have played a leading role in campaigns against forced resettlement, the apartheid education system, increased rents, bad housing, and in bus boycotts.

In the trade union sphere too, women have always played a prominent role. SACTU directly supported the 1950's campaign against passes for women, recognising that this, and other battles against the special discrimination suffered by women under apartheid, were an integral part of the overall struggle to build a South Africa free from oppression on the basis of class, race or sex. Women took a leading part in SACTU activities, and have been active in the independent non-racial trade unions since their re-emergence in the 1970's.

20,000 women converge on Pretoria on 9 August 1956 in mass opposition to the introduction of passes for women.



Photo: IDAF

As a result of these activities hundreds have been banned, banished, placed under house arrest or detained without charge, and there are known to be at least 10 women political prisoners serving gaol sentences as a result of their opposition to apartheid. At the time of writing, NALGO honorary member Winnie Mandela is under both banishment and banning orders.

There has also been growing public participation by women in the celebration of South African Women's Day on 9 August, the date of the historic march on Pretoria in 1956. The African National Congress designated 1984 'The Year of the Women' in order to 'pay tribute to the embattled womenfolk of our country and to honour their historic achievements' (Oliver Tambo, ANC President). Numerous activities throughout the year were organised to draw attention to the special oppression of women under apartheid, and their role in the liberation struggle.

## Why should NALGO members care?

The question is sometimes asked why a trade union like NALGO should "divert" time and resources to problems on the other side of the world which "have nothing to do with its members"? (Indeed, a recent letter from a NALGO branch to Headquarters posed exactly this question).



*"Every South African product sold is another brick in the wall of apartheid": ex South African Prime Minister B J Vorster.*

With regard to South Africa, NALGO Conference itself has, on several occasions, answered this question by passing motions which have affirmed members' support for the liberation struggle in Southern Africa, including SACTU (South African Congress of Trade Unions), and recognised the importance of international solidarity. As early as 1974 Conference resolved to support SACTU and to seek similar support from the TUC; a motion carried in 1975 called for the withdrawal of any NALGO holdings or investments in South African firms and their British subsidiaries (there were none), and urged branches to press employing authorities to take similar action. It was in this year that NALGO decided to affiliate at national level to the Anti-Apartheid Movement, the organisation founded in 1959 to campaign in Britain for the elimination of apartheid.

More recent motions to Conference have called for the imposition of mandatory UN sanctions, an end to South Africa's illegal occupation of Namibia, support for the ANC and SACTU and their aims, and asked the Council to campaign to inform NALGO members of the reasons why they

should not emigrate to South Africa. Many NALGO members will be aware that, as a result of a motion to 1983's Conference, referred to and subsequently supported by Council, Nelson and Winnie Mandela were invited to Conference 1984 and made honorary members of the Association. Nelson, leader of the ANC, has been in prison for over 20 years for his opposition to apartheid, and Winnie, his wife, has been the victim of frequent banning and banishment orders, restricting her freedom of movement and contact with others. The invitation to the Mandelas was renewed in 1985 as a result of a motion to 1984 conference, referred to and supported by the Council, which also condemned South Africa's attempt to destabilise neighbouring countries, and designated work on South Africa a priority among NALGO's international activities.

*Adelaide Tambo of the African National Congress receives Winnie Mandela's certificate of honorary NALGO membership, NALGO Conference 1984. Her speech received a standing ovation.*



Photo: Richard Satch

At the root of these motions and NALGO action in their support has been the recognition that it is hypocrisy for British trade unionists to fight for the universal principles of freedom and democracy in this country, while ignoring the oppression of fellow workers elsewhere. This is especially true of South Africa and its occupied neighbour Namibia, where British firms extract massive profits from extensive investments in the area, by employing what is virtually slave labour under conditions which would never be tolerated by British workers. What is more, in a world where the forces of capital, particularly through the growth of multi-national companies, are able to affect and control the everyday lives of working people and their dependants all over the globe, it is clearly in the interests of trade unionists to show solidarity with the struggles of fellow workers in other countries against injustice. This is quite apart from purely humanitarian considerations which oblige us, as human beings, to acknowledge and oppose the infliction of unjust imprisonment, torture and ill-treatment on other human beings. NALGO's recognition of this obligation was most clearly expressed in the motion passed by Conference 1977, which instructed the Council to 'extend NALGO's action against oppression and to seek a similar extension within the TUC, to include any country, irrespective of the political complexion of the governing regime, where trade union and other basic human rights are suppressed'.

British trade unionism is founded on the principle that a free, democratic and independent trade union movement is one of the essential institutions of a free society. This cannot be regarded as the exclusive right of some workers and not others, but as a universal principle which will not be achieved without international cooperation and solidarity – in the words of the SACTU motto: "An injury to one is an injury to all". In this spirit, NALGO will continue to support the role played by SACTU and the non-racial independent trade unions in South Africa in the liberation struggle. ■

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