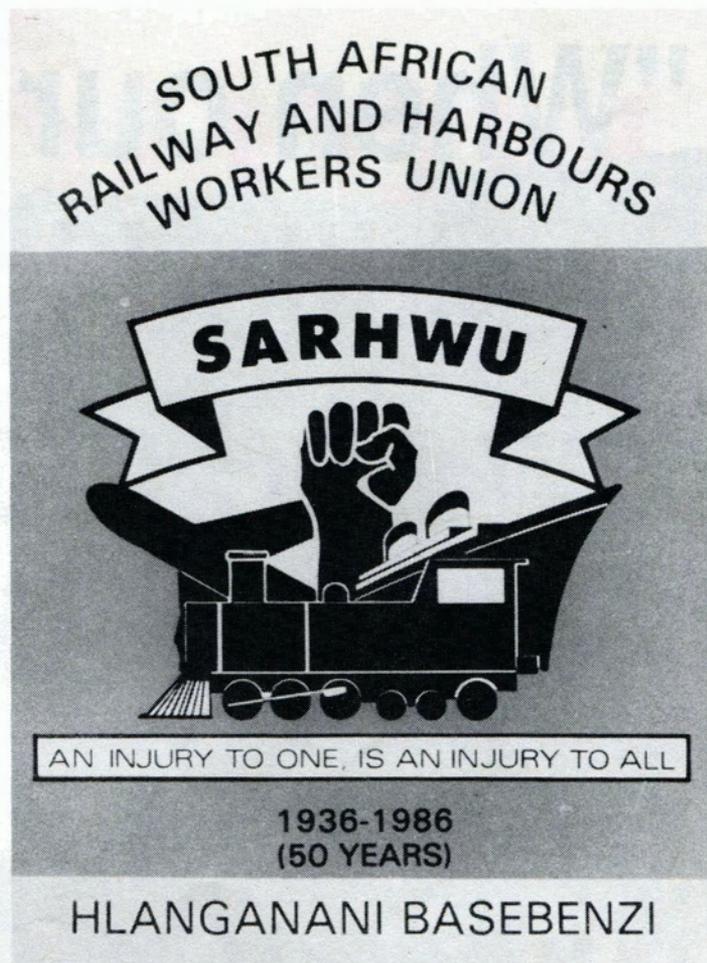


Save the SARHWU Four!



The SARHWU 4 are *Taklani David Mamphaga, Wilson Matshile, George Maungedzo and Patrick Molefe*. The four are members of the **South African Railway and Harbour Workers' Union**. They were sentenced to hang following the death of four non-strikers during one of the longest and most bitter strikes in South African history.

The root of the strike lay in apartheid practices on the state owned **South African Transport Service (SATS)**. Black workers are poorly paid and have vastly inferior conditions of service to white workers.

The strike started in March 1987 over the unfair sacking of one worker. But because of the deep felt anger of the black railworkers about conditions, the strike quickly spread and involved over 20,000 workers. Like all organisations which oppose apartheid rule, SARHWU was subject to severe repression. In 1986 the apartheid state introduced the State of Emergency in an attempt to crush community based resistance to apartheid.

They then brought the full repressive apparatus of the apartheid state to attack the fledgling democratic trade union movement. Trade union leaders were detained, union meetings tear-gassed and union buildings gutted.

On the 22nd April 1987 three railway workers were shot dead as security police broke up a union meeting at the headquarters of the **Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)**. A group of railway workers travelling to a station to investigate the news of the murder of their colleagues was attacked. Three more railway workers were killed. For SARHWU the strike was a fight for its very existence. Several times in its fifty year history the union had been forced underground or destroyed due to state repression.

It was in this context of mounting state violence against SARHWU and the striking railway workers that the four non-strikers met their deaths. COSATU condemned this act of violence but pointed out that the root of the violence in apartheid South Africa is the apartheid system itself.

Those sentenced to death do not deserve to die. Evidence presented in mitigation of other defendants was accepted by the apartheid court, but ignored in the case of the SARHWU 4. Although South African President, **FW de Klerk**, has announced a moratorium on executions, their lives are still in danger. The death penalty has not been abolished. We must step up the campaign to save their lives.

An injury to one is an injury to all!

THIS WAS PW'S 'WORKERS' DAY'



Bloody Wednesday - a striking railway worker lies dead in the street near Doornfontein, one of six SARHWU members killed by Botha's police after SATS had announced it was racking 16000 strikers.

This issue of COSATU NEWS was banned in South Africa, but we managed to get a copy out of the country.

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Trial

Originally eighteen members of SARHWU were arrested and charged with the deaths of the four non-strikers. However the court accepted the pleas of ten of the defendants to lesser charges and they were given custodial sentences and ordered to pay compensation to the families of the victims. The union's lawyers then entered pleas of mitigation for the eight other defendants who pleaded guilty to the killing of the four non-strikers. There was evidence of torture being used by the police to obtain statements which incriminated the eight.

Defence

The defence introduced an impressive array of evidence testifying to the psychological condition of the defendants and outlining that at the time of the strike they were experiencing severe economic deprivation and were engaged in a struggle to ensure the survival of their families. Furthermore the defence explained that the strikers had a large number of dependents and this caused intense feelings against those who undermined the strike.

A senior lecturer in psychology said: "If ... for example the security forces, which weaken a strike cannot be approached due to extreme power and lack of accessibility the tendency will be to look for other targets who are less powerful and more accessible. More often than not these tend to be scabs."

The court heard how trade unions played a useful role in reducing violence by giving voice to workers aspirations. However SARHWU found it difficult to fulfill this role as its leaders were in detention and SATS refused to recognise the union.

Other evidence pointed to a number of forces which drove the accused to adopt such desperate measures to sustain the strike.

These forces are all 'firmly established psychological processes, corroborated by numerous careful scientific research investigations.'

The defence summed up by adding: "For each of the accused in the mitigation trial, I believe the combined situational forces were sufficiently powerful to make it likely that most ordinary people would have behaved similarly It is rare indeed for so many forces to converge at the same time and place with compelling effect."

Judgement

In the case of four of those accused this evidence was accepted and they were given custodial sentences. However in the case of the other four the judge found that there was no extenuating circumstances due to the 'brutality of the crime.' But this is surely false logic as the brutality of the crime applies to all eight defendants. If mitigation was accepted by the judge - it should have been accepted for all eight.

Apartheid and South African Courts

The odds for a fair sentence were stacked against the SARHWU 4. All the judges in the South African courts are white. They are implementing apartheid laws. There is also a great discrepancy in the sentencing policy. One white farmer who had sadistically tortured a farm labourer to death was let-off with a compensation order.

South African judges have also not passed sentence on the racist system itself. But this has been done by the United Nations which describes apartheid as a crime against humanity. It is only when this system is overthrown that the violence that it creates will cease. "When our comrades are killed it is called law and order but when we defend ourselves, we are murdered. When the system contravenes the law it is justice, when people demand justice, it is a crime." - SARHWU Statement.

Testimony

When I was detained I was put in a cell on my own. I was initially detained under emergency provisions for three days. I was threatened with shooting unless I told the truth. It was clear that they were trying to get me to admit to involvement in the incident during the railway workers strike when four scabs were killed. They tortured me for three days. I still refused to talk. They said I must know something because I was involved. As one of them asked me, others were hitting me on my shoulders. 'We shall kill you, we shall torture you unless you answer', they kept shouting at me.

I was held under these conditions for about two to three months. I was all alone.

Strike

October 1986 :

Conference of SARHWU launches an organisational drive to double its membership and campaign for mass resignations from the company sweetheart union.

3 November 1986 :

A mass meeting of railway workers at Kaserne compound present demands to SATS to improve their working conditions.

15 January 1987 :

The security police raid the union's head office. Ntai Sello, SARHWU's general secretary and other officials are arrested. February 1987 : A boycott of food provided by SATS spreads.

11 March 1987 :

Lorry driver Andrew Nedzamba is sacked for handing-in money collected late.

13 March 1987 :

The sacking sparks a strike wave involving over 20 000 workers at 55 depots. The Jan Smuts airport is paralysed by the strike.

April 1987 :

The strike spreads and repression intensifies. Hundreds of strikers are arrested. Offers by COSATU to mediate are rejected by SATS.

22 April 1987 :

Thousands of striking railway workers are sacked. At COSATU's offices three strikers are shot dead and four hundred union officers are dragged from the building and arrested. Three more strikers are killed at Doornfontein station.

29 April 1987 :

Solidarity rally at Witwatersrand University is broken up by security police.

7 May 1987 :

COSATU House is destroyed by two bombs. To date the bombers have not been caught.

5 June 1987 :

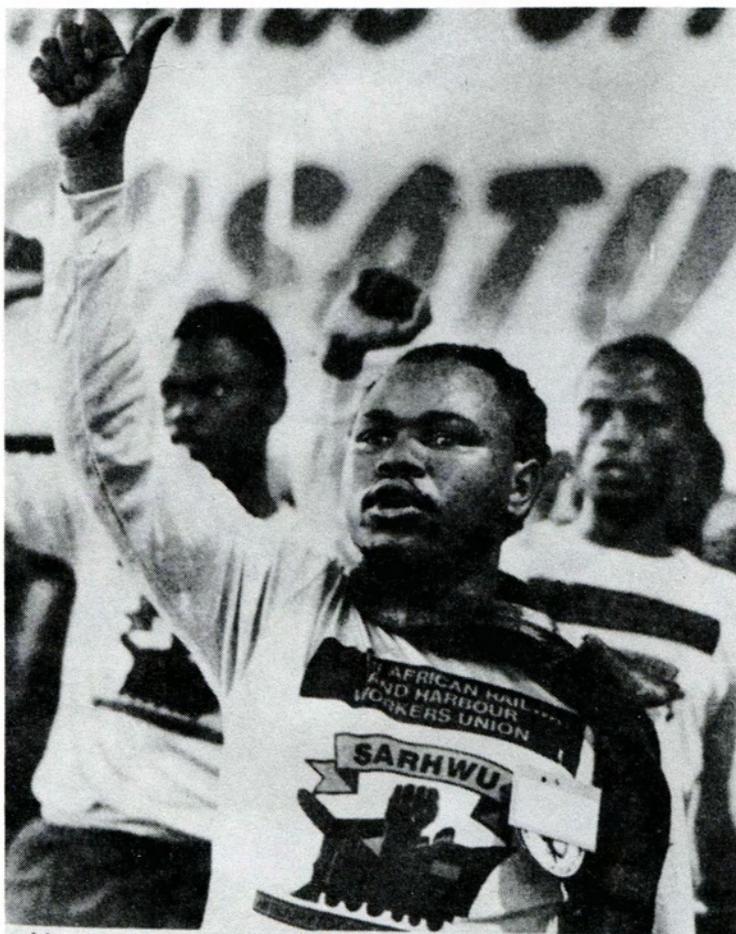
Strike ends in victory for SARHWU. However hundreds of trade unionists remain in prison.

"I cannot lose my dignity and betray my principles for a full stomach" - SARHWU striker.

We couldn't switch off the light. A guard stands at the door all of the time. They just open a grill and push food under it. I went two weeks without water for washing or drinking when I was detained. We could hear people being beaten. Sibisi Bongani was brought to us. He had been charged by now. He was in a very bad state. He couldn't pass urine - he just passed blood. After five months I was released from detention. You are forced to sign nonsense which the police write down before charges are made. This is shown to the magistrates. They ask you: 'Were forced to sign it?'. Everyone says, 'No, it was voluntary.' Because if you don't you will be beaten.

That is why people are charged with offences like intimidation and kidnapping. It's all false but people were beaten up. We could hear it in the cells.

South African Railway and Harbour Workers Union



Members of the SA Railways and Harbours Workers Union

SARHWU was set up in 1936. Since that time the union has been twice crushed by state repression. The union was a founder member of the South African Congress of Trade Unions in 1955.

But by 1964 every union official was detained or banned. In the 1970's Lawrence Ndzanga tried to revive SARHWU. As a result, he was murdered by the regime in prison. However by 1983 the union was officially revived, and affiliated to COSATU at its launch in 1985.

SARHWU is a non-racial union, open to all workers regardless of race. For SARHWU, the enemy is the apartheid system not a particular colour. The union has adopted the Freedom Charter the African National Congress' blueprint for a post-apartheid South Africa.

To fully appreciate why the sacking of one railway worker would inspire such a forceful reaction from the other workers one has to understand the nature of repression on the railways. SARHWU's struggle is against deeply entrenched racism and exploitation which are a feature not only of the state owned railways but of the whole apartheid system.

As one railway worker explained: "That is what the strike is all about - it is about being beaten, being called 'kaffirs', being dismissed without representation and being paid starvation wages." The 1989 strike for recognition of SARHWU resulted in the death of over thirty strikers at the hands of railway security and state backed vigilantes.

South African Transport Services

SATS, which operates the railways, harbours and other state-owned transport services, is the only industry in South Africa which employs more whites than blacks. Since the Great Depression SATS has been a haven for poor whites - mostly Afrikaners. The strike by the black railway workers struck fear into the ruling National Party. This was not only because of the economic importance of SATS but also because they feared that the white workers on the railways might be attracted to far-right forces. It was this fear which inspired the severe backlash against SARHWU.

But the repression in SATS has also created a firm sense of the need for a trade union to fight for improved conditions. As the same railway worker explained: "The nature of our work has helped forge a sense of comradeship amongst railway workers. As individuals we cannot lift the heavy rails, but as a united team we can. This rule applies to the struggle against SATS as well.

Who are the SARHWU Four?

Takalani David Mamphaga

David Mamphaga grew up in Venda under difficult conditions. Despite his disadvantaged background, he was able to matriculate at the age of 22 at a farm school. He is 25 years of age, is married and has one child. At the time of the strike, he was living as a tenant in his uncle's house in Soweto, with four people in one bedroom house. He was unemployed until February 1985, when he began to work for SATS as an electrician. At the time of the strike, he was working as a cleaner, earning R280 (£60) per month. He was greatly embittered by the extreme police action during the strike and in his evidence he remembered an incident where a worker was shot at Park Station.

Wilson Matshile

Wilson Matshile grew up in Venda. His father died when he was one year old and he was brought up in his uncle's house where there was no electricity, water and very little money for clothes and education. He passed standard 4 in education, but due to lack of money was unable to continue his education. Even when he was able to go to school, there was not enough money for books and school materials. Wilson Matshile has been married for 16 years and has eight children. He is very close to his family. He joined SATS in 1982 and lived in a compound dormitory. He was very unhappy there because he could not live with his family. For some time he was able to have his wife and two children with him in Soweto, but they had to return to Venda to care for the other children and he was forced to move back to the hostel.

George Maungedzo

George Maungedzo is 36 years old. He grew up in Venda and used to herd goats and cattle as a boy. He was only able to receive standard 2 education at school. He is married by customary union to two wives and has two children. He was supporting both wives and children. He moved to Johannesburg in 1980 to look for work, and began to work for SATS at New Canada. While he was working there, he lived at a municipal hostel in Soweto. As such he suffered all the conditions of insufficient space, light and ventilation, and the overcrowding of all the migrant workers who are forced to be hostel dwellers. He shared a single room with 10 other men and was allowed no visitors; not even his wife. At the time of the strike he was employed at SATS and was earning R350 (£70) per month.

Patrick Molefe

Patrick Molefe grew up in abject poverty, raised by his grandmother in the Transkei, while his parents worked in Johannesburg. His education did not exceed Standard 2. He is 28 years old and unmarried. He began to work for SATS in 1983, stationed at Germiston. He lived in the single male hostel in Delmore, in the same unacceptable conditions of other hostel dwellers. At the time of the strike he was earning R280 (£60) per month. He became involved in the strike after watching the police action violently applied to workers in Germiston, when they were trying to forcibly remove a group of strikers.

"We, the General Secretaries of transport unions representing over 1.5 million trade unionists do not believe the SARHWU 4 should hang. Apartheid is the root of violence in South Africa. It is this system that should be destroyed not the lives of these trade unionists. We urge all concerned individuals to campaign to save the lives of the SARHWU 4."

Britains record

Britain has intervened in some cases of those on Death Row. However it refuses to pursue a general policy of opposing the execution of opponents of apartheid. Indeed in many cases it states that it will only consider intervening over a case when the South African State President has turned down a final Petition for Clemency. This is a case of too little - too late. It is usually only disclosed that a Petition has been refused at the same time as the execution date is given, with no more than a weeks notice.

Act now ***The Joint Campaign***

The Anti-Apartheid Movements Joint Campaign Against the Repression of Trade Unionists in South Africa and Namibia was launched in 1988 after increasing concern about the attacks on the democratic trade union movement in these countries. We have mounted campaigns with the shopworkers union USDAW to save the life of a South African dairy worker, with the NUM to save the lives of three South African miners and have campaigned to free political prisoner and detainees.

What we can do

Our Government refuses to intervene to save the lives of the SARHWU 4. Please write to urge that they must act now.

■ **Write to:**
The Right Honourable Douglas Hurd,
Secretary of State Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office,
King Street,
LONDON, SW1.

■ **Protest to the South African authorities.**

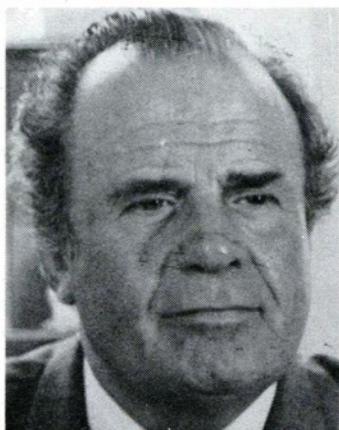
■ **Write to:**
President FW de Klerk,
Union Buildings,
PRETORIA 0001,
SOUTH AFRICA.
The South African Ambassador,
South Africa House,
Trafalgar Square,
LONDON, WC2.

Join the campaign to save the SARHWU 4

- Support the SARHWU 4 Action mailing list.
- Write to the Joint Campaign for details.
- Write to the SARHWU 4 :
Pretoria Central Prison,
Private Bag X45,
PRETORIA 0001,
SOUTH AFRICA.
- Send donations to the campaign in order that we can spread the campaign through Britain and internationally.
- Affiliate your organisation to the Anti-Apartheid Movement.

Produced by the
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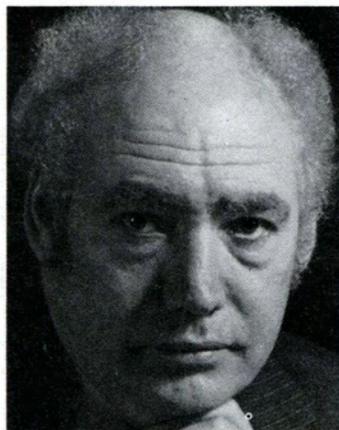
Transport and General Workers Union
Transport Salaried Staffs' Association
National Union of Railwaymen
Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen
National Union of Seamen
National Union of Marine Aviation and Shipping Transport Officers



Ron Todd TGWU



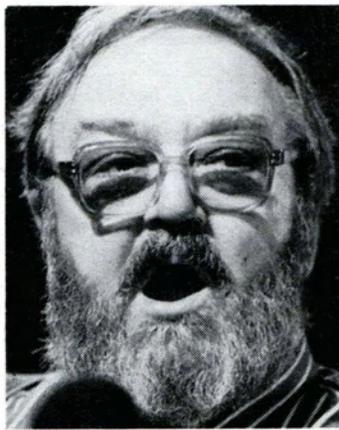
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