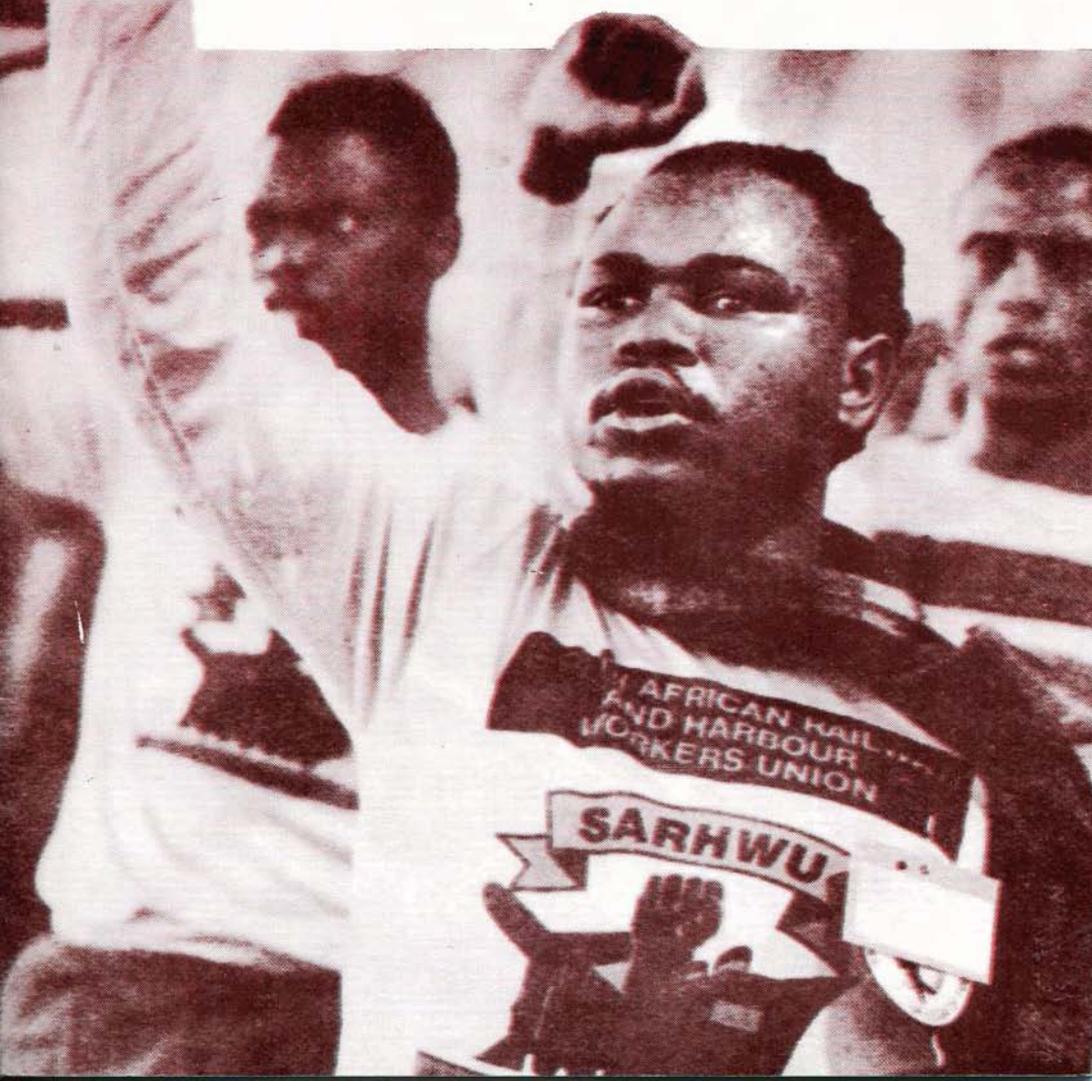
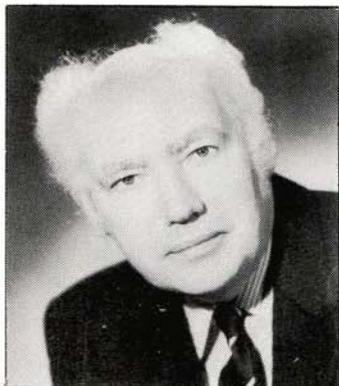


SOLIDARITY WITH SOUTH AFRICAN RAILWORKERS

REPORT ON NUR SUPPORT FOR SARHWU



From the General Secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen.



In our lifetime we have seen evil regimes flourishing and passing into oblivion but in the process leaving a legacy of tragedy and suffering. The same is true of South Africa today.

Whilst the NUR has always been in the forefront in its opposition to such regimes, the death of railway workers during the South African Railway and Harbour Workers' Union strike for just treatment of its members has prompted our own Union into greater involvement with the plight of our South African railway colleagues.

The Executive Committee of the NUR felt that it was essential to demonstrate personal solidarity, in addition to its active support and in consequence sent two representatives to South Africa to demonstrate the NUR's support to SARHWU and to assess at first hand the situation on the spot.

Two representatives from Rail Against Apartheid accomplished this important but dangerous task.

We honour those railway workers who have been killed in the Union's struggle and record our deepest respect for their courage and determination in the fight for justice and freedom which is the birthright of all mankind.

Those killed in Johannesburg were Mr. Joseph Mampuru, from Sekhukhuniland and Mr. Christopher Jozana and Mr. Molahlehi Mohlakametsi, from Herschel. Those killed in Germiston were Mr. Moses Mokgopa, from Pietersburg, Mr. Jeremiah Diutlwileng, from Zeerust and Mr. Zonwabele Mogubata, from the Transkei.

James Knapp

J. Knapp

Introduction

ON FRIDAY, 5 June the streets of Johannesburg were filled with thousands of railway workers celebrating one of the most important labour victories seen during the recent upsurge in South Africa. For three long months — with their families near to starvation - South Africa's railway workers had been on strike. As it became clear that despite their desperate position they would not be forced back to work, the South African Transport Services (SATS) management had no option but to back down.

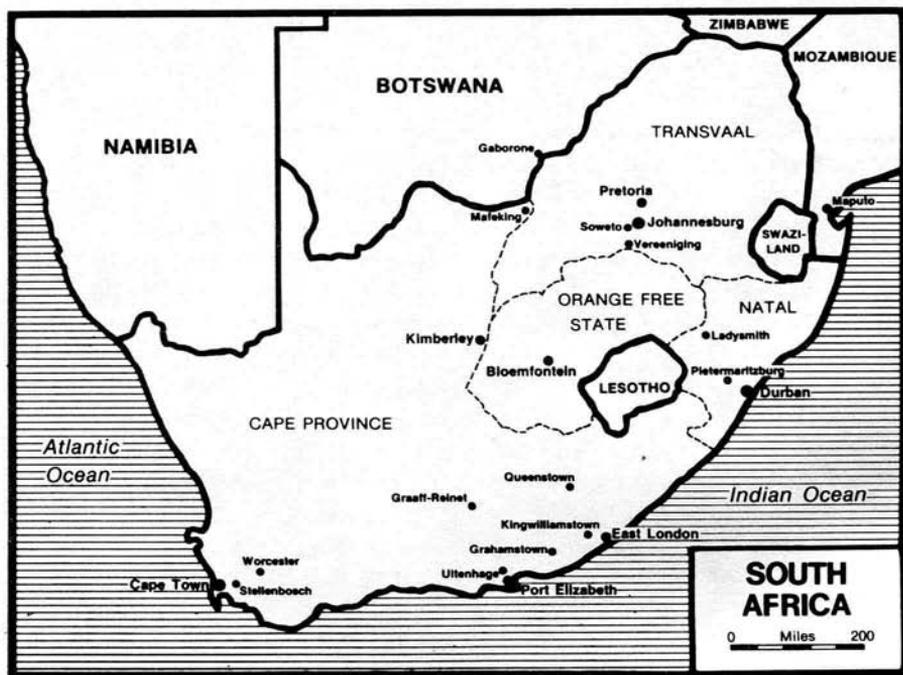
The strikers were members of the South African Railway and Harbour Workers Union (SARHWU). On 13 March thousands of SARHWU members took industrial action after the dismissal of a fellow worker for a minor misdemeanor. However, it soon became a struggle for recognition of the rights and aspirations of black South African railway workers. By the end of the strike, six railway workers lay dead, murdered by the South African security forces. About 1,000 had been imprisoned during the dispute, joining the union's general secretary Ntai Sello who had been arrested in February. Justice Langa, the president and Mike Roussos, the education officer were amongst those imprisoned. (Justice Langa still remains in apartheid's gaols.) Hundreds of railway workers had been injured. Sixteen thousand members had been sacked.

Bonds had been made between the National Union of Railwaymen. (NUR) and SARHWU through Rail Against Apartheid (RAA) in the summer of 1986. Because of the harassment and detention designed to stop representatives of SARHWU from building on those links at a critical time for this dispute, it was decided by all concerned that representatives of Rail Against Apartheid should enter South Africa to make the contact being denied to SARHWU. The National Executive Committee of the NUR had to make the decision officially in retrospect on 21 May, 1987. The resolution adopted at the NEC meeting stated, "following upon the activities of "Rail Against Apartheid" in connection with the South African Railway and Harbour Workers Union strike, G. Revell of the NEC and Doreen Weppler are currently in South Africa on behalf of Rail Against Apartheid. They will inquire at first-hand into the prevailing situation and convey fraternal greetings and your solidarity and support to our colleagues in SARHWU in their present desperate struggle for survival".

The visit was backed by the individual members of the national executive committee of the NUR as well as by its officers, including the general secretary, the president, and the assistant general secretaries. However, it could not be arranged as a normal delegation between two trade unions if it was going to have any

success. The apartheid state in South Africa does not allow such fraternal relations and normal contact to develop. In fact, it was only through the offices of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) that the trip was made possible. SACTU was founded in 1955 as the first non-racial trade union coordinating committee in the forefront of the political struggle against the national oppression of all black people in South Africa. Today, the NUR benefits from invaluable aid and advice received from the SACTU offices in London, and the trip is one example of our close collaboration.

This is a report for the membership of the NUR from Geoff Revell and Doreen Weppler — the representatives of Rail Against Apartheid who made that solidarity visit — who also wish to acknowledge and thank those outside of the leadership of the NUR without whose help the visit would have been impossible.



Map: Pathfinder Press

Report written on behalf of the National Union of Railwaymen, Unity House, Euston Road, London NW1 2BL.

Life on the South African Railways

AS A BLACK South African railway worker you may have ended up working on the railway not through your own choice of employment, but from reasons of the harshest necessity. You may have come from a family who once owned land, where your own cattle grazed. The apartheid regime would have stolen your land and forced your family to re-settle in reservations of land set aside for the black population. There is no way you can make a living from these barren lands, called bantustans. Living in abject poverty, you would have been forced to become a migrant labourer.

On joining the railway, you would leave behind your family. You would be forced to live in a single sex compound or hostel. You would know that your family would only be able to visit you infrequently, if at all. In the compound, the food would be provided by your employer, the South African Transport Services (SATS). Although your food and rent is deducted from your wages, it is of the lowest quality maize, cooked in unhygienic conditions. Your rent is also deducted from your wages. Your room in the compound would have the barest necessities. Even the lights are on at all hours because there is only a single light switch.

You would not be a permanent employee. Instead you would be a contract worker — a status which takes away any idea of job security. Before becoming a registered railway worker, you would have to complete one year's probationary service.

During that year, you will suffer many abuses. You will have been beaten and kicked, and called 'kaffir' by your white boss. Sometimes when you booked on duty you would be told by the white boss to do private jobs which have nothing to do with your employment as a railway worker. If you had complained, you would have been dismissed.

Because of the apartheid system's racist job allocation in SATS, you soon realised this was all life was going to offer you forever.

At the end of 1985, you would have heard of the re-launch of a union called SARHWU, and heard of the role it played in the launching of the major non-racial union federation in South Africa — the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). You will also have read the union's declaration of principles that included these words: 'The future of the people of South Africa is in the

hands of its workers. Only the working class in alliance with other progressive minded sections of the community can build a happy life for all South Africans, a life free from unemployment, insecurity and poverty, free from racial hatred and oppression, a life of vast opportunities for all our people?

You may have been in a compound where SARHWU was signing up members in the fight to resist living conditions as a food boycott got underway. Or you may have begun to understand that your conditions would not change as long as you remained a member of the boss-controlled Black Staff Association. In a clandestine way, you would have been approached to join that union, and agreed, seeing it as vital in the struggle for a better life.

Declaration of principles

History has shown that unorganised workers are unable to improve their wages and conditions of work on a lasting basis. Only where workers have organised in effective unions have they been able to improve their lot, raise their standard of living and generally protect themselves and their families against the insecurities of life.

The whole experience of the trade union movement the world over has, furthermore, established that the movement can only progress on the basis of unity and in the spirit of comradeship and the solidarity of all workers. Trade unions must unreservedly reject any attempts to sow disunity amongst the workers, on the basis of colour or nationality or sex or religion.

Because of the results of living under apartheid, SARHWU's membership is mostly black. But our aim is to achieve a nonracial, democratic South Africa. We are convinced that the growth of democratic unions — which encourage participation and decision making — is a vital contribution to the struggle for a free and democratic South Africa. SARHWU aims to use our union meetings and struggles to make sure that strong working class leaders emerge from amongst the workers.

The future of the people of South Africa is in the hands of its workers. Only the working class, in alliance with other progressive minded sections of the community, can build a happy life for all South Africans, a life free from unemployment, insecurity and poverty, free from racial hatred and oppression, a life of vast opportunities for all our people.

But the working class can only succeed in this great and noble endeavour if it is itself united and strong, if it is conscious of its inspiring responsibility. The workers of South Africa need a united and strong trade union movement, in which all sections of the working class can play their part, unhindered by prejudice or racial discrimination. Only such a truly united movement can effectively serve the interests of the workers, both the immediate interests of higher wages and the longer term interests of better conditions of life and work.

The living conditions of railway workers, forced to live in single-sex compounds. One of the important areas of SARHWU's struggle.



The South African Railway and Harbour Workers Union

SARHWU was first set up in 1936 and was a founder member of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) when it was launched in 1955. Since that time, the union was twice crushed by state repression. For whole periods, the union didn't exist. Lawrence Ndzanga tried to revive SARHWU in the mid-70s. He was imprisoned and murdered. In 1983, with the help of other unions, SARHWU was re-established.

SARHWU is a founding member of COSATU, the 700,000 member union federation formed in South Africa at the end of 1985. It is a non-racial union, open to all workers regardless of race. For SARHWU, the enemy is the apartheid system, not a particular colour. However, in practice the union's membership is almost totally made up of black workers. The South African Transport Services (SATS) claims 107,000 black workers on its books.

COSATU has given extensive aid to SARHWU, helping its rapid growth in recent months before the strike. The union was formally re-launched in October

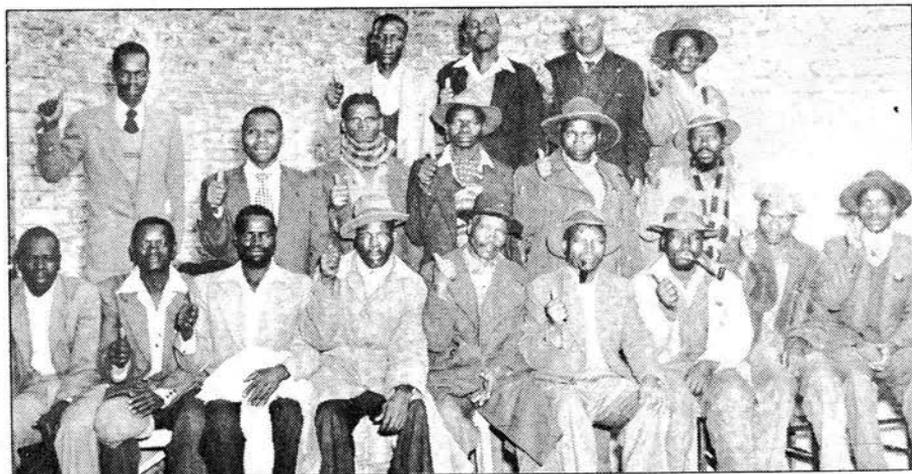


Photo: SACTU

Lawrence Ndzanga, (top left corner), tried to revive SARHWU in the 1950s. Pictured here with Transvaal members, he was murdered by the regime while in prison.



Photo: Afravision

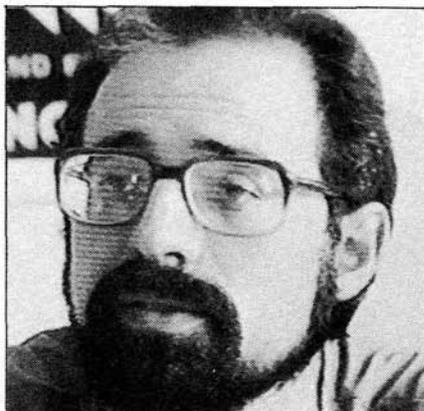


Photo: Afravision

MANDLA MSIMANJA (left) a steward at the City Deep container depot where the incident occurred which sparked off the three-month long rail strike. Mandla was arrested at the end of June when security forces detained him at work. He is being held under the notorious Section 29 of the Internal Security Act which rules out any form of communication with him. MIKE ROUSSOS, (right), the union's Education Officer, was arrested just prior to our visit but through successful court action has recently been released on the basis of a legal technicality.

1986. Over 180 delegates travelled to Port Elisabeth to adopt a new constitution and elect a leadership. At that conference, several of the older leaders of the union, including Moses Mabhida, Curnick Ndlovu, and Archie Sibeko, were honoured by the union. At that time, SARHWU had signed up around 10,000 members. The major rally at the end of the conference was addressed by top officials from both COSATU and the United Democratic Front, the largest anti-apartheid federation of community-based organisations in South Africa.

Since its early days, SARHWU has not faced an easy task. The 1970 Labour Relations Act doesn't apply to the railways, so railway workers have no legal rights to form a union. Wages and conditions of these industrial workers are amongst the worst in South Africa — only the agricultural workers and the domestics fare less better. Just like in the early days of the NUR, SARHWU's organisers are not always railway members. Archie Sibeko who worked on the railways in the 1950s before becoming a full-time functionary for SACTU later told how useful it was that he'd kept his uniform. 'Outsiders are not allowed in (railway premises), so to organise the workers was very difficult. We had to trespass all the time. Because of my overalls, I could go straight through the guard box, straight to the workers.'

Whatever the difficulties, the organisation of railway workers is fundamental to the liberation struggle in South Africa. The railway system is important on a number of counts. First, from the point of view of the economy. About 80 per cent of freight is moved by rail, so this gives the railways the massive economic

importance they had in Britain 50 years ago. Furthermore, the South African rail network is vital to the economies of all the other countries throughout the region of Southern Africa who are dependent on South Africa's railways for the transport of their exports to ports. This dependence also explains why the South African army has targetted the railway networks of the front line states, which have had such a crippling effect on their economies.

Just as fundamental to the apartheid system, is the use of the railways to transport labour to the workplace. Apartheid means, according to how the government wants the world to see its philosophy, the 'separate development' of South Africa's races. They put it that way because it suggests elements of freedom amongst the black population that just do not exist. Black people are confined to the poorest land, the bantustans. To survive, they are forced to move to urban areas and to sell their labour cheaply. Every day they travel from these blacks-only townships into the white cities where the factories, businesses and industrial centres are located. Or else they travel to the homes of the white population where they find employment doing domestic jobs. So that the influx of labour to these areas does not create by stealth any suggestion of a non-racial society, when they have finished their labour and earned their starvation wages, the vast majority return to the townships. In some circumstances, such as if they lose their jobs, they are forced to leave the townships and return to the bantustan which is assigned to them by the apartheid state.

It is not difficult to see why the apartheid authorities have deemed that the railways are a strategic sector and outlawed strikes on them. A work stoppage by railway employees does not only halt the transport of materials necessary for the economy, it also prevents the entire workforce travelling into their jobs. Additionally, the entire military machine which apartheid has built up, is also dependent on the railways. The South African Defence Force (SADF), the army, demobs its conscripts and has a new intake of men during the same month. Many thousands of soldiers have travel permits which allow them to travel only on trains, neither air transport nor buses are used. So even here apartheid relies heavily on the railways.

In short, the railways are of prime importance for the movement and control of the exploited labour of South Africa's black population, and they contribute centrally to the ability of employers to reap super-profits in that country.

The re-launching of SARHWU seen against this kind of back cloth shows why the South African government is so intolerant of its existence. After all, a union whose constitution states its opposition to apartheid, and further states it will organise all employees of SATS regardless of race, to fight apartheid, can be seen as nothing else than a defiance of the present social order in South Africa.

But the reaction of the state does little to halt the growth of SARHWU. Since its re-launch, SARHWU has moved closer and closer to achieving the target of doubling the membership which the re-launch conference set.

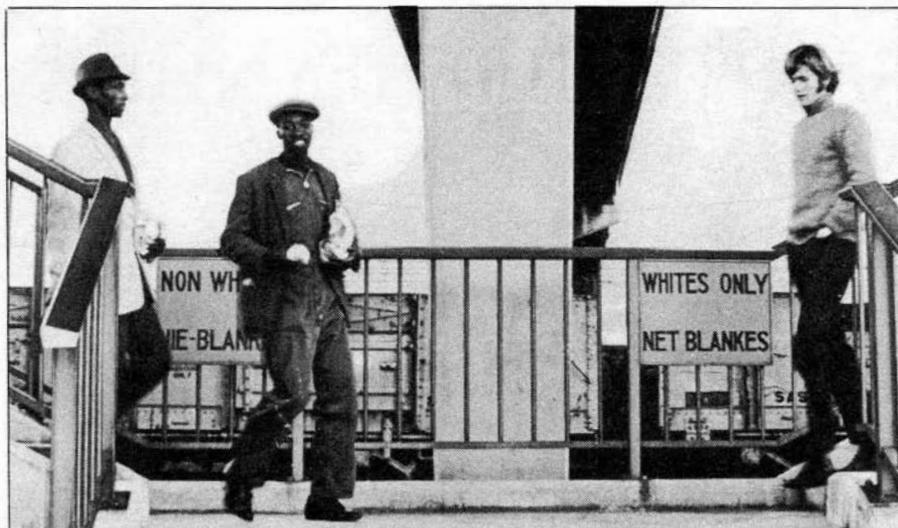
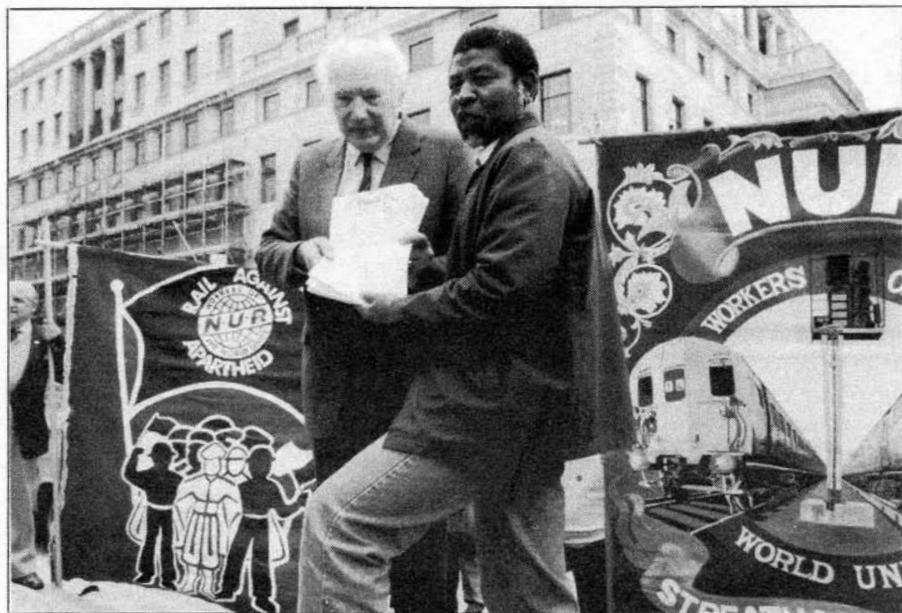


Photo: IDAF

A clear demonstration of the absurdity of the apartheid sickness is seen in this photograph of the entrance to a railway platform.



Jimmy Knapp and Zola Zembe, Western European co-ordinator of SACTU, attempt to hand in a petition at the South African embassy. Thousands of British railway workers demanded the release of Ntai Sell, general secretary of SARHWU.

SARHWU and the NUR

RELATIONS between SARHWU and the NUR were established in May 1986 when Mike Roussos visited Britain. At that time meetings were arranged between Mike Roussos, NUR general secretary, Jimmy Knapp, and Rail Against Apartheid. From that time, the purpose of RAA was to work in conjunction with SARHWU to form fraternal bonds on a union to union basis. RAA seeks support in its activities from individuals, branches and district councils. It appeals for members' participation in carrying out projects which have been set by SARHWU. All of the activities undertaken by RAA have relied on the membership of the NUR to achieve them.

The first major project which RAA got underway was to pay the wages of an organiser for SARHWU. The importance and necessity of this project cannot be over-stated. Firstly, the union does not have official recognition from the employer. In fact, such recognition is explicitly denied as the 1970 labour laws don't apply on the railways. Recruitment at the workplace is extremely difficult because of the harassment by SATS. The union has to send its organisers into the hostels and compounds where railway workers are forced to live. In other words, recruitment to the union has to be done underground.

The importance of any organiser is therefore an absolute necessity. As Mike Roussos explained in May, the lesson drawn from the miners union in South Africa was that without a national organising drive, which depended on being able to afford organisers, the union would not be able to develop. The miners union only really started to sink roots in the workforce once it had sufficient organisers.

This project received a magnificent response from railway workers in Britain and was successfully completed. It is an example of what has been achieved and what can be achieved. The importance of the links for SARHWU which the state wanted to crush can best be summed up by the headline in the progressive South African weekly newspaper, *New Nation*. The interview done by that paper with the two NUR representatives just before they left South Africa, was headlined, 'SARHWU, you are not alone.'

Background to the strike

FOLLOWING the bonds made between SARHWU and the NUR last May, a state of emergency was declared in South Africa on 12 June. Under the cloak of these new laws, SARHWU faced stepped up harassment.

In February, the NUR received word that Ntai Sello, the general secretary of SARHWU, and other shop stewards had been arrested. The arrests took place in the midst of negotiations over action which spread amongst 20,000 railway workers at the start of the year. These workers were protesting the conditions at their compounds.

As this wave of action spread to rid the industry of its compound system of accommodation and its intolerable racist practices, a driver at the City Deep container depot near Johannesburg, was sacked for a minor misdemeanor which had taken place on 24 October 1986. This worker, Andrew Nedzamba, had returned from delivering a container on the Friday evening and found the cash office shut. He was therefore unable to hand over the £12 delivery charge until Monday morning. Yet five months later, on 12 March, 1987, he was dismissed. This blatant case of victimisation of a SARHWU member was the mere spark to an already explosive situation which led to one of the most bitter trade union disputes in the history of South African railway workers.

The action on the railways grew and built up so that in less than a week, 7,000 workers had come out in solidarity with the City Deep strikers. By the beginning of April, 19,000 railway workers were on strike in defence of their trade union rights. The strike snowballed in a way that couldn't be controlled by the bosses. In fact, the actions taken by management worsened the situation. One incident during the dispute took place in Kimberley when a gang of permanent way workers on the track suddenly noticed armed state security forces standing at the top of the bank near where they were working. The gang had a black worker go off to meet the white boss to enquire why these soldiers were there. 'What's wrong?' 'Should we raise our heads or keep still?' 'Why are they there?' The boss replied: 'They are there to stop you going on strike'.

The workers didn't know anything about the strike until that minute. So on the Sunday afternoon when the security wasn't so strong at the compound, they decided to travel to Johannesburg to see what the dispute was about. They got on the train and met up with SARHWU in Johannesburg. The soldiers came back to the compound on Monday morning and no one was there. They were all still in Johannesburg. After the workers had heard what the strike was about, they all



Justice Langa, President of SARHWU, who remains inside apartheid jails following a wave of arrests at the end of June after the return to work. Before his detention he commented in the press: 'I take my inspiration from such great leaders like Nelson Mandela. If he was prepared to spend over 20 years in jail removed from his family and friends, then why should I hide from the police?'

decided to join it.

This incident shows how strongly SATS and the state were prepared to act when they saw the strike spreading. Finally, they gave an ultimatum to the strikers. If they didn't return to work by 22 April, they would all be dismissed. This ultimatum was completely rejected by the striking workers.

They paid dearly for their decision. On the very day of the deadline, at an 1000-strong demonstration to protest the mass sackings, police attacked. The streets of Germiston, a suburb of Johannesburg, were stained with blood. Three workers had been shot dead and scores injured as the security forces waded into the protesters, armed with guns and hitting out with whips.

A mass meeting of 1000 at COSATU House heard news of these cold-blooded murders. Incensed by the deaths of their comrades, railway workers decided to set off for Germiston to demonstrate against this crime. Armoured vehicles started to arrive at COSATU House as the meeting prepared to leave. The workers were fearless and totally defied the massive armed police presence in the area. The security forces attacked and in the Doornfontein area of central

Johannesburg, three more strikers lay murdered while many others suffered terrible injuries as the police ran amok.

Not content with this violence, the security forces invaded COSATU House. Workers still inside leapt from windows in an attempt to escape the attack. Handcuffed and bloodied prisoners were whipped with truncheons while racist troops led them away from the scene. One injured member was handcuffed then thrown down a flight of stairs, and beaten where he fell with rubber staves. The walls of COSATU House were stained with the blood of South African trade unionists.

Jay Naidoo, the general secretary of COSATU reacted strongly to this blood-bath. 'COSATU sees the brutal attack on railway workers as an assault on the entire labour movement. Our members and the exploited community will never accept that management and the government can use guns and sjamboks (whips) to crush the legitimate demands of workers'.

Following these attacks, arrests of railway workers were stepped up. If they weren't detained, they were harassed constantly. The union tells of cases of workers whose homes had been occupied by security forces. In an attempt to lure the workers back to their jobs, management employed ex-railway police. 'These cops take over the houses of workers — sleeping there, eating all their food. The workers have been forced to sleep all around, or in their cars! The leadership of the union was forced to go underground at this stage.

A situation was very rapidly developing where the railway dispute was becoming the focus for a broad upsurge of the South African people fighting for an end to apartheid rule. Despite the fierce repression, the trade union movement was moving forward. South Africa's second largest union, NUMSA, was founded as a result of a merger between the metal workers and the car workers. Twenty thousand miners were involved in sporadic actions over intolerable conditions on the job and in their living compounds. In Soweto, a township on the outskirts of Johannesburg, massive resistance was mounting to rent evictions in an attempt to break the two year-old strike. South Africa's youth had managed to launch a half a million strong underground youth organisation which identified with the struggles of the unions. And the Federation of South African Women was about to be re-launched. In the midst of all of this, anger amongst South African people was growing. The railway strike and the intransigence of SATS was becoming a symbol of the hated apartheid system of rule.

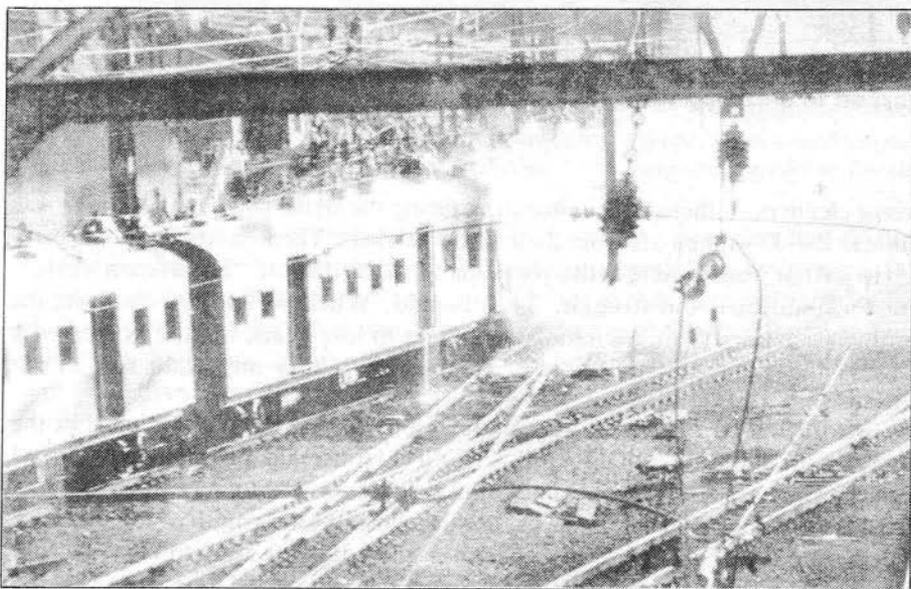
As the strike was prolonged, the union was building itself. Despite attempts by the regime and the bosses to divide the workforce on the basis of language differences, tribal groups, and areas of origin, the strikers counterposed their *common* interests as workers. Through their struggle, the railway workers came to insist that 'The workers united will never be defeated'.

In this respect, the role of women in the dispute is noteworthy. Although many women are employed by SATS in cleaning jobs — both as platform staff and car-



Photo:AP

Armed security forces oversee railway workers collecting their severance pay after the mass sackings.



A press campaign was carried out against SARHWU. Part of this campaign alleged that SARHWU was burning trains — a charge which the union strongly denied.

A week stained with blood



A photograph carried in a Sunday newspaper showing the workers forced to clean up the evidence of the murders of the railway workers.

riage cleaners — there was no instance during the strike when management was able to divide women off from their fellow workers. Themba Khuzwayo explained to us that women were active participants in the dispute. 'The women workers gave inspiration to our struggle,' Themba said. 'Whenever spirits were down, the women remained firm. Men have a tendency to lose heart, but the women were always there to boost the morale. They played a very important role in our strike.'

Two further events which were major blows for SARHWU occurred in the wake of the shooting. On 29 April, COSATU House was surrounded by armed police. The occasion for this attack was an important mass meeting of railway workers to discuss the next stage of the struggle in the aftermath of the sackings. Furthermore COSATU had just called for a two day stayaway to coincide with South Africa's whites-only election on 6 May. The whole of Jeppe Street which is the length of Oxford Street was sealed off. The security forces demanded the building be evacuated, or they would invade the building. Yet as people tried to leave, they were horribly beaten.

Tear gas poured through the building up to the ninth floor. Outside, apartheid forces used dogs and batons to drive away crowds as they gathered near

COSATU House. Armoured vehicles filled the area and helicopters circled overhead. War had been declared on the trade union movement, and its focus was SARHWU. Police moved through the building, illegally seizing union materials. Workers were roughly searched and beaten up. But the trade unionists never bowed down although the odds were massively against them. Freedom songs echoed throughout the building. At the end of the day, the union had more members in prison, and many more injured.

The second event occurred on 7 May as the successful two day stayaway which had involved 2.5 million workers drew to a close. Two bombs ripped through COSATU House at 3.30am. The professionalism employed put the responsibility at the door of the security forces. The basement was destroyed with extensive flooding. The ground floor was seriously damaged and windows right up to the top of the 11 story building were blown out. The regime then used the excuse that because the building was now structurally damaged and might collapse, in the interests of safety, nobody would be allowed back into COSATU House. Inside the building, everything in the way of administrative resources, membership files, union records — the whole paraphernalia of a union, right down to a pen and pencil, was trapped. All of the union's resources which had been patiently built up from membership subscriptions were lost to the security forces. Here then was SARHWU, running a dispute of huge proportions mainly from an underground base, having to literally start again from scratch, so far as building an administration is concerned. According to SARHWU, the problems caused by the bombing of COSATU House can't be underestimated. It provided not only the offices for union organisers, it was also a vital organising centre for the dispute.

It was then that the workers turned to the countries where they had formed bonds for assistance. Members of the union's negotiating team made arrangements to visit Britain. They were arrested just as they were making preparations to leave. It looked as if there were little chance of South African railway workers arriving in Britain. At this point, the decision was made to send representatives into South Africa.

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 sacking 16000 strikers

May Day Feature

Number 4, May 1987

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

British NUR representatives in South Africa

DURING our stay in South Africa, we were in permanent contact with the SARHWU leadership. We were able to visit two major cities — Johannesburg and Durban — and to travel over 1000 miles on the South African railways in the areas where no industrial action was underway. It has to be understood that conditions prevailing in South Africa made contact with SARHWU very difficult. The state of emergency, the leadership of SARHWU on the run, a major bombing outside the magistrate's court, and the normal extensive state security was made even more acute by the strike itself. The problems were successfully overcome, but it was a relief to be able to take the greetings of the NUR to Jay Naidoo, the general secretary of COSATU. Arrangements were then made for us to meet SARHWU leaders who had so far avoided arrest.

During our first discussions with them, we came to understand how during the dispute the relationship between the leaders and the strikers was maintained in spite of all the difficulties. Whilst we were actually talking to them, we suddenly heard hundreds of voices singing freedom songs. This was coming from the streets of Johannesburg and it was the strikers coming in for the daily report from their stewards. They packed into a meeting hall and those who couldn't get in went to the nearby blacks-only parks and squares. When the first mass meeting finished and reports from the stewards had been heard, the mass meeting would then send runners to the parks to bring in those who could not attend the first meeting. These rolling mass meetings were another example of the loss of COSATU House. All decisions for the direction of the strike were taken at these meetings. What was clear to us at this point was that the spirit and determination of the strikers were as strong as ever. Indeed, the strike was growing. This, in spite of 16,000 members sacked; leaders of the union and hundreds of members arrested — many still in prison, others on the run; threats of evictions from the compounds where the strikers lived; attempts to deny food for the compounds; and some comrades had been maimed and even murdered.

At all of our meetings, we took extensive notes. These together with all printed information and other material we wanted to have in Britain had to be sent out



Photo: IDAF

One of the entrances to the Johannesburg railway station.

piecemeal, and immediately. It would have been unsafe to have these about our person.

The following day we were taken to meet SARHWU's acting general secretary, Themba Khuzwayo; the president, Justice Langa; the treasurer, Thami Mbanxa; a regional officer, Katherine Mavi; and a steward from City Deep on the negotiating team, Mandla Msimanja. They welcomed us warmly and immediately began to discuss the future relationship between SARHWU and the NUR.

Our discussion was cut short, however, because a meeting had been arranged between those present and the Church leaders of Johannesburg. We were asked if we would attend the meeting with the SARHWU leaders and act as observers. We readily agreed. The reason for the meeting was that SARHWU wanted to persuade the Church leaders to put pressure on those responsible for the great problems the union faced. Just who was responsible was complicated. For instance, SARHWU was demanding the full re-instatement without loss of

bonuses for the sacked railway workers. If this was granted, it would bring closer prospects for a return to work on the understanding that the issues which caused the strike and those which have evolved since then, would be negotiated with the elected negotiating team of SARHWU. But many of the team's members were in prison and on the run.

Just to get back to the table at that time therefore didn't only depend on the response from SATS. It would also involve the Justice Ministry, the Commission of Police and the Ministry of Transport. Also, SARHWU wanted the Church leaders to monitor the talks with management because of the slanderous lies being put out by SATS claiming SARHWU was demanding that the industry be run by the workers before they would consider a return to work.

The meeting was held at the residence of the Anglican Bishop of Johannesburg. The kind of harassment, pressure and danger that people in South Africa face daily became evident in the procedure we had to adopt just to get into the van which was taking us to the meeting. At one point, because not everyone had arrived, we had to quickly leave the scene and return a bit later as those who had arrived felt it was too dangerous to wait in a group until the remaining SARHWU members turned up.

On their way to meet us, both Themba Khuzwayo and Justice Langa had been chased by security police with their guns drawn. They had narrowly escaped arrest and possibly worse. Shortly before, another member of the negotiating team had been nearly shot dead on a country road by plain clothes security forces who had drawn their guns, and placed the barrel against his head. He was saved only by the intervention of a reporter who just happened to be passing.

We were introduced at the Bishop's residence to eight Church leaders, both black and white and including Bishops, Canons and other leaders of the religious community. When the up-to-date position on the strike was established and the 'reconciliation role of the Church' as the Bishops put it, was outlined, Themba Khuzwayo made a number of points. His remarks helped us to understand the issues in the dispute. We therefore include below our notes of his comments.

Themba Khuzwayo

"First of all, I want to say a word on our reasons for not putting out a press statement. It involves legal issues. The lawyers said if we issued a statement, then negotiations would break down. We kept quiet because of that advice. We now think that was an error. Management has caused great confusion with their propaganda in the press.

Secondly, on Tuesday all workers in all compounds — whether they are on strike or not — were told they had one month's notice to quit their accommodation. They were told they can re-apply for their rooms on 16 June. We don't think the choice of that date — the anniversary of the Soweto uprising — is an accident.

Thirdly, on Wednesday SATS went to Court against the union. They want to stop the union from intervening in any railway matter. They didn't inform anyone this Court case was coming up.

Finally, yesterday SATS replied to our demands and said they would re-employ the 16,000 strikers, but not re-instate them. But they won't guarantee all of them re-employment, and they won't negotiate on it. When management was questioned on re-employment they said it was a question of retrenchment (redundancies) because people had already taken some of the jobs. In our view, this is unacceptable. The scabs can be removed from their jobs. The fact is that there is a total lack of industrial relations on the railways. The workers want unconditional reinstatement. However, we have seen a recent change of attitude from management. We don't know why — possibly there is a division in SATS.

The workers are still coming out on strike. At Bloemfontein, 300 have just gone on strike, and it could rise to 600. At Kimberley on Tuesday, they came out. And today we've heard about more areas coming out along the coast. The situation is a powder keg. There is no way they can fire so many workers and not get a reaction. We can't be responsible for the situation.

Another serious situation has developed with respect to food. Yesterday, Operation Hunger carried out its first emergency food supplies to a hostel in the Central Rand where management has shut down the canteen and are starving the workers. The truck was turned away. Then management told Operation Hunger that if they tried to bring food again, all the workers would be evicted from the hostel.

At the New Canada compound all the workers were ordered out of the compound by the police. So the workers peacefully went to their rooms and packed their bags and told the compound authorities they would like to be sent the monies due to them. The authorities then let them go back until the money was ready. That was last week. We don't know what will happen next there.

SATS thinks it has a mandate from the recent election. They have undertaken a total onslaught on the labour movement. The workers are not prepared to bow down — they would rather go underground. And they will if they are forced to.

This dispute doesn't only affect railway workers. The community is also involved. Everyone is saying 'What are you doing? Things are moving too slowly! Action by SATS is drawing the community directly into the dispute as well. Trains have been stopped for up to one hour. The drivers' coaches have been used by the security forces. Passengers have been searched on the platforms. Then they have been allowed to get back on the train. Then they are searched again. This isn't railway workers. It's the community. And the community is getting impatient.

There is now a court application against SARHWU and COSATU, taken out by the railways. This is being postponed indefinitely because we have filed affidavits to try and force SATS to provide information. They have given vague answers to the affidavit. It's apparent they are using the time to build up cases against the union. They've presented two confessions from workers on their affidavits. These workers were forced to make statements against the union. They told us later. They are both in hiding now. They have no place to sleep.

There is no meeting with SATS planned. The last one was 21 April, the day before they put their ultimatum, calling for a return to work or there would be mass sackings. Then they decided our negotiating team would be disbanded. The dispute has now spread right through the community.

Now Mike Roussos, the education officer, has been detained under the emergency regulations. They are connecting him with the murder of railway workers they falsely allege took place in COSATU House. This is absurd.

So how can Church leaders help? We're aware the Church has a hold on the government itself. They have the possibility of swaying the government into proper thinking.



Geoff Revell with the Durban leadership of SARHWU.

The Church has a responsibility to the community, not only to SATS workers. If the Church remains bound by its beliefs then it must take a stand where there is wrong and put this stand publicly.”

After an initial exchange between union and Church leaders exploring the possibility of a monitoring role for the Church in negotiations once they restarted, plus action on detained union members, Themba Khuzwayo touched on another pressing problem facing the union — that of a meeting hall.

“Since the bombing of COSATU House, there has been no possibility of the workers holding a rally because of the problem of the venue. The workers are scattered all over. We need to keep our members informed. Management has been given a free hand, and they have used it in the press to create confusion. Our workers are dispersed throughout the parks in their thousands. We would like the Catholic Cathedral to meet in which is the only building of a large enough size.

The request is for our union meetings. We have our own marshalls who steward the workers in the different parks. They know who their workers are and the marshalls won't let anyone else in the meeting. There will be nothing vandalised by the workers. If the security forces interfere it's a different story. But we can give you a guarantee against damage on our side. We need 5-6 meetings each day right now because there are at a minimum 11,000 workers in the streets. As we have no large meeting place, we have to spend the whole time organising the workers into small groups so we can inform the membership.

We have three different kinds of meetings each day. Perhaps the shop stewards could use the Methodist Church for their daily meetings. We are organised so that from 9am-11am the co-ordinating committee meets — that is six of us. Then between 11am and 12.30pm we report to the shop stewards. From 1pm-3pm there is a general assembly. This takes place in groups of 300 or so. The workers are not being paid, yet they travel each day to Johannesburg. It's very expensive for them. We are also very broke and want you to fund the project of getting us a meeting hall.”

As the meeting drew to a close, SARHWU members were asked to comment on the position of the white workers employed by SATS.

“Very few are sympathetic to our cause. Fear reigns supreme and they feel totally isolated. Even the Pilots Association whose members are employed by SATS and which has been recognised for 20 years, can’t today make a response to the strike.

In general, the whites benefit from the current situation. There is extensive job reservation for the whites. None benefit more than the drivers. Class one drivers are all white. They go to deliver containers or drive buses or trucks. But those who aren’t seen, the depot or shed drivers are all black. There is only one school which trains them and the same method is used for black and white workers, but the ones seen by the public are white jobs.”

The attitude of the Church leaders at the meeting was by and large to agree to try to play a role by putting pressures on the authorities so that the negotiations could resume. The meeting ended with an arrangement to meet again once the authorities had responded.

We left the Bishop’s residence and went to continue our discussions at a place of reasonable safety. There our discussions centred on the strengthening of bonds between the NUR and SARHWU. We discussed how best the NUR could assist SARHWU both in support of the strike, opposing the detentions of railway workers, and in ensuring the future existence of SARHWU. We once again met up with Jay Naidoo, and we left them all in a meeting.

Apart from gaining a greater understanding of the position of SARHWU, other pictures had by now emerged from our trip. It has to be understood that South Africa is a vast country with regions far greater in size than Great Britain itself. This coupled with the repression meted out by the state made us amazed that any communication whatsoever was possible. Contrary to what newspapers here had been reporting in Britain, the strike was not dying, but growing.

For instance when we were in Durban, we found a determination from the workers that they would join the strike if there was not a conclusion to it soon. These workers had already carried out actions of solidarity in support of their comrades in the Transvaal. At one point, they withdrew ticket examination enabling all the very many black workers who travel on the railway to travel free. Threats to join the strike also came from East London and Cape Town. For a national union, with the great problems that SARHWU had just to maintain communication with those different regions, the surprising fact is that they have indeed been able to keep in contact with their members nationally.

The sheer level of oppression the leadership was facing also became clearer to us. The people we were with moved from address to address, slept in cars and even in the open air to avoid arrest and even death.

Most unions acknowledge the great benefits of belonging to a federation of unions. It is a means whereby a single union in struggle can be helped and sus-



Photo: New Nation

Doreen Weppler receives her honorary membership of SARHWU. On her right is Themba Khuzwayo, assistant general secretary of SARHWU.

tained by the strength of that federation. SARHWU certainly was not fighting alone in South Africa. Many actions had been organised in support of the railway workers, by other unions and groups. For instance, the Post Office and Telecommunication Workers Union (POTWA) were involved in a successful strike against racism that naturally identified with the railway workers union, which they saw as a sister union in the public sector. Community groups were organising food to be taken into the compounds that housed the dismissed workers. In these groups and in other committees already in existence to assist detainees and their families, women played a key role in the solidarity work. In fact, the growing role of women in the community is one of the noteworthy features of the struggle in South Africa at the present time. Other workers also gave assistance, but what was given came from starvation wages.

We cannot find words that can adequately express the sickness and madness that is the apartheid system. Having only for a short time stayed in South Africa, our journeys on the railway involved us in the whites-only booking offices, the whites-only platform areas, and the whites-only railway carriages.

As we travelled, the apartheid system at the workplace became visible. Train drivers who operated on the main line were all white workers. But drivers operating in depots were black and were graded as a lower category. Needless to

say, the black driver could never achieve promotion to a mainline driver, as those jobs are reserved for whites. So far as shunters were concerned, a white or black employee could perform the work. Nevertheless, in order to preserve the apartheid system with its super-exploitation of black labour, a black shunter was simply called a 'shunter'. A white shunter was called a marshall and earned a far greater wage for doing the same job.

The stark differences, the enormous gap between the living standards, the way of life and the relative freedoms of the white population and the conditions the black population can expect under apartheid rule was enormous. We don't aim to explain apartheid's existence. This is well known. We merely point out its reality for us in our short stay. To experience this system first hand and to see that despite its implications for humanity that people are still determined to struggle for its downfall, moved and inspired us deeply.

Finally, we must also mention the great anger we felt about the position of the British government on South Africa. People we met involved in the liberation struggle attached the greatest importance to the role of the British government in propping up the apartheid regime. They recognised that a massive Anti-Apartheid Movement would be required to force the government to change course.

It wasn't for nothing that Pik Botha, South Africa's Foreign Minister said after the Tories won the general election in Britain that if the Tories had lost, it would have been a disaster for the South African regime. The relationship between the intelligence services here and South Africa is well known. Members of SARHWU who have approached the British Embassy in Pretoria for visas to come to Britain to raise support for their struggle have met with harassment and obstruction from the Embassy staff. We have brought this disgraceful situation to the attention of the NUR's sponsored MPs.

The next day we continued our discussions with SARHWU, again centred on forging unbreakable relations. We were then invited by an anti-apartheid activist to meet with Helen Joseph, the veteran white campaigner against apartheid rule in South Africa. One of the accused in the infamous Treason Trial of the 1950s, and the first person to be placed under house arrest, she continues despite bannings, jail, and police harassment to campaign tirelessly for freedom and justice for all people in South Africa. Her life has been a long saga of police persecution. As recently as 1978, she was gaoled for two weeks for refusing to make a statement to the security police about Winnie Mandela. She was again charged in 1983 — at the age of 78.

We found Helen Joseph to be a warm, vibrant and inspiring woman. We were especially pleased to meet with her on the eve of the re-launch of the Federation of South African Women, a mass women's organisation which rallied 10,000 in Pretoria in 1956 to protest any extension of the pass laws to women.

All of our work completed, it was now possible for us to go public. We made

arrangements for an interview with a mass circulation progressive weekly newspaper, the *New Nation*. This paper had covered the rail strike from the union's point of view throughout the dispute.

For this reason, they were enthusiastic to cover our visit. It had to be the final part of our work before we left, and the interview appeared only once we had returned to Britain.

Our final meeting with the SARHWU leadership mainly to make our farewells turned into something slightly different. To return the solidarity we had brought on behalf of the NUR members in Britain, the SARHWU leadership made us honorary members of their union. We joined the same as any other worker in South Africa. We were taken to a building with a room where we filled in our membership forms and were issued with our cards. For us, this truly symbolised the unbreakable bonds that our presence in South Africa had enhanced.

The strike itself ended in a massive victory for SARHWU when on the 5 June, the employers and the state caved in. However, it is more important than ever to maintain our determination to support SARHWU. It is quite clear from statements made by the Botha regime and above all, by the continuing arrests, that they are out to crush SARHWU as a union, along with other democratic unions. We must demonstrate more than ever that the NUR membership and all others who support SARHWU will not stand idly by and watch this happen.

- Material support can be given from individuals, branches and District Councils sending generous donations to Rail Against Apartheid (SARHWU Fund), c/o Doreen Wepler, 24 St Agnes Close, London E9 7HS.

- Get your branch or District Council to organise fund-raising events in support of SARHWU.

- When the NUR or the Anti Apartheid Movement, to which the NUR is affiliated, calls for activities and demonstrations, become involved. **Start organising now for the mass demonstration to be held in London on Saturday 24 October.**

Our experience with the leadership of SARHWU showed conclusively the enormous importance they attach to international solidarity. The largest investors in the apartheid system are British companies. This gives us a special responsibility to respond to calls for assistance from the oppressed peoples of South Africa. We appeal to all on behalf of SARHWU to rally to their defence by stepping up our material and moral support. At the 1987 Scottish TUC, condemning the South African regime and calling upon the trade union movement to build 'an irresistible pressure on the government to impose mandatory economic sanctions', general secretary Jimmy Knapp said: 'I hope everybody will carry the image of those dying railway workers and never again purchase a pennyworth of South African goods.'



Celebrating the victory after three long months of struggle.

The Victory

ON 5 JUNE at a press conference in Johannesburg, Jay Naidoo, general secretary of COSATU, announced that the railway workers had won 'a victory over apartheid arrogance'. After a three month struggle of enormous proportions, the SATS had agreed to:

1. Reinstate the 16,000 railway workers it sacked in a cynical attempt to crush the strike.
2. Guarantee permanent employment status to black railway workers with more than two years service placing them on the same footing as white workers in this respect.
3. Guarantee of no loss of individual benefits.
4. No victimisation of strikers.
5. The right of SARHWU to elect their own representatives — a massive step towards full recognition, undermining the previous refusal of the South African Transport Services to recognise SARHWU as a legitimate union.

This massive victory heralds a landmark in South African labour history and more broadly, in the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed South African people. However, maintaining solidarity with SARHWU must still remain a priority insofar as the activities of the NUR membership are concerned. This will remain the case until each and every railway worker in South Africa has been released from apartheid's prisons and the detentions stop.

WE HAVE WON

TO ALL SATS WORKERS

You have scored a major victory. Through SARHWU and its mother body, COSATU, we have negotiated the reinstatement of all striking railway workers. This could only be achieved because

- You were united and strong
- You believed your struggle was just
- You were prepared to sacrifice for your democratic rights as workers

SOUTH AFRICAN RAILWAY & HARBOURS UNION



THE SETTLEMENT

1. The reinstatement will start on Monday June 8. To get your job back, you must report before June 14. SARHWU wants all our strikers to come back in a united way on Tuesday 9 and Wednesday 10 1987.
2. You will have to report to your compounds and depots.
3. No benefits will be lost. No striking worker will lose pension or other benefits that belong to you because you have worked for SATS for a long time.
4. No worker will be victimised because he/she went on strike.

As you can see, the agreement is in line with discussions which you have had about how to resolve the strike. Your representatives have carried forward your mandate. These four points are the main points of the agreement. Your shop stewards will give you full reports at the various depots. Also, if you want to find out more about what was decided, phone your union at (011) 29-5422 and ask for SARHWU.

AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL

COSATU SALUTES YOU

COSATU salutes your courage and commitment. The victory we have won is a victory for all workers fighting for their rights. It is a victory for all who believe in democracy.

OUR DEMANDS

BLATU claimed in the *Sowetan* that they won the following commitments from SATS

1. Equal pay and pensions for workers of all races.
2. The same disciplinary procedures for all SATS workers, regardless of race.
3. All black workers to be registered as permanent workers.

In fact, these victories have been won by SARHWU and SARHWU members who have been in the forefront of the struggle for your rights.

We also call for:

1. An end to all racist practices of any sort in SATS.
2. The right to democratically elected leaders.
3. Our leaders and members in detention to be allowed to return to work immediately.

These are our demands. This is what our unity will bring closer to us.

We must concentrate on building our union and continuing the struggle for our rights.

All railway workers are SARHWU members. All SARHWU members are COSATU members.

Issued by SARHWU and COSATU

ALL SATS WORKERS: JOIN SARHWU NOW!

This advertisement was placed in several South African newspapers to inform railway workers of the victory.

Release the Detainees!

AT THE TIME of our visit, while over 1000 railway workers had been arrested and detained during the dispute, large numbers were out on bail. However, over 100 remained in prison. Amongst these were Ntai Sello, the general secretary, and Mike Roussos, the national education officer. Ntai had been arrested in February and up to that time the NUR had been unable to ascertain his whereabouts. We were told that he was being held in Durban.

Ironically, the people who told us this, Justice Langa and Mandla Msimanja, are both today in prison. Justice was arrested a few days after we left. At the time of publication he is still in detention. Mandla has just been detained in a wave of arrests of shop stewards at work, treacherously betraying the 'no victimisation' agreement entered into by SATS.

Ntai was finally released as a result of the victory of the strike. However, this brother suffered terribly at the hands of the apartheid state during his imprisonment. Today he is under constant medical care although SARHWU officers say his condition is improving. Ntai was held under section 29 of the Internal Security Act, a law which is designed for 'purposes of interrogation'. The prisoner is only released once the authorities are satisfied with the responses to their interrogation. Because of the nature of the imprisonment, the detainee is supposed to be kept free of all 'distractions'. This involves depriving detainees of all reading material except the Bible, all family visits, food, and even legal advice is not guaranteed.

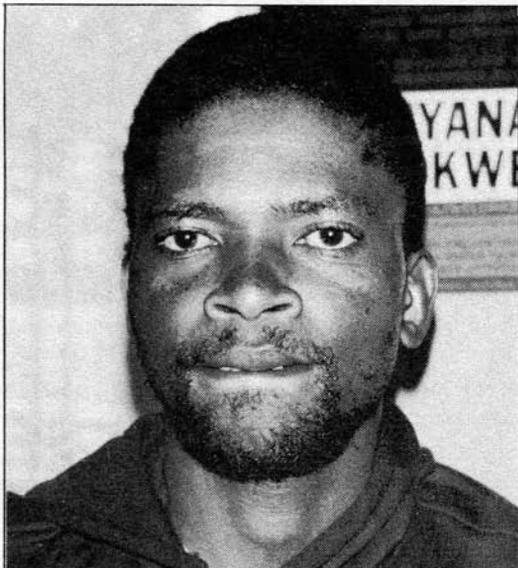
Mike Roussos, the education officer, has been released since our return. He was being held on trumped-up charges connected with allegations by the government that strike breakers had been murdered in and around COSATU House. The 'evidence' has now been exposed for what it always was — police lies.

As well as Justice Langa, the president, and Mandla Msimanja a City Deep steward, other stewards that we met have been detained — again, arrested at work. We should urge our branches and District Councils to demand their release. In addition to those already mentioned, these latest arrests are known to include: Thami Mbanxa, David Mnisi, Johannes Mashijo, Jonas Makhavu, and Norman Mokhotoathetsane, Simon Chau-chau, Willie Jacobs, Joseph Lebello.

Messages demanding the release of the president and these stewards and all other railway workers in detention to:

- **President PW Botha**, Union Buildings, Pretoria, Republic of South Africa.
- **Minister of Transport**, Mr. Louw, Sanlam Centre, 252 Andries Street, Pretoria, 0001, Republic of South Africa.
- **Minister of Police**, Mr. Vlok, Civitas Buildings, Pretoria, 0001, Republic of South Africa.

(Please send copies to Rail Against Apartheid)



Ntai Sello, general secretary of SARHWU, recently released after over four months in prison. Ntai is currently under medical supervision as a result of his imprisonment.

1987 Union Policy

THE 1987 Annual General Meeting (AGM) endorsed the position of the National Executive Committee (NEC) by carrying the following resolution:

Item 31: 'That this AGM instructs the NEC that the NUR gives all practical support and aid to help sustain the South African Railway and Harbour Workers Union and that NUR branches are urged to do the same.

'In the light of the current repression against SARHWU which has resulted in the death of fellow railworkers, we call on the NEC to extend its financial support to SARHWU to help defend itself against the attacks of the apartheid state.'

Item 30: 'That this AGM urges the NEC to use every means at their disposal to develop the campaign for sanctions to expose to our membership the involvement of the British government in support of apartheid and to build solidarity with the Congress of South African Trade Unions.'

Rail Against Apartheid

RAIL AGAINST APARTHEID (RAA) has greatly developed since its initial meeting in March of 1986. Its successes lie in the response given to the projects and activities laid down in full collaboration with SARHWU. Those responses have come from all levels of the union — the 1986 and 1987 AGMs, officers, NEC members, District Councils, branches and individuals.

Without this kind of response the main SARHWU project of funding a full-time organiser could not have been completed successfully. We would not have been able to respond so quickly to the call for the AAM to picket on 22 March the NUR-organised Great Western Hotel in London. This campaign resulted in a pro-apartheid group being denied access to that hotel and all their bookings cancelled for the coming year. Speakers have been warmly received at our grades conferences, District Councils and branches up and down the country. Members responded to the call from the NUR leadership to join Jimmy Knapp at the South African Embassy on 6 May to present petitions with thousands of railway workers signatures, demanding the release of Ntai Sello. The initiative for this came from RAA activists in the South London Rail Branch of the Labour Party. The number of members becoming more actively involved in promoting the union to union links so important to SARHWU is growing all the time.

Because of the campaigning which had been done, our union membership were more than ready to respond to the call for assistance when the South African railway workers began their three month long strike. All this solidarity is known and appreciated by SARHWU. We feel none of this would have been possible without the direct involvement of SARHWU and the fraternal, union to union links, first established in our meeting with Mike Roussos in May of 1986.

Rail Against Apartheid is backed by the leadership of the NUR and its chair and organising secretary give full reports of all the activities RAA has promoted to the NEC of the union. But RAA is in finality those in the NUR who wish through their branches and District Councils to carry out and bring to a successful conclusion the projects passed on to it by SARHWU, and those who wish to put into action the decisions arrived at by the AGM and NEC of our union.

Our aim in the coming year is to work even harder to achieve these ends. The policies of the NUR are something to be proud of. Our union is taking a lead in the labour movement in showing how links with a sister union in South Africa can be developed. The 24 October demonstration for 'Sanctions Now' in London will be the next opportunity of its kind to allow NUR members to put into practice our union motto: 'Workers of the World Unite'.



Anti Apartheid Movement



**National
Demo**



**SAT
24
OCT
'87**

**Assemble 12 noon
Embankment.
March to Hyde
Park Rally 3pm**

NUR members assemble outside Temple tube (District or Circle line) at 1200 hours. Meet behind the Rail Against Apartheid banner.

IN MEMORY OF

Joseph Mampuru

Christopher Jozana

Molahlehi Mohlakametsi

Moses Mkgopa

Jeremiah Diutlwileng

Zonwabele Mogubata

