

Hlanganani Basebenzi

Commemorating South Africa's Labour Movement

EXHIBITIONS IN THE CLASSROOM



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This guide for educators is based on, and accompanies, the first in a series of SAHA exhibition kits available for loan to heritage, educational and community organisations interested in hosting commemorative events and celebrations

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For more information about SAHA's other exhibition kits, educational products and projects,
please visit www.saha.org.za

ACCESSING THE EXHIBITION ONLINE

There is an online version of the **Hlanganani Basebenzi** exhibition kit that includes downloadable copies of many of the primary sources – posters, photographs, pamphlets, reports, speeches - that appear in the exhibition panels.

To view this virtual exhibition, please go to www.saha.org.za/workers.



INTRODUCTION

This guide for educators is based on the SAHA portable exhibition kit entitled ***Hlanganani Basebenzi: Commemorating South Africa's Labour Movement***, in which artefacts from the archives provide a lens into decades of the labour movement's resistance to apartheid.

On the first of May each year, workers throughout the world celebrate International Workers Day. In South Africa, Workers' Day is a day to remember and honour the significant role played by the trade union movement in the history of our country.

This guide is intended to help educators to use the exhibition as a starting point to commemorate this day with their learners by considering:

- How the trade union movement historically not only secured better working and living conditions for black workers, but also played a central role in the struggle against apartheid.
- The struggles still faced by South African workers in a democratic society, from extremely low wages to hardships in the workplace - and the fractured state of the trade union movement in the country today.

The guide includes different kinds of activities linked to each of the 16 exhibition panels:



PAUSING FOR THOUGHT:

This icon indicates questions intended to encourage internal reflection by the learners.



READING THE PAST:

This icon indicates activities where learners are required to analyse textual primary sources, such as reports, letters or pamphlets, included in the exhibition.



VISUALISING THE PAST:

This icon indicates activities where learners are required to analyse visual primary sources, such as photographs or posters, included in the exhibition.



WORKING TOGETHER:

This icon is used to identify opportunities for learners to work together in the classroom.



MAKING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT:

This icon identifies activities where learners are required to identify patterns and make connections between the past and present, finding similarities between conditions then and now.



WORKING AS A HISTORIAN:

This icon identifies activities intended to develop learners' skills as historians.



LEARNING MORE:

This icon indicates other SAHA educational publications and products to consult for more information and primary sources relating to this topic.

Hlanganani Basebenzi

Commemorating South Africa's Labour Movement

PANEL I

"...South Africa has been built by the blood, sweat and broken bodies of the oppressed and exploited black workers. It is a well-known fact that the blacks carry the economy of this country on their shoulders.

All the sky-scrapers, super highways, etc., are built out of our undistributed wages. It is because of these facts that the students realize that in any labour struggle, the power for change lies with the workers."

— Worker's Organisation for Socialist Action special edition newsletter, WOSA Remembers 16 June 1967, 1996.



Hlanganani Basebenzi

Workers all over the world are exploited and oppressed. They are paid wages far below the value of their labour, and often find it difficult to survive as wages do not keep up with inflation.

However, black workers in South Africa experienced a double oppression. They were oppressed because they were workers and they were oppressed because they were black. In the struggle to create a strong trade union movement in the 20th century, trade union organisers had to confront this dilemma.

Did they build a trade union movement that aimed to build up strong factory floor structures? This would enable workers to fight for better working and living conditions through the creation of workers' control.

Or did they have to play a role in the political struggle against black oppression, perhaps at the expense of strengthening workers' rights?

This problem dominated thinking in trade union circles in the 20th century and often determined the shape and structure of many trade unions that came into existence, particularly as the struggle against apartheid intensified in the 1980s.

Where do the working class come from? When industrialisation takes place in a country, one sees the growth of factories, which are owned by the capitalist middle class. They require workers to work in the factories. These workers form the working class.

In South Africa, the creation of the African working class began with industrialisation as a result of the discovery of gold in 1886. African peasantry were forced off the land through taxation and the 1913 Land Act and were forced to work as cheap labour in the gold mines. This began a pattern of intense exploitation of the African working class in the mines. From the 1940s onwards, the manufacturing industry began to develop and African workers also began to work in factories in large numbers.



In this panel you see a woman and a child picking up heavy sacks of potatoes. What is your reaction to this? Why do you think they agreed to do this work? What effect does this work have on the body?



Imagine you are the small boy or girl picking up sacks. Write your diary entry at the end of a long day from 8am until 5pm as you helped your mother or father. Share your writing with a friend.



Imagine your parents asked you to leave school because your father was not earning enough as a labourer. You have to give up the possibility of completing your education and earning a living. Write your answer to them.



Find a person in your community who is over 60 or 70 and who has worked as a labourer for many years. Interview him or her. Decide what questions to ask and make notes of everything that is said. Then send your interview to a newspaper.



Photo: Jodi Matthews



Photo: Gideon Mendel



Artefacts from the South African History Archive (SAHA) provide a lens into decades of workers' resistance to apartheid. Development of this SAHA exhibition kit was funded by the National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund and the Atlantic Philanthropies. To view the online version of this exhibition kit, please go to www.saha.org.za/workers.



Photo: Gideon Mendel

Why trade unions?

The images in this panel show different black workers at work.

There can be no doubt that black workers are the backbone of the South African economy. They have worked long and arduous hours in the mines, inside factories and on the farms in order to build up the wealth of this country. Yet, even today, millions of black workers earn low wages, live in poverty, face starvation and struggle to survive.

It is because of the challenges facing black workers that it was important, both during apartheid and today that they be able to join trade unions that would fight to improve their wages and working conditions.

What is a trade union? It is an organisation of workers that is controlled by the workers. It aims to give workers more rights in the workplace in terms of decisions made about working conditions and wages. It also tries to protect workers from unfair labour practices such as unfair dismissals and discrimination in the workplace.

Workers need a trade union because without one, they are in a very weak position in relation to their employers. They have no say about anything that goes on in the workplace. If they complain about their conditions they can be dismissed immediately. Workers without a trade union have no power.

A trade union unites workers, and this unity gives them strength. In order for a trade union to be successful, it is important that all the workers in a factory join the union. There are trade union officials who work for the union and help to organise workers and advise them of their rights. Workers then meet together to discuss grievances and problems they experience on the shop floor. Usually, the workers will appoint shop stewards from among themselves to represent their interests.

In this way, workers are able to protect themselves from the intense exploitation of their employers.



Think about a time when you felt powerful: when you helped someone with their homework, or you gave advice to a friend who acted on it. Then think about a time when you felt powerless: you had no choice but to obey a parent, a teacher or someone who had power over you. Using crayons or paint, colour those emotions onto paper, side by side. Talk about what you've created with a friend.



Examine the photographs in this panel. The women stand all day; the petrol attendant is not allowed to sit, and the men in the third photo are squatting on their haunches. Visit a restaurant close to you and ask the waiter or waitress what their conditions of employment are. Explain the interview is part of a project you are doing. Prepare questions such as: Do you have a lunch break? Are you allowed to sit down during the day? Why do you work here? Think about whether the situation today is better, worse or the same as that in the photos?



Choose a situation today, at school, where one group of learners have power over another group or one child, or where a teacher uses their authority disrespectfully. Role-play the encounter. Discuss the choices of the powerless group or person and re-play the scene so that the ending is positive.

In 1919, the first trade union for black workers came into being. The Industrial and Commercial Union (ICU) was formed by Clements Kadalie and some dockworkers. Their basic demands were a minimum living wage and decent working hours. There were many strikes by African workers challenging the discrepancies in wages between workers. These strikes were crushed with force by the police.

I.C.U. POEM

We are building up a union,
With which we hope to save the land
I.C.U. are its initials,
In its ranks we take our stand.

We shall show by workmen's councils
How to banish sweated ills
How to raise the blackman's status
How to conquer strife that kills:

Union means an all-in movement
None outside to scab upon us;
With folded arms we'll stand like statues
Sing our songs but make no rumpus.

That is how we'll win our battles
Make good our claims to rights;
We have no other weapon left us
Brains not Bombs shall win our fight.

Forward then in one big union
All in which we're organised
Solid phalanx undivided,
No more shall we be despised.

I.C.U. spells workers only,
I.C.U. - fraternity
I.C.U. means liberation;
I.C.U. - "Labour holds the key."

- Labour History Group booklet, The ICU, date unknown.

Black farm workers' wages were miserably low:

- Men earned R1.20 per month
- Women earned 50c per month

Black industrial workers earned:

- R1 per month in rural areas
- R6 per month in towns



Origins of the trade union movement

The Industrial and Commercial Union (ICU) was one of the earliest trade unions to be formed in South Africa. It was formed in 1919 under the leadership of Clements Kadalie. It started as a trade union to represent dock workers in Cape Town. However, in a very short time, it changed form and became a popular mass movement in the rural areas. Workers began to join the ICU in large numbers. By 1927, it claimed to have a membership of 100,000.

In 1925, the ICU had just over 30,000 members; by 1927, its membership had increased to over 100,000. However, within three years, by 1930, the ICU had collapsed. How did the ICU grow so quickly, and why did it collapse so quickly after that?

One of the reasons for the ICU's rapid success was that it was able to respond to important issues that directly affected the African people. In the 1920s, African sharecroppers and squatters were facing increasing hardship on white-owned farms. Many were evicted; others faced severe wage cuts. Violence broke out on a number of these farms. The ICU focused on the anger of these African squatters, and took direct action. They took some white farmers to court, protesting that the evictions were illegal. The African farmers saw the ICU as an organisation that was actually doing something to help them. And so, their support increased.

However, despite such widespread support, the ICU quickly collapsed. The organisation was not well organised. Some officials stole money from the organisation and there was fighting amongst the leadership of the ICU. This led to a split in the organisation and a loss of membership. By 1930, the ICU had effectively disappeared.

However, the ICU was not a complete failure. Later black trade unions were able to learn from its mistakes. It was also important because it tried to organise farm workers, a group which was often ignored by other political organisations. It provided hope, albeit for a short time, to the dispossessed people of South Africa.



Examine the panel and read the text above.

- Give three reasons why the ICU collapsed so quickly.
- Choose one of these reasons. Does this still happen today? Give an example that illustrates your answer and offer reasons.



SOURCE: Labour History Group booklet, *The ICU*, date unknown

Analyse the ICU poem. Find two examples in the poem which show why a trade union would be of benefit to workers. Explain why this would benefit workers.



“Sing songs and use brains or rumpus and throw bombs?”

Use the question above as the starting point for a debate in class on the role of violence in protest. Which method creates a more equal society?

The Rand Revolt of 1922 took place three years after the formation of the ICU, when white mine workers went on strike. These workers resisted retrenchment. The strike was against the goldmine bosses and the state that supported them. Commandos (armed groups) formed to protect striking mine workers and their families. At the time there were ten times more black miners than white miners, yet white miners refused to collaborate with black miners in the struggle for better working conditions. African unions were excluded from the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA) when it was formed in 1953.

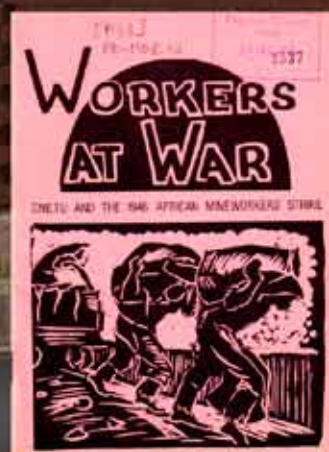
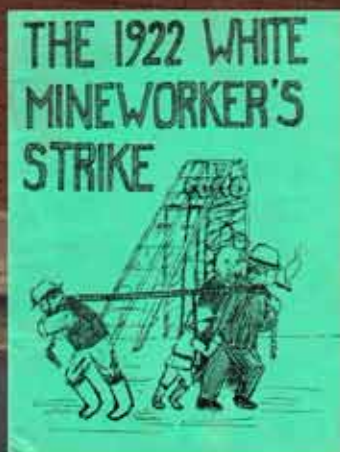
PANEL 4

— Labour History Group booklet,
The 1922 White Mineworker's Strike, data unknown.

- The government broke the Rand Revolt by bringing in the army.
- 250 people were killed.
- 3 white workers were hanged for high treason.
- The strike dragged on, but after three months the workers had to accept defeat.
- The mine bosses, with the help of the government and army, succeeded in crushing the white mine workers and their trade unions.

— Labour History Group booklet,
The 1922 White Mineworker's Strike, data unknown.

— Photo: Nadine Hutton



Early mine workers struggles

Unlike other countries in the world, where the working class was generally a single grouping in society, the working class in South Africa was divided on racial lines. The black working class endured severe exploitation while the white workers were protected and privileged on the basis of the colour of their skin.

For example, in 1911 the government introduced the Mines and Works Act which ensured that skilled and semi-skilled work was reserved for white workers only. They were also paid more than black workers for doing the same work. This led to a conflict of interests between the government and the mine owners. The Chamber of Mines who preferred to use black workers because they could pay them less, while the government protected white workers because they had the right to vote and could ensure that the government stayed in power.

White workers on the mines had gone on strike a number of times, but it was only during the First World War that the Chamber of Mines decided to recognise white trade unions. In 1918, the South African Mineworkers' Union negotiated an agreement with the Chamber of Mines called the Status Quo Agreement. They agreed that for every 17 black workers employed on the mines, two white miners would be employed and be paid skilled wages. However, as the economy slowed down after the war, the Chamber of Mines looked for ways of cutting costs in the industry. They decided to lay off many white workers and lower the wages of those still working. This angered white workers!

In January 1922, about 25,000 white mine workers went on strike. They demanded that the Status Quo Agreement be upheld. The Chamber of Mines refused. The strike lasted for eight weeks and soon turned violent. White miners armed themselves and prevented black workers from going underground. The Chamber of Mines appealed to the government to help them.

The Prime Minister, Jan Smuts, sent in the army. The air force dropped bombs on striking workers and there were street battles in Johannesburg. After four days of struggle, 153 people were killed, 500 wounded and over 5,000 workers were arrested. Four of the leaders of the strike were hanged. The white mine workers had lost the strike! Thousands lost their jobs while those who remained were forced to accept a huge drop in wages.

This strike increased the divisions that already existed between black and white workers, especially as many white workers lost their jobs to black workers.



SOURCE: Labour History Group booklet, The 1922 white mineworkers strike, date unknown.

Read the text accompanying the panel and answer the questions about the white working class.

- In what way was the working class in South Africa different to that of other countries?
- In which two ways in 1911 did the government ensure that white miners were treated better than black miners?
- Why did the Chamber of Mines prefer to employ black labour on the mines?
- What were the results of the January 1922 strike for both black and white miners?



The source on the panel taken from the Labour History Group booklet states that three leaders were hanged. Many other sources refer to four leaders who were hanged. Does this make this source unreliable or not? Explain your answer.



Your 4 member team is part of a media team. You have been asked to cover the 1922 strike. Divide the strike action into the following news headings: 1) Miners on Strike? 2) Death and Destruction over 8 weeks 3) White Miners Strike Back! 4) Jan Smuts Provokes War! 5) Mayhem in Johannesburg! 6) Dead Men Tell No Tales. Write up your newspaper report in the form of newspaper clippings. Make your project as dynamic and interesting as possible.



Find out about any miners' protests that have taken place in South Africa in the last decade. You may use the internet to find further information. For each protest, identify the causes, methods and results. Think about your research and write a concluding paragraph relating the past to the present.

WORKERS OF SOUTH AFRICA!

UNITE AND FIGHT FOR A LIVING WAGE!

THE BUREAUCRACY OF 'PROTECTION' AND 'REGULATION' HAS MADE MANY WORKERS UNEMPLOYED. THE BUREAUCRACY OF 'PROTECTION' AND 'REGULATION' HAS MADE MANY WORKERS UNEMPLOYED. THE BUREAUCRACY OF 'PROTECTION' AND 'REGULATION' HAS MADE MANY WORKERS UNEMPLOYED.

AND EVEN WHEN WE GET THE BEST MONEY AND THE BEST WORK, WE ARE NOT PAID ENOUGH. WE ARE NOT PAID ENOUGH. WE ARE NOT PAID ENOUGH.

WE DEMAND A LIVING WAGE! WE DEMAND A LIVING WAGE! WE DEMAND A LIVING WAGE!

WE DEMAND A LIVING UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT FOR ALL WORKERS!

WE DEMAND A LIVING UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT FOR ALL WORKERS!

WE DEMAND A LIVING UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT FOR ALL WORKERS!

WE DEMAND A LIVING UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT FOR ALL WORKERS!

PANEL 5

WE DEMAND JOB-SECURITY FOR ALL!

WE DEMAND JOB-SECURITY FOR ALL!

WE DEMAND JOB-SECURITY FOR ALL!

WE DEMAND JOB-SECURITY FOR ALL!

WE DEMAND DECENT EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR ALL!

WE DEMAND DECENT EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR ALL!

WE DEMAND DECENT EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR ALL!

WE DEMAND DECENT EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR ALL!

WE DEMAND A LIVING UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT FOR ALL WORKERS!

WE DEMAND DECENT EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR ALL!

WE DEMAND JOB-SECURITY FOR ALL!

The demand for trade unions in the 1930s and 1940s

From the 1930s to the 1960s, there were many attempts to create a strong trade union movement. However, during this period, the movement was vulnerable and fragile and faced many obstacles.

- The nature of the African working class living in towns made organisation difficult. The workforce was fragmented and there was a high turnover of jobs.
- Migrant workers were difficult to organise because they were not a stable workforce. They were forced to return to the reserves, and later the homelands, when their contracts ended. When they returned to work, it was often at a different place.
- African unions were not recognised and strikes were illegal. The state reacted harshly towards any kind of union activity.

In the 1930s South Africa experienced rapid economic growth and there was an increasing demand for labour. This was intensified when the Second World War broke out and many Africans moved into semi-skilled positions to replace white workers who had gone to fight in the war. The war increased the bargaining power of the African working class. Both the state and employers wanted to maintain production so that the war effort was not disrupted. As a result, trade union activity increased. In 1939, the Joint Committee of African Trade Unions (JCATU) was formed when 20,000 workers from eleven different unions joined together. They aimed at building solid shop-floor structures with strong leadership. They worked with the Wage Boards* to try to improve workers' wages and conditions. Although JCATU was small and vulnerable, it provided its unions with strong shop-floor structures and established a working model for trade union growth.

The Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) played an important role in building the trade union movement in the 1940s. In particular, it established the Congress of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU) which claimed a membership of 158,000 workers in 119 affiliated trade unions by 1945. However, these affiliates* were not linked to each other which led to fragmentation. CNETU was also hampered by divisions within its leadership, particularly with regards to the role of the CPSA. The CPSA often prevented CNETU from acting in the interests of its workers. Because the CPSA supported the Soviet Union in its fight against Germany, they argued that trade unions should not strike during the war. Membership of CNETU declined rapidly after the war.

In 1946, 76,000 mineworkers from the African Mine Workers Union (AMWU) went on strike. During the war period, conditions on the mines deteriorated rapidly. African mine workers were not given a cost of living increase as the Wage Board that migrant labourers did not need an increase. They also experienced severe shortages and they lived in shocking conditions in mining compounds. Police responded violently to this strike. Twelve workers were killed and over 1,200 injured. The brutal crushing of the strike effectively destroyed AMWU. Nevertheless, despite its failure, the 1946 strike was an important landmark as it was the first time that mine workers had been organised and gone on strike.



Examine the cartoons in this and the next panel and try to identify the issues workers were fighting for. What would you say is the value at the core of them all? Compare your answer to your neighbour's answer. Are they the same or different? Discuss further.



Working in small groups, role-play a wage board meeting to discuss improving the wages of a particular industry. Within each group, there should be one person representing the interests of the state, another representing the interests of the employer, and others representing the interests of the workers in the union.



“We demand decent education and training for all!”

Divide your page into two sections. In the one section, draw a school in the 1950s and label everything you think is not ‘decent.’ In the other section of the page draw your school today and label everything you think is ‘not decent.’ What do you notice? Are they similar or different? Explain your reasons.

*Wage boards – these were established by the state to establish minimum wages in industry

* affiliates – these are organisations that are officially attached or linked to a larger organisation

WE DEMAND DECENT HOUSING NEAR OUR WORKPLACES!

WE DEMAND A 40-HOUR WEEK AND A BAN ON OVERTIME!

PANEL 6

WE DEMAND 6 MONTHS MATERNITY LEAVE ON FULL PAY!

WE DEMAND DECENT HOUSING NEAR OUR WORKPLACES!

WE DEMAND A 40-HOUR WEEK AND A BAN ON OVERTIME!

WE DEMAND 6 MONTHS MATERNITY LEAVE ON FULL PAY!

The call for a non-racial union

When the National Party came into power in 1948, they introduced the apartheid laws aimed at controlling the black population. Many of the laws aimed at weakening the position of black workers. These included the following:

- African trade unions were not recognised and therefore were not allowed to strike.
- They were not allowed access to the industrial councils, which is where most important decisions were taken about workers. (white unions actively participated in the councils).
- They were no longer allowed to sit at wage board determinations.
- Racially mixed trade unions were not allowed to exist.
- The Minister of Labour had the right to reserve any job for a particular race group.

The factors made it difficult for trade unions to organise effectively.

Nevertheless, a new trade union movement emerged in 1955 with the formation of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), with 20,000 members from affiliated unions. SACTU organised workers on a non-racial basis and argued that politics and economics could not be separated in the working class struggle against exploitation and oppression. Therefore, it organised workers in the workplace but it also took up broader political issues as part of the struggle against apartheid.

In 1955, SACTU formed part of the Congress Alliance. This was a broad alliance of a number of different political organisations that came together to fight against apartheid. They include the African National Congress (ANC), the South African Indian Congress (SAIC), the South African Congress of Democrats (SACOD) and the South African Coloured People's Organisation (SACPO). The Congress Alliance organised the Congress of the People which took place on 26 June 1955. Here, they adopted the Freedom Charter, which were a set of guiding principles for a future equal and democratic South Africa. Incorporated into the Freedom Charter were several demands related to improving the conditions of the working class and strengthening the labour movement.

After the Congress of the People, 156 leaders from the Congress Alliance were put on trial for treason. Many of SACTU's leaders were on trial or were banned. SACTU continued to work for improved conditions for workers despite the severe restrictions placed upon it. One of its SACTU's campaigns was the pound-a-day campaign which called for a massive stay away from work on the 26 June 1957. This was very widely supported. SACTU was able to make some gains and by the early 1960s, its membership reached 55,000.

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Role-play the following historical situation: 64 leaders of SACTU were banned. When a person was banned he or she was not allowed to attend meetings of more than 2 people and had to stay at home and report to a police station daily.

Imagine one member of your group was one of the people from SACTU who was banned and has to remain at home all the time. Choose another group member as a famous radio personality who has set up a secret interview with your banned member. The other members of the group can phone-in and ask you questions. Your radio interview is 15 minutes.



In 1994, the new democratic government stated that the new South Africa would be based on the principles of the Freedom Charter. Locate a copy of the Freedom Charter and compare the demands of the working class to those in the cartoon panel. Do you think that these principles have guided the treatment of the working class and the labour movement today? Find out what is the same and what is different.

"There is no place for the Bantu in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour..."

— Dr Hendrik Verwoerd,
Minister of Native Affairs, 1953.

REUELING VAN BANTOE
ARBEIDSVERHOUDENGE, 1953

(Wet 48 van 1953)

BANTU LABOUR RELATIONS
REGULATION ACT, 1953

(ACT 48 OF 1953)

Brutal Repression intensified, supported by the barrage of legislation designed to entrench white minority rule and apartheid. In the years following the National Party coming to power in 1948, the might of the apartheid regime and its security forces took hold. At the same time however, there were increased rumblings of discontent and a growing resolve by ordinary people to overthrow the apartheid regime.

In the 1960s, 64 leaders of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), formed in 1955, were banned, leading to even more strike action including the PUTCO strikes in the early 1970s. Although there were several other recorded strike actions taking place between 1922 and 1973, it was the Durban strikes in 1973 that were pivotal in spiking energies and reigniting workers struggles.

This period was marked by significant labour reforms, including the passing of the Bantu Labour Relations Amendment Act in 1975, followed by recommendation of the Wiehahn

Commission that all races be allowed to join worker unions; and the relaxation of restrictions on where African workers were allowed to work by the Riekert Commission.

PANEL 7

Five brave days



Tightening the noose with labour reforms

The 1960s was a time of great economic growth in South Africa. In particular, the manufacturing industry developed rapidly. This led to a growth of the industrial working class, based in factories. However, there was little trade union activity taking place as a result of government repression and restrictions placed on trade unions.

However, this all began to change in the 1970s. The economic boom came to an end and workers faced uncertainty in the workplace. Rapid inflation led to rising costs, but the wages of black workers were not increased. They faced a period of hardship and struggle.

In 1973 a number of spontaneous strikes broke out in Durban. This was a key moment in the black workers' movement. It inspired workers and led to the rapid growth in membership in new, emerging black trade unions. These unions began to call for recognition and rights for all workers. At the same time, the growing manufacturing industry called for a semi-skilled black labour force.

A number of these new trade unions believed that they would have more bargaining power if they were organised into a tight trade union federation. This led to the formation of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) in 1979.

The government responded to these pressures by introducing new labour 'reforms'. The government hoped that by introducing reforms, it would be able to stop the growth of the trade unions. In 1979 the Riekert Commission looked into influx control. As a result, workers who had been living and working in the urban areas for ten years or more were recognised as permanent residents. However, this created a division between workers from the homelands who were seen as 'outsiders'.

As a result of the Wiehahn Commission, also in 1979, African trade unions were recognised for the first time. This meant that they were allowed to organise black workers and they now had the right to strike. But those unions that registered faced government restrictions. The unions had to be registered on a racial basis. Also, migrant workers, who made up the backbone of the workforce, were not allowed to join these trade unions.



Why do you think changes in the economy in the 1970s led to changes in the trade union movement? Do you think the labour reforms of the 1970s improved the lives of the African working class?



The South African Putco bus strikes were a big moment and made an impact and alerted government to introduce reforms. Find out which other country used bus strikes in the 60's to bring about freedom for their black population. Who was their leader? See if you can find a newspaper report during those times. Think about why commuters, past and present, have an extraordinary power when they decide to strike.

In the late 1970s a mass movement for political change was gaining ground.

Strike actions swept across the entire country throughout the latter part of the 1970s and into the 1980s.

In 1982 the United Democratic Front (UDF) was formed, consolidating and strengthening resistance on the ground.

The Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) and the 1976 student uprising contributed significantly to the groundswell.

PANEL 8



The birth of FOSATU

The Soweto Uprising in 1976 had led to increased state repression against any form of resistance. This affected the trade unions as many union officials were arrested and banned. Also, as membership increased in the emerging trade unions, a number of them believed that they would be stronger in the face of repression and have more bargaining power if they were organised into a tight trade union federation. A federation is where a number of individual trade unions come together under a central organising body.

Talks took place between these unions and this led to the formation of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) in 1979 with 45,000 workers. By 1984 it had over 120,000 members and eight affiliated trade unions under its federation.

FOSATU believed strongly in the principles of non-racialism, workers' control and workers' democracy. It promoted these principles through the use of shop stewards. Shop stewards were union members in a particular factory who were elected by their fellow workers to represent them in negotiating for better conditions with management. FOSATU also believed that its trade unions should concentrate on improving the working and living conditions of workers and should not be involved in national politics.

Not all trade unions shared the beliefs of FOSATU. A group of independent trade unions in the Cape refused to register their unions, believing that by doing so, they would be placing themselves under state control. They chose to remain as a separate, independent grouping of unions.

The 1970s had also seen the emergence of new political thinking based on the philosophy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness. The Black Consciousness Movement began to work with workers to develop trade unions based on its philosophy. This led to the formation of a separate federation of black trade unions under the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA) in 1980. It believed that trade unions should be led by black people and rejected the non-racialism of FOSATU. It too supported workers' democracy and aimed to develop effective black leadership. Its most militant affiliate was the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) which was launched in 1982.

Nevertheless by the 1980s, the position of workers had increased and there had been a large number of strikes wherein the working class had made gains in improving their working and living conditions.

In order to increase awareness about the importance of trade unions, and also to gain solidarity for strike action, many trade unions developed plays about their struggles. *The Long March* was a play about the BTR-Sarmcol Strike in 1985 and it was extremely well received by the local community as well as by trade union members. BTR-Sarmcol was a rubber factory in Natal which fired all 970 workers when they went on strike.



SOURCE: "The Long March", poster produced by SAWCO, date unknown

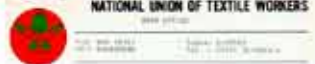
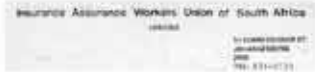
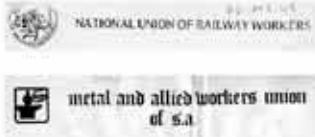
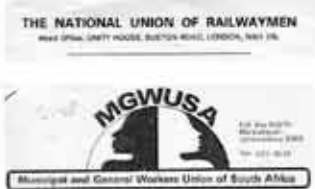
Look at the poster promoting the play *The Long March* and answer the following questions:

1. Why do you think the play was called *The Long March*?
2. What does the central figure in the poster represent?
3. Do you think this is an effective representation? Explain your answer.
4. What do you think the tree represents? Explain your answer.
5. Comment on the faces that are shown in the poster.
6. Do you think this is an effective poster or not? Explain your answer.



Create your own poster that represents either FOSATU, CUSA or the independent trade unions. The poster should contain the following elements:

- it should reflect the beliefs and aims of the particular trade union group that you have chosen
- it should be visually interesting and appealing with:
 - a powerful slogan
 - a strong image



The Unity Talks took place over four years (1981-1985).

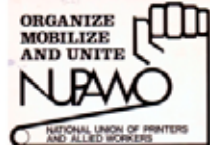
They brought different unions together to seek agreement on the alignment of the labour movement with the political struggles of the majority.

Some of these unions were already aligned with the principles of the Freedom Charter. Others, particularly those from the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), remained largely 'workerist', arguing for autonomy from political interests.

FOSATU also emphasised the central role of the shop stewards in bargaining and negotiating structures.



PANEL 9



The democratic tradition of the trade union movement strengthened its mass base.

Transparent governance and a culture of accountability is evident in the archive's collection of documents.



Unity for workers struggles

The move towards unity did not happen overnight. It took four long years of negotiation between the different trade union groupings. The unity talks were also made possible by a changing political climate in South Africa in the 1980s.

P.W. Botha had introduced a new constitution, which gave some political rights to coloureds and indians but completely excluded Africans. As a result, in 1983 two new political groupings were formed to protest the new constitution proposals. They were the United Democratic Front (UDF), which supported the principles of the Freedom Charter and the National Forum (NF), a part of the Black Consciousness Movement. Botha responded with increasing repression. Thousands of people, including large numbers of the trade union leadership, were detained without trial or banned. Some were even killed. This led to widespread resistance, which focused on civics and community struggles. Trade unions also played a central role in these struggles against the growing repression.

However, the trade union movement was not unified which weakened the movement. It was largely split into two different groups. The 'workerists' like FOSATU, believed in focusing on strengthening workers' rights within the factories. The 'populists' argued that workers must be part of the wider national liberation struggle. These divisions also played into the government's thinking, which was effectively 'divide and rule'.

As the political struggles intensified, FOSATU realised that its position was no longer viable. Their workers might be committed to strengthening workers' rights in the factories, but outside of the workplace, they were all victims of apartheid discrimination and repression. It began to see a space for worker action within the community. This shift allowed for the different trade union groupings to start thinking about uniting into a larger coordinated federation.

The death in detention of Neil Aggett, a white trade unionist who worked for the independent Food and Canning Workers Union, was a turning point in the quest for unity. The FCWU announced that their members would go on a 30 minute work stoppage to mourn his death. FOSATU and the other independent trade unions joined in this call.

Then, in May 1984, FOSATU and the independent trade unions worked together to organise May Day rallies. At these rallies, there was a call for May Day to be recognised as a public holiday.

In November 1984, the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) called for a stayaway in order to highlight the grievances of students. FOSATU, GAWU and the UDF worked together to organise the stayaway. It proved to be a huge success, with 800,000 workers staying away from work and 400,000 students boycotting classes.

In 1985 a range of different trade union organisations worked together to launch a national consumer boycott of white shops.

These actions paved the way for unity.



Look at the image of the map of Africa and answer the following questions:

- What do you think the fist in this image represents?
- What message does the artist want to get across with this image?
- Is this an effective image or not? Explain your answer.



On this panel there are a number of logos representing different trade unions. These logos show what industry is being represented by the trade union and what the union believes in. Choose any industry. Decide what you will call your trade union and create a logo to represent your industrial union.



Find out as much as you can about Neil Aggett. Include his home town, his early involvement as a doctor, his organisational ability and what led to his arrest and detention. Compare the results of the inquest into his death in 1982 with those in 1994 from the Truth and Reconciliation Committee. Conclude with your opinion of Neil Aggett and what you'd say to him if you met today.



Learn more about the Neil Aggett and his death in detention on SAHA's DVD: *Between Life and Death* – stories from John Vorster Square or online on SAHA's virtual exhibition "Detention without trial in John Vorster Square on the Google Cultural Institute website at http://www.saha.org.za/publications/between_life_and_death.htm



On 1 December 1985, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the largest federation of trade unions in South Africa, was formed. The launch of COSATU brought together 760 delegates from the 33 unions, representing 460 000.



The initial COSATU logo selected by the majority of workers was modified to reflect and acknowledge the central role played by women workers. This logo also inspired many artists and poster makers of the day.

“We have to make it clear to all that
a giant has risen
 which will confront all who stand in its way
 as COSATU will not stand for defeat.”

— Elijah Baray, the first president of COSATU
 later reiterated by Cyril Ramaphosa in his address at COSATU launch 1985.

COSATU unites!

Although trade unions had moved closer to the idea of unity by 1985, there were a number of stumbling blocks towards unity. These included:

- CUSA, following a Black Consciousness philosophy, was hostile towards the role played by white union officials in FOSATU.
- FOSATU was not prepared to form a new federation with unions that would not adopt its democratic style with its focus on strengthening workers' rights in the workplace.
- There were many clashes of personality which led to tension.

CUSA withdrew from the talks, although the NUM, its largest affiliate, remained committed to unity.

Finally in November 1985, the Congress of Trade Unions (COSATU) was launched at the University of Natal. 760 delegates from 33 trade unions attended the launch. COSATU claimed a membership of 460,000 people, making it the largest trade union federation in the history of the labour movement in South Africa.

COSATU adopted many of the principles of FOSATU. It committed itself to both non-racialism and workers control. Under the slogan of "One Industry, One Union", COSATU aimed to create a strong union in every industry, by trying to unite smaller unions into a single one. Within five years it had united the original 33 unions into 13 larger and much stronger unions, with a membership of over 700,000 workers. COSATU began to organise workers in areas where unions were not yet legally recognised, in farms, in domestic service and in the public sector. This contributed to its growth. As the numbers of unemployed people rose, COSATU began to work with the unemployed and dismissed workers. It set up cooperatives where unemployed workers could earn some money and develop skills.

COSATU also recognised that it had a political role to play. At the launch, COSATU decided not to affiliate to any one political organisation but rather chose to engage in political struggles through alliances with community organisations, the civics and other progressive movements. COSATU adopted the Freedom Charter as its guiding document. It participated in a number of campaigns. One of its most important campaigns was the Living Wage Campaign where millions of workers went on strike to demand wage increases and a decent life.

In 1986, the Black Consciousness trade unions also decided to merge, forming the National Congress of Trade Unions (NACTU). It drew over 400,000 members.



Read the text accompanying the panel and answer the questions:

- Identify three reasons why COSATU became the largest trade union federation in the country.
- Is COSATU a political party? Give reasons for your answer.



Examine the COSATU logos on the panel. Why was the original COSATU logo changed? What does this indicate to you about COSATU and gender equality?



Elijah Barayi, the first president of COSATU, said at the formation of COSATU that "a giant has risen" (This was later reiterated by Cyril Ramaphosa in his address at COSATU launch in 1985)

- What do you think he meant by this?
- Find out about COSATU today? Do you think that it can still be referred to as a giant?
- Is there conflict within the organisation today? If so, describe the nature of the conflict.



If you were asked to write a job description of a leader for such a powerful organisation like COSATU, what are the most important qualifications and attributes you would look for?



What change would you like to introduce at your school, in your community or in general? How would you go about gathering support for your project? Do you think you could do it alone using the internet?

COSATU strikes back!

The apartheid state responded to the growing resistance of the 1980s with increasingly harsher methods of repression. In 1985, P.W. Botha declared a limited state of emergency in so-called trouble spots. This was extended to a nation-wide state of emergency in 1986.

This gave the police and army even more power than before. Thousands of people were detained. The trade unions were particularly hard hit. In order to weaken the base, many of the leadership of COSATU were detained, including its president, Elijah Barayi.

However, this did not deter COSATU. Membership continued to increase and workers became more militant. Strike action became commonplace during this period. Strikes were a powerful weapon of the workers. As historian Kally Forest stated:

“... it is the strike weapon, the ability to withdraw labour, that lies at the basis of trade union power.”

The strike by the South African Railway and Harbour Workers Union (SARHWU) in 1987 was one such important strike in the 1980s. The strike began when a SARHWU member was dismissed by the South African Transport Services (SATS). Railway workers in over 250 depots went on strike and demanded recognition of SARHWU. As SATS was a state-owned institution, management refused to negotiate with the union and called on the state to intervene. As a result, the police took action. They broke up any meetings that were held by SARHWU and seven railway workers were killed.

Part of the issue was that SATS refused to recognise SARHWU and during the strike, 16,000 workers were dismissed. After a long legal battle, SATS management was forced to reinstate these workers and recognise SARHWU, but it was a costly battle for COSATU.



Read the text accompanying the panel. Describe in detail the legal battle between SATS and SARHWU. What was the loophole that gave SARHWU the edge? What was the result for the workers?



There are people today who lived through these experiences. Find such a person and interview them or video an interview with them. You would be making a valuable contribution to history.



In your group, imagine that you are union officials working for a trade union. You want to organise a strike for improved wages. Discuss what your strategy would be. How would you persuade the workers that it is necessary to go on strike?



1987

was a pivotal year
in the history of South Africa's
trade union movement:

- The siege of COSATU House, best depicted by the iconic photograph (above) of comrades spread-eagled as COSATU House is ransacked by the apartheid government's police force on April 22;

- The bombing of COSATU House on May 7

- Mass support and stay-aways in commemoration of May Day and June 16

- The biggest strike in the history of South Africa – the NUM strike – where 340 000 mineworkers demanded better working conditions and higher wages;

- National protest action against the whites-only House of Assembly elections and workers demands;

- Strikes and solidarity action for transport and postal workers;

- Boycotts of black local authorities.



COSATU attacks!

The railway strike of 1987 was a turning point in terms of how the state dealt with COSATU.

In April 1987, the police placed COSATU House, the headquarters of COSATU, under siege. All the people who were in the building were held hostage while the police ransacked the building.

The state also used the strike as a platform to begin a massive propaganda attack on COSATU. The aim of this campaign was to undermine COSATU. The state distributed 'dirty tricks' pamphlets and posters which discredited COSATU. For example, in May 1987 COSATU House was rocked by two large bomb blasts. The damage was so bad that the building was declared unsafe. The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) then launched a campaign declaring that the bombing was done by COSATU itself. During the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Adriaan Vlok, who was the Minister of Law and Order came forward and sought amnesty for his role in the bombing.

Despite detentions and bannings, COSATU continued the fight for workers' rights. In August 1987, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), the largest affiliate of COSATU, launched a strike against the gold mining industry. Despite the great wealth generated by the mining industry, mine workers did not receive a living wage. Gold mine workers earned R230 a month on the gold mines and R355 a month on the coal mines.

340,000 mineworkers went on a strike which lasted for 21 days. It was the most dramatic and largest strike in the history of South Africa. Both management and the state reacted with extremely harsh measures. Union officials were prevented from entering the mines and workers were threatened with dismissal and eviction from hostels. The police were called in and fired on mineworkers.

Matters came to a head, when management sent in 'hippos' – armoured trucks and workers were fired upon. Anglo then fired 10,000 workers who were sent back to the homelands. All in all, about 50,000 workers were dismissed. NUM felt it had no choice but to accept a dissatisfactory wage offer on behalf of the workers.



Examine the photograph of people under siege at COSATU House. Imagine that you are one of the people being held hostage. Write a diary entry at the end of the day, highlighting what happened and how you felt about the events of the day.



Look at the figure of the mineworker on this panel. What does this image make you feel? Do you think it is a good representation of a mineworker or not? Explain your answers.



Notice how cohesive the protests were in 1987. People were prepared to be detained, even killed, in order to achieve their rights. What would you be prepared to contribute to ensure equality of living standards for all people in South Africa today?



“The aim of this campaign was to undermine COSATU. The state distributed ‘dirty tricks’ pamphlets and posters which discredited COSATU.”

How easy is it to discredit someone you dislike today? Examine comments in Facebook and Twitter. In which ways are learners undermined today – at home, at school and on social networks? What would your response be to a 'dirty tricks' pamphlet discrediting your family or nation?



PANEL 13

The struggle for political and socio-economic freedom was strengthened by ordinary people heeding the call for social solidarity. From boycotts to marches and rallies, the people of South Africa were called upon to show up and demonstrate their resistance to apartheid. It is precisely this tradition of struggle for justice that we are called upon to honour as we engage with present day challenges.



don't eat just any sweet - **DON'T EAT Wilson Rowntree!**
SUPPORT THE BOYCOTT

There were a range of boycotts and solidarity strike actions such as the meat boycotts, **Wilson-Rowntree**, Fattis & Monis and Simba boycotts.

We won't buy WILSON ROWNTREE'S

Workers' education was key to the growth and development of the union movement.

In the 80's activists revived **worker night schools**, first popularised in the late 1920's by the Communist Party. These schools were well attended and training sessions ran from sunset to sunrise in church halls and at Wits University.



COSATU takes on civil strife

While the trade union movement saw as its major task the creation of strong democratic shop-floor structures and redressing working class grievances, COSATU also believed that it had an important political role to play in the struggle against apartheid.

Increasingly, during the 1980s, COSATU began to link up with wider community struggles. These became increasingly more common during the 1980s. Thus, COSATU played a central role in calling for the two-day stay away on 5 and 6 May 1987 to protest against forthcoming whites-only parliamentary elections. On 16 June 1987, COSATU joined with other political organisations in calling for June 16 to be made a public holiday.

COSATU also joined in many of the rent and consumer boycotts that were organised in the townships, often by local civics. From 1984 onwards, there were continuing rent boycotts. By 1988 over 50 townships were affected by rent boycotts, which resulted in the government facing a debt of over R300 million.

During the 1980s, the trade union movement had also supported the many consumer boycotts that took place. Boycotts proved to be a powerful source resistance in areas where community organisation was strong. This worked both ways. When the unions called on the community to support boycotts relating to trade union resistance, the community came out in wide support.

Repression played an important role in determining the political role played by the trade union movement. In 1988 the government banned the UDF and other civic and youth organisations. However, the trade unions were not banned; their activities were strictly curtailed by the state. Although COSATU was warned to stick to trade union matters exclusively, the trade unions moved into this political vacuum that had been created. Many trade union officials moved into leadership position and COSATU acted as a coordinating body to mobilise protests and to organise a strong alliance of anti-apartheid forces. It was thus the trade union movement that kept the momentum of struggle going at this point.



Look at both the poster and the text and notice which products were boycotted. Follow up on these products to see whether they are still operating in SA today. If you had to boycott a product today, which would you choose and for what reason?



Examine the green poster in the middle of the panel. Do you think that it provides a good explanation about the exploitation of workers? Explain your answer.



Compare the two posters calling on people to boycott Wilson-Rowntree sweets. Which do you think is more effective? Explain your answer.



Is there a video or a movie or a book you've read recently with the theme of rich versus poor, or management versus staff or government versus the people? If this is still happening today, think about why it happens. Is conflict inevitable? Are we, as humans, simply born with genes that compel us towards conflict?



“It is precisely this tradition of struggle for justice that we are called upon today to honour as we engage in present day challenges.”

Working with a group, list all the challenges that you as learners face today. Then list what your parents see as challenges and your teachers see as challenge. Prioritise your lists, then pick one challenge and discuss how you'd go about facing it and solving it.

Organise....

★ **Marches**

★ **Boycotts**

★ **Demonstrations**

★ **Occupations**



PANEL 14

Nkosi Sikelel' i Afrika
Maluphakanyiswe uphondo wayo
Yizwe Imithandazo yethu
Nkosi Sikelel' i Afrika
O Thina Lusapho Lwayo

Moya Moya Moya Moya
Moya Moya Moya Moya
Moya Moya oyingevele
Nkosi Sikelel' i Afrika O Thina Lusapho Lwayo

Morena Buloka sechaba sa hese
o fedise dintso le matsosinyeho
o seboloke
o seboloke
o seboloke morena
o seboloke

Sechaba sa hese
Sechaba sa hese

Nakube njalo
Nakube njalo
Nakube ngu na phakade
Nakube ngu na phakade
Sensenina
What have we done
Wat bet ons gedoen
Sonosethu ubantama
the only sin is the colour of my skin
Nkosi Sikelel' i Afrika
Maluphakanyiswe uphondo wayo
Yizwe Imithandazo yethu
Nkosi Sikelel' i Afrika
O Thina Lusapho Lwayo

Moya Moya Moya Moya
Moya Moya Moya Moya
Moya Moya oyingevele
Nkosi Sikelel' i Afrika O Thina Lusapho Lwayo

Morena Buloka sechaba sa hese
o fedise dintso le matsosinyeho
o seboloke
o seboloke
o seboloke morena
o seboloke

Sechaba sa hese
Sechaba sa hese

Nakube njalo
Nakube njalo
Nakube ngu na phakade
Nakube ngu na phakade
Sensenina
What have we done
Wat bet ons gedoen
Sonosethu ubantama
the only sin is the colour of my skin
Nkosi Sikelel' i Afrika
Maluphakanyiswe uphondo wayo
Yizwe Imithandazo yethu
Nkosi Sikelel' i Afrika
O Thina Lusapho Lwayo

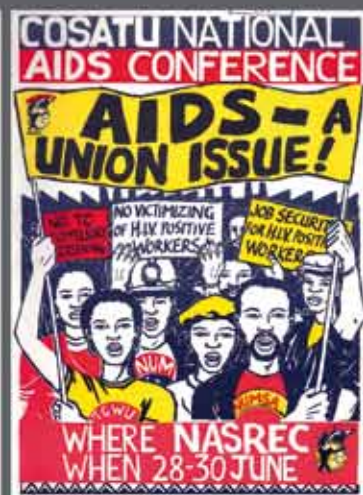
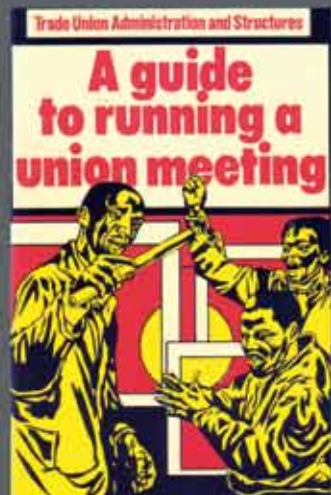
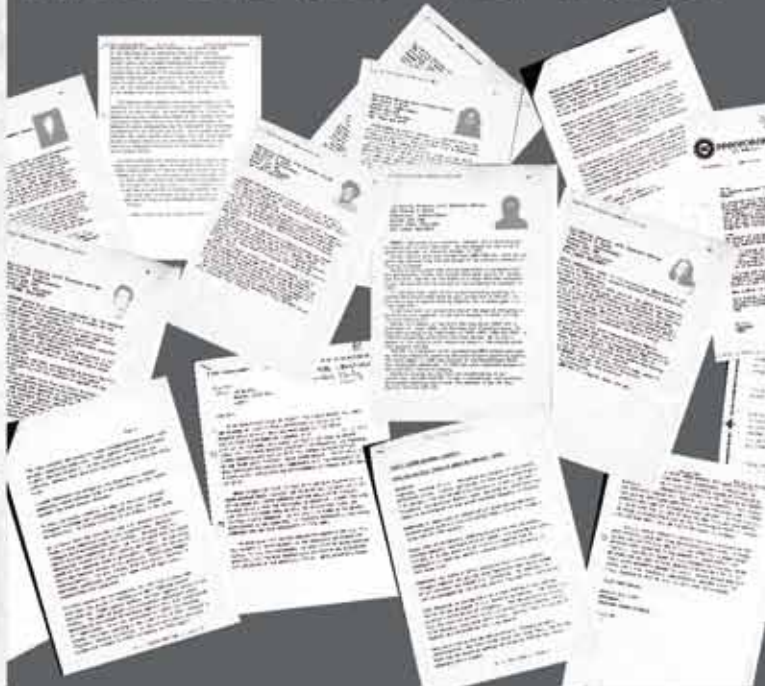
Moya Moya Moya Moya
Moya Moya Moya Moya
Moya Moya oyingevele
Nkosi Sikelel' i Afrika O Thina Lusapho Lwayo

Morena Buloka sechaba sa hese
o fedise dintso le matsosinyeho
o seboloke
o seboloke
o seboloke morena
o seboloke

Sechaba sa hese
Sechaba sa hese



LETTERS OF SOLIDARITY FROM AROUND THE WORLD



Strengthening global support

In the late 1980s, the union movement played a significant role in bringing about the end of apartheid. They adopted a stronger political role in fighting against apartheid, but also called for countrywide stay aways which showed that the unions had the power to cripple the economy. However, union activity took place amid increasingly harsh state action. The many restrictions placed on the trade unions led to widespread feeling of demoralisation.

COSATU believed that it was important to restore faith in the union movement. It held a special conference in May 1988 to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses and to strengthen its structures further. A leadership code was established and discussed. The delegates also called for a three-day stay away to protest the Labour Relations Bill. The success of this stay away did much to revive the spirit of the trade union movement.

Further conferences discussed the political role of COSATU and its decision to join in a broad anti-apartheid alliance with the UDF and other anti-apartheid organisations. At a Workers Summit in 1989, COSATU, NACTU and independent unions agreed to work for greater unity among the working class and to take joint action against the Labour Relations Act. COSATU also believed that it was important to provide education for its members. It appointed education officers who held workshops dealing with the role of trade unions, but also on wider issues such as HIV-AIDS.

During the 1980s, the trade union movement received widespread support from the international community. The various anti-apartheid movements overseas pledged solidarity with the union movement and held their own protests in support. Also, trade union organisations in various countries supported the growing labour movement by holding solidarity protests and by forcing some of their companies to withdraw from South Africa or place pressure on their South African branches to improve wages and working conditions. This support also boosted the morale of the labour movement.



Read some of the letters of support from international organisations (below). Imagine that you are a member of an international trade union. Write your own letter of support to COSATU.



Examine the poster dealing with HIV-AIDS.

- Do you think that it should be the role of a trade union to address wider issues such as HIV-AIDS? Use evidence from the poster to support your answer.
- Create your slogan for a poster that could be included in this poster.
- Do you think this poster would be effective in persuading workers that there is no stigma attached to being HIV-positive? Explain your answer.



Think about the role of songs during protest. Nkosi Sikelele Afrika was often sung during workers' protests and at the end of meetings. Why do you think this was the case?



Interview a worker who was involved in the workers' struggles of the 1980s. Ask them what kind of songs did they sing and why? If possible, try to get a recording of a struggle song, and play it for the rest of the class.



Working in a group, discuss what structures and policies you would need to put in place if you were starting a school club or organisation. What can you learn from the trade union movement in doing this?

FIONA BISHOP has been a researcher for the past three years with the Saskatchewan Government Employees Union. Previously she worked for 10 years as a research officer with the Saskatchewan government and was a member of SGEU.

She is now a member of CLC local 481, which includes the 40 staff reps for SGEU, and she serves on the provincial labour federation's human rights committee and is the staffer assigned to the SGEU human rights committee.

While a member of SGEU Fiona was a chief shop steward, was on the co-ordinating committee for the SGEU's 1979 general strike and chaired the union's labour solidarity committee. In her workplace she was active on the health and safety and affirmative action committees.

In interests outside the workplace Fiona has been active for years around child care and is a board member of the Canadian Day Care Advocacy Association. She is also a board member of the Saskatchewan Committee Against Racism and has worked with anti-apartheid groups for a decade, most recently with the South African Solidarity Committee in Regina.

Her interest areas for the tour are women's issues, labour legislation, racism and land claims.

Her work address is 1440 Broadway Ave., Regina Sask. S4P 1E2. Telephone (306) 522-8571 or Fax (306) 352-1969.

APRIL BOURGEOIS works in the anthropology department at the University of Regina as an academic assistant marking exams and term papers for professors.

She has been a member of CUPE 2419 for two years and serves as shop steward for her work area and as secretary for her local of 355 people. April is on CUPE Saskatchewan division's International Solidarity and Human Rights Committee. This committee has been involved with the Mission tour plus has planned educationals for CUPE's provincial division. One on racism was delivered at CUPE's spring conference; a package on aboriginal history and rights is being developed and a public educational was held in early September on the farm crisis.

April is a delegate on the Saskatchewan Coalition Against Racism, an education group that lobbies the provincial government. She is on the South African Solidarity Committee in Regina and the Saskatchewan Anti-Apartheid Network. She also helped plan an October conference aimed at politicizing young people and forming a youth wing of the Coalition for Social Justice.

Her interests for the tour are racism, co-operatives, women in unions, the CUPE-NEHAWU linkage, the Union of Democratic University Staff in South Africa, and workplace strategies/community coalitions.

Her address is 1836 Rae St., Regina, Sask. S4T 2E2.

ONE & MANY:

Workers Unite for a Living Wage

PANEL 15

On 5 and 6 September 1989, South Africa experienced one of the biggest stayaways in its history. Over three million workers, which is more than the number of voters in the white elections, heeded the call for two days of protest.

Production in many centres was brought to a complete standstill. The protest was part of a sustained campaign against the Labour Relations Act (LRA), and was called for by COSATU and the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) and a number of independent unions.



The LRA hindered workers' right to strike and workers were hamstrung when it came to demanding a living wage, negotiating maternity rights, sick leave, and canteen facilities. When these demands were denied, the consequences were felt in communities.



Crushing the Labour Relations Act

One of the most important stay-aways that showed the formidable power of the trade unions was the protests that took place over the Labour Relations Act.

The banning of organisations had not ended resistance and the state was concerned to restrict the power of the unions even further. In September 1987 the state and business, working hand in hand, introduced a new Labour Bill. This would eventually become the new Labour Relations Act (LRA).

The LRA tried to reverse many of the reforms that had been introduced in 1979. It attacked workers' rights by making unfair dismissals and retrenchments legal. It tried to prevent workers from striking and from boycott action. It also allowed the Minister of Labour to decide what an unfair labour practice was.

The unions resisted strongly against the new proposed Labour Relations Bill. In June 1987, workers protested by holding a three day stay away which resulted in almost 3 million workers staying away from work. This led to about R500 million loss of capital, which both business and the state could ill afford. The bosses agreed to meet with both COSATU and NACTU to discuss the new bill.

Despite negotiations, in September 1988, the bill came into law anyway as the Labour Relations Amendment Act. Another stay away was held.

The struggles against the new Labour Relations Act brought about closer unity between COSATU and NACTU. Both federations participated in the stay aways, and in March 1989, COSATU, eleven independent unions and eleven NCTU affiliates attended a joint summit. Its aim was to work towards greater unity and to show joint solidarity in their rejection of the LRA.

At the summit, workers agreed to isolate any companies that used the LRA against them, by boycotting their products nationally and internationally.



Do you remember a time when you worked hard to achieve something? Maybe it was passing at school with a certain mark or you practised hard to be chosen in a soccer team? How did you feel when you met the requirements but the person who gave you the mark decided to change it, or the coach of the team said he'd chosen someone else? You probably felt disappointed, angry and helpless. Did you fight back or accept? Imagine now how the members of the Union felt when the LRA was introduced.



When you look at the posters in Panel 15 which emotion stands out for you? Explain the meaning and symbolism of a fist clenching money and a woman with a child on her back. Why do you think these symbols were chosen?



Examine the images on this panel. Which rights and demands were withdrawn? Find six strong verbs that tell the people how to act.

Write your own slogan for a workers' protest using one of the verbs.



Discuss this topic in a group.

“It is right and just to cripple the economy when a minority of people live well, make money, have homes but the majority remain poor, hungry and homeless.”

Decide which arguments are stronger than others. Each speaker must use current examples to reinforce their argument.



The latter part of the 1980's was defined by **rolling mass action**. As one strike ended, another began. As the state cracked down on resistance movements, the pressure cooker began to boil over. The states of emergency did little to quell the power of the people who as individuals began to take control of their lives. A mass base began to gain significant ground against the apartheid state.

Friends and comrades from around the world, who demonstrated a commitment to social solidarity, supported South Africa's struggle for political and economic freedom. From international trade unions and resistance movements to individuals, businesses and governments, many people supported the call for **disinvestment** and **sanctions** against the apartheid regime. It was this collective effort of ordinary people, mass mobilization and social solidarity, which ultimately led to the unraveling of apartheid.

The People Must Decide!

We have had enough of corruption!

We have had enough of state sponsored violence and death squads!

The people must decide – not murderers and crooks!

It is time for a new, honest, democratic government!

– COSATU pamphlet,
Mass Action, date unknown.



Defiance through mass action

Despite the intense repression of the state in the late 1980s, which included mass detentions, the restriction of political activity and a ban on all media activity, the state had not been able to crush resistance. 1989 saw a strong revival of anti-apartheid activity. It began with the detainees in jails across the country embarking on a hunger strike. This led to the government releasing a large number of these detainees, largely to avoid an international outcry. This inspired further resistance to the state.

The UDF 'unbanned' itself and began to work openly. The UDF began to strengthen its political alliances and formed an alliance with COSATU, which came to be known as the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM). The MDM was a broad coalition of anti-apartheid forces within South Africa which were committed to a non-racial, democratic South Africa. Not everyone agreed with this approach to the struggle. Some trade unions, in particular, the National Union of Metalworkers (NUMSA), supported a socialist alternative and believed that workers needed to overthrow both apartheid and capitalism. Black Consciousness leaders also rejected a broad anti-apartheid alliance.

In August 1989 the MDM embarked on a massive Defiance Campaign. The aim was to mobilise people against the segregation laws of apartheid. Thousands of people started to engage in acts of civil disobedience. They broke the laws by going into segregated public places and defied the restrictions imposed on them by the State of Emergency. The Defiance Campaign ended with mass protests against elections to the Tricameral Parliament. A number of mass marches took place. In Cape Town about 50,000 people marched against security police actions. There were marches by workers against the Labour Relation Act. In Johannesburg, about 25,000 people marched against racial repression and racial segregation. This sustained resistance and pressure on the government was known as rolling mass action.

The new president, F.W. de Klerk, urged police to behave in a restrained way. At this time, the government was involved in secret talks with the ANC about negotiations. It was also facing intense pressure from the outside world. International companies had disinvested, there were economic sanctions placed on South Africa. The South African economy was in a very vulnerable position. De Klerk recognised the need for change.

The Defiance Campaign had shown the South African state that it was possible to resist apartheid and bring about change. Very shortly after the Defiance Campaign, F.W. de Klerk unbanned the ANC and other political organisations, and released Nelson Mandela from prison.

There can be no doubt that workers played a significant role in bringing about the end of apartheid. In the late 1980s, COSATU emerged as a driving force in the mass protests that rocked the country. During the 20th century, the trade union movement had come a long way, in fighting for workers' rights, in forging unity between the different trade union groupings, and in challenging the apartheid regime.

Have these achievements been sustained in the 21st century? The trade union movement was weakened when the country moved towards democracy. Many of the leaders in the union movement abandoned the trade unions and took up positions in government. With COSATU in an alliance with the government, one must question how effective it is as a trade union federation which often has to challenge conditions in the public sector. Cracks in unity are also beginning to emerge as NUMSA talks about breaking away and the giant mining union, NUM is ruptured by a breakaway union. If one is to sustain a strong trade union movement in South Africa, these issues need to be addressed.



Look at the photograph from one of the marches during the Defiance Campaign.

- How many different organisations can you identify in the photograph?
- What does this large number of different organisations suggest about the Mass Democratic Movement?
- What feelings does this photograph make you feel? Explain your answer.



Source: "The People Must Decide", COSATU pamphlets, date unknown.

Look at the slogans under the heading 'The People Must Decide!' Make a point of listening to the news on five radio stations. Make a list of the problems besetting the country. Are they different or similar to the ones written in 1987? Support your answers.



This EXHIBITIONS IN THE CLASSROOM guide for educators is based on the SAHA portable exhibition kit entitled **Hlanganani Basebenzi: Commemorating South Africa's labour movement**, in which artefacts from SAHA's archives provide a lens into decades of workers resistance to apartheid.

This guide is intended to help educators to use the exhibition as a starting point to explore with their learners:

- the struggles to secure better working and living conditions for black workers during apartheid;
- the role of the trade union movement in forwarding the struggle against apartheid;
- the struggles still faced by workers today in a democratic South Africa.

Development of the SAHA exhibition kit was funded by the National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund and the Atlantic Philanthropies. To view the online version of this exhibition kit, please go to www.saha.org.za/workers