Trade Union support to the struggle against Apartheid: the role of the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions


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Chapter 8

Chapter 8
Trade Union Support to the Struggle Against Apartheid: The Role of the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions
Vesla Vetlesen

Introduction
Equal rights, regardless of ethnic origin, represent a corner stone of trade unionism. The apartheid system, built on racism and inhuman suppression of the black population, was bound to be fought by the trade unions—internationally as well as by the individual, national unions world wide.

What first triggered off the direct involvement of LO, the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions, was an international consumer boycott of South African goods, initiated in 1959 by ICFTU, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. As a First of May slogan LO launched an appeal to the consumers not to buy South African fruit, vegetables, wine or brandy in a four month period from May to August 1960.1 The effect was remarkable as this import of fruit and vegetables to Norway in the said period went down from NOK 10.7 million in 1959 to 0.5 million in 1960.2 The other Nordic trade unions carried out similar actions as well as unions in 30 other countries.

Even though LO throughout the following years expressed its condemnation of the apartheid system in resolutions and statements, it was not until the mid-1970s that LO got involved in systematic and continuous antiapartheid work. At a meeting called by the Nordic Trade Union Council in Oslo in 19743 a joint Nordic committee was set up to follow the situation in South Africa closely and to come forward with proposals for action. The same year ICFTU established their Co-ordinating Committee for South Africa. A growing public opinion in Norway against apartheid was reflected in a number of resolutions from local trade unions. When LO in 1976 decided to launch its broad campaign against apartheid, it was based on sup1 Fri Fagbevegelse, 1960, issue 4 and 6.

3 Minutes from the meeting 12 Mardi 1974, “NFS’arbeidsgruppe for Soy Afrika.”

port from rank and file members as well as on Nordic and international trade union co-operation.

Together with other unions and co-ordinated by the ICFTU, LO contributed to the economic support of the South African trade unions. As we will see below this financial assistance—as well as the moral and political support—had a significant impact on the rapid growth of the trade union movement in South Africa and thus served to build up one of the most important forces in the fight against apartheid.

Campaigning against apartheid
The campaigns were carried out in close co-operation between LO and the Norwegian labour movement as a whole. The organisations involved beside LO were the Labour Party (DNA), the International Solidarity Committee of the Norwegian Labour Movement (AIS), the Workers Educational Association (AOF), the Norwegian People's Aid (Norsk Folkehjelp), the Norwegian Labour Youth (AUF) and the Young Pioneers (Framfylkingen). The aims of the campaign as formulated in 1976, were:

- To influence the Norwegian public opinion through information, thereby preparing a platform for stronger economic and political action against South Africa.
- To raise funds in support of the liberation movements and the trade unions in Southern Africa as well as for humanitarian aid to the victims of apartheid.

It was evident from the very start that the campaign would have to be a long term one, and with varying levels of intensity it went on for nearly twenty years. The slogan "Solidarity with Southern Africa" indicates that the campaign was not concentrated on South Africa alone, but included Zimbabwe where the liberation struggle was becoming more and more intense, as well as Namibia which was still occupied by South Africa.

The labour movement utilised all its organisational channels to distribute the information material. Leaflets, posters and other printed matter about apartheid, South Africa and the neighbouring states were in 1976-77 sent to all trade union branches. Together with the leaflets were included appeals for fund-raising: Join us in assisting the victims of apartheid! The answer from the grassroots was thousands of contributions amounting to nearly NOK 1.0 million, the main part granted by trade unions. Alongside the money came resolutions demanding political and economic actions against the apartheid-regime in South Africa. Another slogan in the campaign was: "Show your solidarity-stop buying South African goods!" Fruits and wines were the main targets for the consumer boycott. The Norwegian Consumers Co-operative stopped all imports from South Africa for a year.

A trade union boycott was implemented at the Wine Monopoly, the state owned company which in Norway at that time monopolised the import of wine and brandy. The Wine Monopoly workers refused to handle South African goods, and LO together with the relevant unions, formalised the action by informing the Executive Board of the Wine Monopoly about the boycott. A letter of 22 December 1976 to Ko-operative Wijnbrowers Vereiningen van Zuid-Afrika, signed by the treasurer general of LO, Einar Strand, informed the company that the boycott would take effect as from 5 January 1977. This boycott, initiated by the trade unions and accepted by the Board of Directors of the Wine Monopoly, was kept up from 1977 to 1994 in which period no wine or brandy was imported from South Africa to Norway.
The campaign continued in 1978-79 when further material was produced and distributed. A number of meetings focusing on South Africa and the struggle against apartheid and colonialism were held in local branches all over the country. Again the result was hundreds of resolutions from trade unions condemning apartheid and granting funds for the liberation movements and for the black trade unions.

Under the slogan "Freedom to Southern Africa" the campaign was revitalised in 1981. Several new brochures, going deeper into the apartheid question, were produced in addition to leaflets and posters. A full time secretary was employed to run the campaign. However, this time South Africa was overshadowed by the events in Poland where the government clamped down on the trade union Solidarnosc and declared a state of emergency. The secretary of the South Africa campaign was re-directed to deal with relief assistance to Polish workers. However, the campaigns for South Africa were later to be continued with fundraising and solidarity meetings. LO and the other labour organisations would mostly carry out their separate arrangements without involving "outsiders", but on the occasion of Bishop Desmond Tutu receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984, a large meeting was held together with the Norwegian Council for Southern Africa (Fellesrddet for det sorlige Afrika) and the Norwegian Church Council. A similar joint arrangement conducted by the trade unions, the Church and the Solidarity Council was held in 1986 to mark the visit of Nelson Mandela's daughter, Zenani Dlamini.

In 1985-86 the campaign was re-launched, this time concentrating on South Africa only, under the slogan "Freedom to South Africa". Again a campaign secretary was engaged, and again several hundred thousand leaflets and posters were spread. Local trade union branches put the apartheid question on the agenda, and an information kit specifically produced for students in secondary school was distributed in great numbers.

The demand for the release of Nelson Mandela, who had at that time been imprisoned for more than twenty years, was emphasised and a postcard action to this end was part of the campaign. 70,000 postcards were to be sent to the prison with the following text: "Dear Nelson Mandela. Please accept from a friend in the Norwegian labour movement the best wishes for your future. I want you to know that I work for your immediate release as well as for release of all other political and trade union prisoners in South Africa. ... Best regards ... " This mail action had however to be postponed. According to a press release from LO of 5 December 1985 the reason was ironically enough—that an international post and telegraph boycott against South Africa was being carried out at this time. A month later though, the cards were mailed. The campaign coincided with big upheavals in South Africa as the strikes in the mining industry took place at that very time. The unions in Norway sent numerous contributions to a strike fund for the miners, and the fundraising gave more than NOK 1 million.

A special fund raising campaign for Namibia-in support of SWAPO and the National Union of Namibian Workers-was carried out in 1989, the same year in
which general elections were held in Namibia, leading to independence the following year.

In addition to the campaigns described above, which were all centrally monitored by LO and the other organisations within the labour movement, there were also numerous initiatives taken by individual unions and local branches. The campaigns were hardly mentioned by the mass media, except by the labour press. However, the impact was notable in particular on the attitudes of rank and file members of the labour organisations. In this respect the campaigns contributed-together with information activities and actions carried out by other organisations-to building a strong public opinion against apartheid. The Norwegian population at large obtained a fairly high level of knowledge about apartheid, and even more so a hardened emotional attitude against apartheid, which was important as a base for the political and economic actions taken by the Norwegian government against South Africa.

The rise of the South African trade union movement
The period in question-from the early 1970s to the 1990s-saw a tremendous growth in the trade union field in South Africa, as the workers-particularly the black workers-were struggling for their rights to form their organisations and their rights to collective bargaining-in line with international labour standards but incompatible with the apartheid system.

Trade unions as a free and non-racial movement were close to non-existent at the end of the 1960s. Apartheid legislation divided the working class according to race, and a union with members of different "colours" would not be officially recognised. As for black workers they were recommended to join so-called "parallel" unions assigned to white unions which had exclusive bargaining rights on behalf of blacks.

The non-racial union SACTU, South African Trade Union Congress, allied to ANC, suffered harassment and oppression from the apartheid regime since 1960. Although SACTU was never banned, as was the case with the liberation movements ANC and PAC, SACTU could not operate openly and function as a proper trade union any more, and the leadership of SACTU went in exile. Other unions were also persecuted. Figures from 1969 show that only 14 independent unions with a membership of approximately 14,000 black workers survived the suppression.5

In protest against inhuman and unfair working conditions a wave of illegal strikes involving 100,000 black workers took place in 1972-73. This marked the starting point of a revitalisation of unionism amongst "nonwhite" workers. These unions-although unregistered and with no bargaining rights-were nevertheless from time to time able to achieve results, to improve the wages and working conditions through informal negotiations and signing of local agreements with employers. The first non-racial, unregistered union to sign a collective agreement was the National Union of Textile Workers in 1974, covering the workers-mostly blacks-at Smith & Nephew, a subsidiary of the British based company. The employers, however, refused to renew the agreement in 1977. Only after trade union pressure was brought to bear on the mother company by the British and international trade
union movement was the agreement renewed in 1978.6 Other cases of international trade union actions to pressurise multinational companies to respect the workers' rights are described below.

The struggle for recognition of trade union rights was supported by "workers' institutes". About 10 such institutes were established all over the country-Urban Training Centre in Johannesburg, Western Province Workers' Advice Bureau in Cape Town and Trade Union Advisory and Co-ordinating Council in Durban, to mention a few of them. At these centres progressive white students and other resource persons assisted in training and educating a new generation of black workers. The legal advice from experts at these centres also played an important role in supporting black workers to achieve their limited labour rights.

The Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), stimulated by the liberation of Mozambique and Angola in 1975, had an important impact on the attitudes of the black population, including the trade unions. The patience of the suppressed black population was about to run out. When the police massacre of children and young students took place in Soweto in 1976, this triggered off strong reactions all over the world, but, naturally, even more so in South Africa itself. The Soweto massacre marked the beginning of the end of apartheid, as the militancy of the black population flamed up never to die again. This militancy was strongly reflected in the black trade union movement resulting in strikes, stay-aways and demonstrations. The apartheid regime reacted with increased suppression of trade union organisers and activists, who were arrested, banned and harassed.

Strikes and unrest in the labour force in the late 1970s compelled the government to look for reforms. Not only were the workers struggling for their rights, but even spokesmen of the employers demanded reforms as economic growth was hampered by the rigid apartheid regulations. In addition the international community increased its pressure on the apartheid regime in the aftermath of the Soweto massacre. As a result the government in 1977 appointed a commission under the leadership of professor Nic Wiehahn, The Commission of Inquiry into Labour Legislation, which came up with certain recommendations. Two years later the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act was adopted. Imperfect as this act still was, it nevertheless gave organisational and bargaining rights to black unions on certain conditions, and the organising of black workers was strongly stimulated.

The time was ripe to unite the many non-racial and black unions in one single federation. However, ideological differences and disagreements on strategies resulted in the formation of two national centres. FOSATU, Federation of South African Trade Unions, was formed in 1979 with 13 affiliated unions representing 60,000 members-mostly black workers, but also white, Indian and coloured.

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CUSA, Council of Unions of South Africa, was launched in 1980 with 8 affiliates and a membership of some 36,000. CUSA rejected whites in their leadership. Some unions still remained independent of these two national centres. The major task of organising black workers in the mining industry still remained. In this field organising had previously been prohibited by the employers, The Chamber of Mines, by denying organisers any access to the production premises or dormitories. Continuous labour unrest, however, convinced the employers that it would be better to deal with unions than with unorganised workers. CUSA initiated the formation of NUM, National Union of Mineworkers, in 1982. The Norwegian LO contributed at the very start NOK 100,000, sufficient money to employ an organiser, Cyril Ramaphosa, and provide him with transport. During the first year 20,000 workers already had joined the union, and the next year the membership had increased to 110,000. The miners had started their march in the ranks of organised workers.

As the political situation in South Africa in the mid-1980s was characterised by increasing resistance against apartheid and with the formation of United Democratic Front, UDF, new constellations also developed in the trade union movement. Negotiations took place to try to merge the two centres, FOSATU and CUSA, as well as other independent unions which had been formed on community bases rather than along traditional industrial lines. The unions had become increasingly politicised, and in particular within FOSATU the support for ANC became more obvious, as was also the case with the "community unions". However, political and strategic disagreements once again made it impossible to gather all the different unions in one single federation.

COSATU, Congress of South African Trade Unions, was formed in 1985 by FOSATU, a number of "community unions" and the miners' union NUM, which had previously left CUSA. With about 400,000 members right from the start, COSATU soon became the dominant workers' organisation and a decisive force in the fight against apartheid. COSATU developed its connections with ANC and the exile leadership of SACTU. COSATU signed a cooperation agreement with ANC and SACP, the South African Communist Party.10

NACTU, National Council of Trade Unions, was formed in 1986, by the remains of CUSA and some independent unions, representing 200,000 members. NACTU, which affiliated to ICFTU, sympathised with PAC and the Black Consciousness Movement, although no formalised connections existed.

The years following the reorganisation of the labour movement in 1985 were marked by a great number of large strikes, partly political and partly wage conflicts. The strikes in the mining industries, following a breakdown in wages negotiations, were particularly violent and cost many lives. Workers on strike were assaulted and killed by police forces, and there were also incidents of workers killing strike-breakers. Through negotiations and strikes the workers were able to increase their real income in the period 1987-90. While the inflation was close to 14% the rise in the nominal wages exceeded 20%. In other cases
millions of workers stayed away in political demonstrations, as was the case in 1986 to celebrate the First of May which at that time was not a public holiday. The largest mobilisation however took place in 1992 when 4 million workers stayed away in protest against the position of the government during the negotiations between the government and ANC. As the negotiations were about to collapse, they

8 Communiqué from Meeting between COSATU, SACTU and ANC, Lusaka, 7 March 1986.
11 Ibid., p. 307.

were brought back on track by the pressure of mass movements where the trade unions played a decisive role. 12

During these turbulent times the government of South Africa declared a state of emergency leading to mass arrests of trade union leaders and activists. The COSATU head office was blown up, and branch offices were exposed to armed attacks. Despite the violent onslaughts and all the obstacles which made normal trade union activities so difficult, the unions continued to grow. The organisations increased their striking power and the membership was in the early 1990s close to two million.

Direct links to the South African trade unions

In the initial phase of LO’s co-operation with and support of the South African trade unions, the ICFTU played a key role. LO did not traditionally have close contacts with these unions, and the ICFTU Co-ordinating Committee on South Africa served as an important meeting place. Representatives from the South African unions would usually be present in Brussels during these meetings. Furthermore, clandestine meetings took place in South Africa’s neighbouring countries as trade union activists sneaked across the border and met with representatives of LO and other unions. 13

In the 1970s and early 1980s South African trade unionists kept a very low profile when abroad and their opinions would not be exposed through the media or in public. Their most important task was the organising inside South Africa, not to give statements and declarations from abroad. Yet-as a rule-they were likely to be interrogated or arrested on their return to Johannesburg airport. As the South African trade unions gained strength from the mid 1980s, the representatives increased their travelling and frequently visited Europe, including Norway, as well as USA. The risk of being arrested on their return had not diminished, but nevertheless, they now gave interviews to the various media. In the late 1980s they would even publicly appeal to other countries to impose sanctions on South Africa. 14

The direct links between LO and the unions in South Africa were hampered by the fact that representatives of LO were never allowed visas to visit the country, that is not until 1986. Even at that time a visa was only obtained by mediation of
the ICFTU, as the International Secretary of LO, Kaare Sandegren, then was a member of an ICFTU delegation. It would probably have been possible to obtain a tourist visa, but it was the policy of LO to play with open cards and not to hide the real purpose of a visit. Any type of visit to South Africa was however strongly condemned by spokesmen of some liberation movements. In particular the exile leadership of SACTU.


South African Trade Union Congress, used harsh words. Over and over again SACTU warned LO against such visits, which they regarded as tantamount to collaboration with the apartheid regime. SACTU, even though in exile, wanted exclusive rights as spokesmen for the South African workers, and they launched the slogan "Direct links stink!", addressed to overseas unions that wanted to develop contacts with unions inside South Africa.15 The Swedish trade unions kept closer direct contacts with the South African unions than the Norwegian LO did. In particular this was the case for the Swedish Metal Workers' Union, a consequence of Swedish companies having subsidiaries in South Africa.16 Further the International Metal Workers' Federation played an important role in building a contact network, as did also the other International Trade Secretariats together with ICFTU.

After the formation of COSATU in 1985 LO participated in regular meetings with this organisation either in one of the Nordic countries or in the Netherlands as part of the assistance programme. At such meetings COSATU's general secretary would normally be present, and sometimes also the chairman and other leaders. This gave an excellent opportunity to discuss policy questions as well as economic aid, and thus to increase LO's familiarity with the situation in South Africa.

Nordic and international co-ordination

With regard to the policy towards South Africa the Nordic Trade Union Council, NTUC, functioned as a co-ordinating body for the Nordic unions, and in 1974 a special committee for this purpose was, as mentioned above, set up. In March 1977 NTUC adopted a "14-point programme regarding South Africa". The programme was formulated as demands to the Nordic governments to sharpen the sanctions, to stop investments and increase assistance to the liberation movements and to the black trade unions. The "14-point programme" was revised in 1979, it being added that the Nordic governments should work for a UN oil embargo and map the Nordic transport and traffic to South Africa in preparation for sanctions. The programme was again revised and further concretised in 1985.17 Parallel to this trade union programme the Nordic governments adopted their "Programme of action on South Africa" in 1978. On this basis the unions had a continuous dialogue with the governments. When the Nordic Ministers of Foreign Affairs had their regular meetings representatives for the unions would be allowed to present their views and demands.
Prior to meetings in ICFTU the Nordic unions would often consult each other, and thereafter they would speak with one voice on policy matters in the international fora. The Dutch trade union organisation FNV would usually take the same stand as the Nordic ones. This constellation of Dutch and Nordic unions was sometimes in the ICFTU context referred to as "the progressives". The Canadian union CLC would also generally join this constellation—thus forming a group of "like-minded organisations" that would press for a policy of action in the fight against apartheid. On one occasion however, it came to serious confrontations between "the progressives" and some of the other ICFTU affiliates—that was about assistance to COSATU, as described below.

In other international fora, such as ILO, the International Labour Organisation, the Nordic unions would again co-ordinate their positions in the Special Committee on Apartheid. South Africa was on a yearly basis also on the agenda of the ILO plenary meeting, and a representative from one of the Nordic unions would then speak on behalf of them all, some times also including FNV of the Netherlands. The ICFTU was involved in a broad engagement against apartheid. In the mid-1970s ICFTU started to publish lists of companies with investments in South Africa. The lists were kept updated and used as a means to keep the firms under surveillance and force them to recognise the rights of black workers. When conflicts arose in South African subsidiaries, ICFTU would in co-operation with the International Trade Secretariat in question mobilise world wide support for the South African workers and put pressure on the mother company. Such campaigns were organised against Unilever, Glacier Metal & Co and British Tyre & Rubber Co—too mention a few. Furthermore ICFTU put lots of effort into its work to improve the Codes of Conduct regarding investments in South Africa. Such codes were in the late 1970s adopted by Great Britain, EC, Canada and USA. The codes advised the multinationals to implement equal rights regardless of colour and enjoined the companies to report on wages and working conditions in their South African subsidiaries. However, no penalty was inflicted when the codes were broken. In some cases the codes, nevertheless, could be used to pressurise the companies to respect trade union rights.

Acting as a watchdog ICFTU would immediately inform its affiliates when trade unionists were arrested, with the result that trade unions all over the world would react—particularly so if lives were at risk. The case of Neil Aggett awoke particular strong reactions when he in 1982 after being taken into custody and interrogated was found dead in his cell at the John Vorster Square police headquarters in Johannesburg. The South African unions reacted with a stop work action while protests from unions in other countries were sent in great number to the South African authorities.
Among others arrested at that time was the well known trade union organiser Emma Mashinini, who was placed in Aggett’s neighbouring cell and also suffered hard interrogation and harassments. After her release she was treated at the clinic for torture victims in Denmark and then returned to South Africa to continue her trade union work.

The ICFTU Co-ordinating Committee on South Africa functioned as a clearing centre to decide which unions and institutes in South Africa should be entitled to receive economic assistance from ICFTU. Representatives for approximately 10 national trade unions would usually meet in the Committee, as well as representatives of some International Trade Secretariats. The Nordic and Dutch unions were represented on a regular basis. Their influence was considerable, the reason partly being that the main bulk of the money came from these unions which had access to official financing in their respective countries. The members of the Co-ordinating Committee usually agreed on which unions should receive assistance. It has been claimed that the Committee was not sufficiently selective, thus giving-if only minor assistance to some new unions without a firm membership basis, and which eventually turned out to compete with already established unions. But by and large the assistance was channelled to those unions which later on formed the national centres COSATU and NACTU.

Assistance however, was never given to Inkatha Freedom Party unions or to unions in exile such as SACTU and the PAC-connected ATUCC.

Prior to the launching of COSATU in 1985 a rather important meeting took place in the ICFTU Co-ordinating Committee. Present at the meeting to inform about the planned new organisation were representatives of the two main founding unions, Alec Erwin-Secretary General of FOSATU, and Cyril Ramaphosa-Secretary General of NUM. Further the Secretary General of CUSA, Pireshaw Camay, and Tyrone August of MWASA, the Media Workers Association of South Africa, were present. In the ICFTU minutes from the meeting it says: "Arising out of the discussion on COSATU’s future relations with the ICFTU, the Committee noted that ICFTU assistance would be welcome on the same principles as in the past."

Contrary to the assumptions of the Committee, the founding congress of COSATU however, took the position that no assistance from ICFTU would be accepted, only bilateral contributions from national unions approved by COSATU. This stand of COSATU, as well as the reactions within ICFTU, has to be seen in the light of-or rather in the shadow of-the cold war. The international trade union movement was divided into two main blocks, the ICFTU and the communist dominated WFTU, World Federation of Trade Unions. Although both organisations had a clear stand against apartheid,

18 Ara Oulatar, oral information, November 1996.

there was next to no co-operation between them on the issue. The fight against apartheid was characterised by competition between the two centres, in line with their general competition for influence and recruitment of affiliates, in particular in the third world-including South Africa itself.

The founding unions of COSATU had, as described above, during recent years developed a closer relationship with ANC, SACTU (an affiliate of WFTU) and SACP, the South African Communist Party. On the other hand the American trade union federation AFL/CIO, with its anti-communist traditions and attitudes, had re-affiliated to ICFTU after having withdrawn in the period 1969-1982. Following this re-affiliation the Nordic unions, as well as some other unions, might have been of the opinion that AFL/CIO from time to time had a disproportionately strong influence on ICFTU policies.

After the foundation of COSATU the ICFTU again called a meeting of the Co-ordinating Committee to discuss the new situation. The Secretary General of the ICFTU, Johnny Vanderveken, opened the meeting by saying that COSATU had refused to receive any funding from ICFTU. “The reason given by COSATU”, he said, “was that there are ‘good’ and ‘bad’ organisations within ICFTU, and money from ‘bad’ organisations (read: AFL/CIO) cannot be accepted by COSATU.” The Secretary General himself stated that he would not accept that an outsider should tell the ICFTU which affiliates were ”good” and which were ”bad” and thus divide the confederation.

There were speakers at the meeting, among these Patrick O’Farrell, the representative of AFL/CIO, who recommended that ICFTU should not take a stand on the financing issue immediately, but rather wait for some weeks or months: COSATU needs the money, and they will soon beg for it and accept it even if it comes from ICFTU, it was said.

The Nordic unions together with the Dutch however, took the stand that there should not be any delay in their support of COSATU. Even if they disagreed with the reasons given by COSATU, the decision taken by COSATU not to receive money from the ICFTU had to be respected. Any stop or delay in the financing of COSATU at this crucial time of the struggle in South Africa would only be to the benefit of the apartheid regime. This should not be allowed to happen. Adding to the tension at the meeting was the suspicion that AFL/CIO supported the Inkatha union UWUSA. This was denied by the American representative, but the fact remained that the George Meany Prize a couple of years before had been rewarded by AFL/CIO to the leader of Inkatha, Mangosuthi Buthelezi. This act was strongly condemned by several representatives at the meeting.

To act bilaterally concerning the assistance was contrary to the policy of the Nordic unions. International co-ordination was necessary to avoid double financing of the various organisations, since considerable amounts of money and a number of donor sources were involved. The solution found was that the Nordic unions together with the Dutch formed a "donors' group" which negotiated
directly with COSATU. When agreements were reached on the COSATU budget, it would be presented to the ICFTU Coordinating Committee. It should be added that the relationship between COSATU and ICFTU improved after some time. A definite change for the better occurred with the collapse of the Soviet Union, after which communism was no longer regarded as a threat to the free, democratic labour movement. In 1997 COSATU actually applied for affiliation to the ICFTU, and was accepted with acclamation.

Economic assistance to the unions

Without the substantial economic-and moral-support from abroad it would not have been possible for the South African trade union movement to expand as fast as it did in the 1970s and 1980s and thus become capable of playing such a decisive role in the defeat of the apartheid system. The assistance from abroad should, however, not in any sense be allowed to diminish the role played by the African workers themselves. They were the ones who fought on the barricades and bore the burdens of the battle.

The ICFTU assistance programme for South Africa, established in 1975, grew from a yearly amount of some NOK 2-3 million to NOK 15-20 million in the mid-1980s. The Norwegian contribution to the programme varied in this 10 year period from 12% to 15% of the total amount, the Swedish, Danish and Dutch unions being the other main contributors to the programme. In this period practically all the assistance from LO was channelled through the ICFTU. After 1986, when the Nordic and Dutch unions transferred some of the assistance directly to COSATU, their share of the ICFTU programme diminished. They still continued, however, to be among the biggest contributors only second to the European Community which by now came up with considerable economic grants to the South African unions, thus keeping the ICFTU programme on the same high level of NOK 15-20 million a year.22

The ICFTU followed a rather strict regime regarding reporting and accounting from the recipient institutes and organisations. The South African trade unionists, experiencing urgent needs when the leaders and members were arrested and banned or when other critical situations occurred, may have regarded the ICFTU demand for updated accounting as a bit too rigid. In the ICFTU Co-ordinating Committee too disagreements arose when donor organisations like the Nordic ones urged that the ICFTU should transfer money without delay to the waiting organisations, even if the accounting for the last transfer was not satisfactory. The strict accounting system was, however, a necessity considering the sizeable amounts of money involved, the bulk of which came from official sources.

All trade union assistance from ICFTU was transferred through banks and accounted for by the recipients.23 The South African authorities never confiscated such assistance, but from time to time they blocked the bank accounts of the unions for periods, thus delaying or interrupting union activities.

The ICFTU assistance programme for South Africa no doubt is the single largest one in the history of trade unionism. When Roger Southall, the author of
Imperialism or Solidarity, in 1995 is discussing the assistance at large, his conclusions are: “None the less, what remains the most distinctive and vital aspect of the ICFTU’s programme was its early recognition of the democratic unions from the moment that they began to emerge and develop in the 1970s. In contrast to those to its left who called for the total isolation of South Africa and who queried the legitimacy and viability of the new wave of Black trade unionism, the ICFTU stepped in and lent the fledgling movement critical moral and material support during its perhaps most difficult days. Indeed, it can be unambiguously stated that such was the extent of their initial dependence upon this funding, that the emerging unions could scarcely have achieved the extent of their organisational reach without it.”

When LO from 1986 onwards transferred the assistance directly to COSATU, it was, as mentioned, still co-ordinated through a “donors’ group” consisting of the Danish, Norwegian, Swedish and Dutch unions, later on to be joined by the Finnish. To monitor the assistance to COSATU, whose budget was in 1988-94 amounting to some NOK 20 million a year, the respective unions in the group provided in turn the secretarial functions.

The economic assistance from LO to the South African trade union movement in the period 1975 to 1996 amounted to NOK 85 million, out of which NOK 75 million came from official sources, namely the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while NOK 10 million were raised through solidarity campaigns or granted by LO.25 The Norwegian contributions peaked in the period 1988-93 with NOK 6-9 million a year, also reflecting the extensive activities of COSATU. The recipients of the ICFTU and LO assistance were in the mid-1970s to a high degree “workers’ institutes”, while from the 1980s onward the main bulk of the assistance went to the unions. The two federations, FOSATU and CUSA—later on COSATU and NACTU, were the main recipients. A number of unions and institutes, estimated at between 50 and 60, benefited however from the ICFTU programme for shorter or longer periods during the 20 years in question. While approximately two thirds of the assistance from ICFTU and LO was used to strengthen the organisations and for training purposes for the union members, the remaining third was used for humanitarian and legal aid.26

Humanitarian aid was needed for families of arrested trade unionists, and for leaders who were banned and unable to earn their living. Legal aid was required to assist arrested unionists, the number of whom could amount to hundreds and at times even thousands. In the case of Moses Mayekiso, the Secretary General of Metal and Allied Workers’ Union, and his co-defendants, they were accused of high treason and risked capital punishment. Their defence was financed by the International Metalworkers Federation and the ICFTU. The outcome of the trial was that they were acquitted and released. The main bulk of the legal aid was however used in connection with labour disputes and trade union affairs.27 The complicated laws which regulated the labour market continuously brought the
workers into situations where legal assistance was needed to defend their rights. The apartheid industrial relations system created conflicts which more often ended in court than they were solved by arbitration. Contributions to strike funds were kept apart from ordinary assistance programmes in line with traditional trade union behaviour. Such solidarity contributions were often channelled through the International Trade Secretariats, as was the case under the large miners' strike in 1987 when the Miners' International Federation co-ordinated most of the assistance. Money from official sources was never used for strike funds.

When preparations for the first democratic elections took place in 1993-94, assistance was given to the unions to inform and train their members in their rights as voters. At this time COSATU probably had the most efficient non-governmental organisational apparatus in the country, including transport and communication facilities. This was of great value, not only during the preparations, but also during the carrying out of the election. For instance, COSATU vehicles were often the only available ones to supply the necessary material when a locality ran out of voting papers. Thus the trade unions contributed to a fair election.

It has not been reported that any of the ICFTU or the LO assistance to the unions in South Africa disappeared or was misused.

Relations with the liberation movements
Economic support for the liberation movements was another important part of the solidarity campaigns. While LO itself kept a continuous contact with the liberation movements, the economic assistance however was handled by the ICFTU, 1992, op.cit, p. 288.

27 Roger Southall, 1995, op.cit, p. 130.

LO's co-operating bodies-The International Solidarity Committee of the Norwegian Labour Movement and Norwegian People's Aid.

A press release from LO of 28 May 1979 states:
For 1978 and 1979 the following amounts have been granted: ANC, South Africa NOK 125,000
PAC, South Africa 25,000
SWAPO, Namibia 25,000
Patriotic Front (ZANU and ZAPU) Zimbabwe 135,000

While allocations for PAC ceased after a second grant, the assistance for ANC continued, amounting to some hundred thousand NOK achieved through the International Solidarity Committee's fund raising campaigns over the years. From 1988, when ANC opened an office in Oslo, the support was mainly channelled to this representation.

The main bulk of the labour movement's assistance for ANC was however handled by the humanitarian organisation Norwegian People's Aid, NPA. In the initial phase 1977-82 the co-operation between ANC and NPA was concentrated on first aid training, this being one of NPA's specialities. The first two of a series of first aid courses for health personnel recruited from the ANC refugee camps in Tanzania, Angola, Zambia and Mozambique were carried out in Norway and
partly in Denmark. The programme in Norway included training in radio link and emergency operations in disaster situations in co-operation with the Norwegian Defence Forces, partly the military and partly the civil service. Also included were basic lectures on nutrition and sanitation. From 1984 onwards the first aid training took place in the ANC camp in Viana near Lusaka in Angola, also including participants from SWAPO. The duration of the courses was extended to twelve months, thus contributing to better qualified health personnel. The construction of the training centre as well as the activities was initially financed mainly by money raised by NPA, including some assistance from the Nordic sister organisations the Danish People's Aid and Finnaid. For this programme the contributions from official sources, i.e. the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, were rather limited until 1985 from which time the allocations from the Ministry were some 2 million NOK a year. Up to 1992 approximately 350 students qualified as primary health personnel, thus improving their work in the refugee camps in Africa, as well as being useful on their return to South Africa itself. Dr. Ralph Mgijima, at that time Secretary of the ANC Health Committee-today Health Inspector in Johannesburg, underlines that in addition to the qualified health personnel several thousand refugees got basic first aid training in the camps as a result of this programme.28


In the period 1988-92 NPA was, in addition to its engagement in the health sector, also the main channel for the Norwegian assistance to ANC amounting to some NOK 30-40 million a year. Agreements between the three parties, the Norwegian Ministry, ANC and NPA, implied that NPA should have the administrative responsibility for the Norwegian assistance to, among other things, the construction of buildings and infrastructures in the ANC refugee camps Mazimbu and Dakawa in Tanzania, as well as for the operation of the camps.29 This programme was co-financed by the other Nordic countries. NPA was further the channel for parts of the officially financed Norwegian food programme and scholarships both for ANC and PAC refugees in Africa. ANC delegations would frequently have meetings with LO during their visits to Norway, and representatives of LO travelling to Zambia would always call on ANC's headquarters in Lusaka.30 Speakers from ANC were invited to address rallies and other arrangements connected with the solidarity campaigns, and ANC cultural groups also gave performances.

Although there were disagreements between ANC and LO on issues concerning unilateral Norwegian sanctions against South Africa-ANC urging for action-the dialogue was felt to be open and friendly by LO. The mutual confidence was indicated by the fact that LO and the International Solidarity Committee hosted the ANC conference at Gran north of Oslo in March 1989. Maximum security was a must when ANC called its resident representatives from all over the world, this time to discuss the new situation after Frederik de Klerk had taken over the position as President in South Africa.

In the late 1970s ANC would request LO to give economic assistance to SACTU,31 the exile trade union allied to ANC, rather than channel the assistance
to the unions inside South Africa, but after some years ANC dropped the issue. To LO this confirmed the ability of ANC to adapt to realities, as LO had no intention of changing its attitude in this matter and as it was important for ANC to remain on good terms with the trade union movement in the Nordic countries. It was also seen as a sign of ANC recognition of the strength and potentials of the growing trade unions inside South Africa, and that the exile leadership of SACTU was about to be isolated from the main stream in the mobilisation against apartheid.

SACTU, on the other hand, continued to press LO for economic assistance. A grant from any ICFTU affiliate was important to SACTU, maybe more so for symbolic than for economic reasons, and a moderate donation from the Canadian federation CLC was referred to by SACTU and used as an argument to exact contributions also from LO. The conflict between LO and SACTU was, apart from by ideological differences, also nourished by SACTU's old bitterness towards ICFTU, which went back to the 1950s. ICFTU documents from 1960 thus state: "Three missions (from ICFTU to South Africa, author's addition) since 1957 have all come up against an unsympathetic attitude on the part of SACTU, arising out of its association with WFTU." ICFTU developed, on the other hand, close contacts with a new organisation, the Federation of Free African Trade Unions of South Africa, FOFATUSA, which was founded in 1959 and affiliated to ICFTU the following year. This rivalry for affiliates between WFTU and ICFTU reflected the cold war. By SACTU, however, it was regarded as an attempt by ICFTU to split the labour movement which found itself in a critical situation due to suppression by the apartheid regime and as an act of betrayal which was never forgiven. FOFATUSA, with its sympathies for PAC, was after few years for various reasons dissolved.

The SACTU issue also led to conflicts between LO and the Norwegian Council for Southern Africa, which acted as a spokesman for ANC and thereby also for SACTU. The Council's connections with the South African exile milieu were close, while LO on the other hand gave priority to the direct and indirect links to the trade unions inside South Africa. LO saw no reason to support an exile union when the genuine unions in South Africa were obviously expanding and benefiting from the assistance given. It was also feared that economic assistance to SACTU would give the apartheid regime an excuse to stop the economic support to the unions in South Africa.

LO reacted strongly against SACTU's accusations published in their magazine "Workers' Unity" in the period 1982-84 concerning ICFTU and its alleged "imperialistic activities", including the assistance programme for South African unions to which LO contributed. Most meetings between LO and SACTU thus developed into confrontations, the last one in 1989 arising from a letter sent by...
SACTU to unions in South Africa, warning them against receiving assistance from the ICFTU.33 This took place only few months before SACTU was dissolved in March 1990. After a meeting in Lusaka between COSATU and SACTU a joint communiqué was published, stating that SACTU would not re-establish itself inside South Africa.34 The communiqué also reflects a farewell to the cold war with reference to the new international climate and expresses the wish that one day all workers will be united in one international trade union centre.

LO's relationship with the exile trade union of Namibia, NUNW which was closely linked to SWAPO, was smoother. Even though NUNW, like SACTU, was affiliated to WFTU, the dialogue with NUNW was more relaxed and trusting. When the South African occupation of Namibia was nearing the end, it became possible for NUNW to work openly in the country. At this stage, that is from 1986, LO supported NUNW economically, in particular the Mineworkers Union of Namibia (MUN). Money from the fund-raising campaign in 1989 was also allocated for the SWAPO election campaign.

Trade union engagement in the Southern African region
Partly as a result of involvement in the anti-apartheid activities LO further developed a broad co-operation with the trade unions in the Front Line States. Specific training programmes for contract workers recruited to the South African mines from the neighbouring states were carried out in Botswana and Lesotho, in co-operation with the national trade union federations in these countries. The programmes included lectures and information on trade unionism, the rights of employees and safety at work according to the international standards of ILO. The financial source for these programmes, as well as other trade union projects in the region outside South Africa, was NORAD, the Norwegian Agency for International Development, i.e. the ordinary source of allocations for development projects run by NGOs.

LO was a strong supporter of the official Norwegian aid to the Front Line States, in particular so with regard to assistance to improve communication, transport and harbour facilities in the region. As early as in 1975 the Norwegian Seamen's Union voiced the opinion that such assistance was needed to secure alternatives to South African harbours in the case of a transport boycott of that country.35 Following the establishment in 1980 of the intergovernmental regional organisation Southern African Development and Co-ordination Conference, SADCC, the idea to create a matching regional trade union body was launched. It was the Zambian Congress of Trade Unions, ZCTU, at the time headed by Frederick Chiluba as Chairman and Newstead Zimba as Secretary General that took the initiative which was supported by the other unions in the region. The good relationship between ZCTU and LO led to involvement by LO from the very start.36 The Southern African Trade Union Co-ordination Council, SATUCC, was founded in Gaborone in March 1983, by the trade unions of Angola,
Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Also included were the exile leaderships of SACTU, ATUCC (the trade union wing of PAC) and NUNW. At the time it was exceptional for trade unions belonging to different inter-

national centres to co-operate in a joint body like this, with three of the organisations affiliated to ICFTU, three to WFTU and the remaining ones without any affiliation. LO was, by means of financing from NORAD, the main contributor to the founding conference as well as to the running expenses of SATUCC. The economic assistance from LO is still maintained in 1998. On request from SATUCC LO delivered a paper on the experiences with and the modus operandi of the Nordic Trade Unions Council, which in some ways was seen as a model. SATUCC’s main tasks have been educational activities with an emphasis on training women trade unionists and presenting viewpoints on intergovernmental development plans for the region often stressing the necessity of taking employment consequences into consideration.

After the fall of apartheid in 1994 the South African unions COSATU and NACTU have taken their places as members of SATUCC.

Attempted infiltration by BOSS

The much feared South African intelligence service BOSS, Bureau of State Security, operated outside as well as inside the country. Characteristically one of its programmes was named "Operation Long Reach". Not only did South Africa carry out armed attacks on ANC bases, offices and refugee settlements in the neighbouring states, but also in Europe, and several antiapartheid fighters in exile were assassinated.

It was to be expected that organisations in the Nordic countries, being sources and channels for substantial financial assistance to the antiapartheid activities, would be subject to infiltration by BOSS agents. LO and its co-operating bodies, NPA (Norwegian People's Aid) and the International Solidarity Committee, were aware of such a possibility and handled their contacts with outsiders and the South Africans in exile with great care. When an attempt was made to infiltrate the labour movement, this was however avoided not because of suspicion against the agent, but due to the restrictive routines followed. LO would stick to its own well known trade union network for assistance to the trade unions in South Africa, and not getting involved in channelling money through other organisations, be they national or international bodies. With regard to contributions to the liberation movements, the assistance would be transferred directly to the organisation in question.

When Craig Williamson, who was later revealed as being a captain of BOSS, visited NPA in January 1978, he was introduced as a member of ANC who had fled South Africa following involvement in student activities against apartheid. He now served as Information Officer of IUEF, the Inter-
national University Exchange Fund, based in Geneva and well known for its assistance to progressive student organisations. Following this meeting Craig Williamson on behalf of IUEF applied for assistance to various projects, among these certain administrative costs for ANC, SWAPO and Patriotic Front. The applications were rejected with reference to decisions taken by LO and NPA only to deal directly with the liberation movements. Craig Williamson would however not take no for an answer and continued to forward applications. Some of the projects seemed to be tailored for trade union assistance, but the applications were nevertheless rejected. In September 1978 Craig Williamson, who had in the meantime advanced to Vice Director of IUEF, paid a new visit to NPA. Again he presented projects for financing without success. No one had yet ever suspected that Williamson acted as an agent of BOSS. Obviously though, seen in retrospect he wanted to obtain information about the recipients of trade union assistance inside as well as outside South Africa. When Craig Williamson in January 1980 was revealed as an agent of South Africa, it came as a hard blow to the anti-apartheid movement. LO and NPA, although shocked by the news, were nevertheless immensely relieved that the agent had not been able to penetrate the trade union assistance programmes.

Economic sanctions against South Africa

Three main issues concerning economic isolation of South Africa were focused in the public debate in Norway: 1) disinvestments regarding Shell, 2) severing trade links with South Africa, and 3) cutting off the oil supplies. LO was strongly involved in the debate on all the three issues which are dealt with below. In 1977 the Norwegian Government stopped all further investments in South Africa. Very few Norwegian firms were however involved and the blockade was effected without strong objections from the investors. In the mid-1980s the investment question was raised again, this time from a new angle: an international campaign demanded the withdrawal of Shell investments in South Africa. The charges against Shell were bad working conditions and anti-trade union attitudes in the Shell subsidiaries in South Africa. LO was called upon by the Norwegian Council for Southern Africa to support a consumer boycott against Shell to force the company to disinvest. LO decided, however, not to support a consumer boycott, but rather continue the dialogue with Shell Norway urging the company to improve working and wages conditions in South Africa. LO kept simultaneously in touch with the unions organising in these subsidiaries, gathering information from them and thus confronting Shell with facts about the local situation for the workers concerned. To press for improvements rather than campaigning for disinvestments was in line with the policy pursued so far by the international trade union movement to which LO belonged. When the Shell campaign came into focus in 1986-89 however some of the ICFTU affiliates, notably the Dutch FNV and the
American AFL/CIO, supported the disinvestment campaign against Shell. ICFTU also engaged itself strongly in this campaign. A consumer boycott was, however, never adopted by the ICFTU. The Nordic trade unions did not involve themselves in boycott actions against Shell, but they supported the pressure put upon the company.\textsuperscript{40}

It should be noted that the South African trade union COSATU did not take an unconditional stand in favour of disinvestments. Even though some spokesmen for COSATU supported disinvestment campaigns, the policy of COSATU, as expressed through congress resolutions,\textsuperscript{41} was equivocal and contained the reservation that any disinvestment had to be compensated by the company, as the values of the South African subsidiary were a result of the workers' sweat. COSATU argued for "a negotiated, fair disinvestment procedure".

The campaign against Shell, carried out partly through actions and demonstrations by solidarity groups and partly through dialogue and pressure applied by trade unions, may have had an impact in improving the company's attitudes towards their workers in South Africa.

UN sanctions were strongly supported by LO. With regard to unilateral sanctions to be taken by Norway, LO would advocate the stand that the burdens which might result from such sanctions should be shared by the society as a whole, and should not be borne by the workers of the affected industries alone. LO also maintained that the Nordic countries ought to act jointly. This attitude was shared by the other Nordic unions as reflected in the "14-point programme" described above, and the unions pressed the governments in order to jointly employ stronger measures against South Africa. Throughout the years LO would be in touch with the relevant ministers, be it a conservative or a labour government in power, always urging new initiatives to be taken to reduce the trade with South Africa step by step.

The effects of severing all trade with South Africa were analysed by LO, in particular the consequences for the employment situation. It soon became clear that the most sensitive part of the trade was not losses inflicted on the export, but the dependency on import of South African raw materials for the Norwegian chemical process industry, in particular manganese. The Norwegian Chemical Workers Union together with LO spent considerable time and resources on ways and means to get substitutes for the South African manganese. To cut off import without obtaining the needed quantities and qualities of manganese from elsewhere, would devastate an important industry. More than one thousand workers would immediately lose their jobs, and the stoppage would hit local communities completely dependent upon the running of these industries.\textsuperscript{42} In the mid-1980s the political climate in Norway, also reflecting changed attitudes in USA and EC, indicated that a trade boycott was about to be initiated. LO, although in favour of the boycott, took the position that manganese should for the time being be allowed to be imported on licence.
The question of an oil embargo overshadowed other issues in the Norwegian debate on sanctions (see chapter 5). The export of oil from the Norwegian North Sea wells to South Africa was stopped in the late 1970s, but Norwegian tankers continued to supply South Africa with oil from other sources. LO put the cutting of oil supplies to South Africa on the agenda in 1979. UN documentation had revealed that probably 20% of the oil imported by South Africa was supplied by Norwegian tankers.43 In the Nordic Trade Union Council the oil issue was brought up by the Danish LO, requesting the matter to be examined. Consequently a demand was directed to the governments to work for UN oil embargo. This demand was included in the "14-point programme" in 1979, and furthermore the same year in the ICFTU resolution against apartheid in accordance with a motion by Danish LO on behalf of the Nordic unions.

In the wake of UN sanctions, the idea that UN should call a special conference of the oil exporting countries to discuss the issue was aired by LO. Many countries declared their willingness not to sell oil to South Africa. But the same countries, in particular the Gulf states, did not in reality care whether their oil ended up in South Africa or elsewhere. The oil might be sold to a company, loaded in the Gulf and be bound for a European harbour, but as soon as the ship was on the open sea, it would be redirected to South Africa. The purpose of a special UN conference would be to discuss how this practice could be prevented. LO's Chairman Tor Halvorsen launched the idea of a UN oil conference at a board meeting of the Nordic Trade Union Council in 1981, which favoured it. To promote the idea LO approached the trade unions in all the oil exporting countries, asking them bring pressure to bear on their governments to support such a conference.44 Some of these unions were well known to LO as affiliates of the ICFTU, others were affiliated to the WFTU or without international affiliation. Several unions responded positively. From the ICFTU, however, came a rather sour comment, signed by Secretary General Otto Kersten.45 In a telex to LO he expresses appreciation of the initiative, but continued: "Your contacting also WFTU affiliates is in our view a bilateral question but we would nonetheless draw your attention to the fact that these organisations as well as those friendly towards the WFTU might take advantage of this approach for their proper purposes."

LO presented the idea to the Norwegian Government which took upon itself to launch it at UN meetings where it was well received. However, the Gulf states demanded that it should be a conference of both oil exporting and transporting countries, which was accepted. After several years of discussions back and forth the UN seminar on an oil embargo against South Africa was held in Oslo in June 1986. Following the recommendations from this meeting, UN established an Intergovernmental Group to monitor the supply and shipping of oil to South Africa. The Intergovernmental Group would encourage governments to impose an
embargo and would also offer to assist the states to enact legislation to this end. It is, however, not reported that these efforts had any effect on the practice of the Gulf states, which let their oil flow to South Africa in spite of their declared policy.

The hot political issue in the early and mid 1980s was however whether Norway should take unilateral action against the transport of oil-Norwegian tankers were in 1982 said to carry 35% of the total South African supply-or wait for international sanctions. The position of LO was that unilateral actions would not prevent the oil from reaching South Africa, and that it would hit the seamen manning the Norwegian fleet disproportionally hard. LO further maintained that at least the Nordic countries would have to act jointly if an embargo through national decisions was to be imposed. This stand was in line with the LO affiliated Norwegian Seamen's Union, which in a letter to LO in 1983 wrote: "Today the situation is that the shipping market possesses an enormous surplus of tonnage competing for orders. What one company rejects, others are queuing up to take on. ... As long as this is a fact it is obvious that a boycott by Norway of this oil transport will lead to Norwegian ships being laid up and loss of jobs. We will not enjoin on our members to take part in an action which would make themselves unemployed."

In particular the tanker fleet registered in "Flag of Convenience" countries, including the African state of Liberia, was eager to take over the market. The registration of ships in countries which were not operating normal taxation practices and which did not respect international standards and pay, was already felt as a threat to the traditional seafaring nations and as a danger to the International Transport Workers' Federation. The Norwegian Seamen's Union was, however, eager to introduce registration of all Norwegian ships calling at South African harbours. In letters to and at meetings with the Ministry of Shipping and Commerce the union again and again from 1983 onwards forwarded this proposal. The union wanted an open register spelling out the name of the ships involved as well as the nature of the cargo they carried. On the other hand the ship owners frenetically fought the introduction of such a system.

The heated debate on the oil transport was nourished by the SRB, Shipping Research Bureau, founded in 1980 by Dutch anti-apartheid organisations in co-operation with ANC and based in Amsterdam. Their disclosures of ships supplying South Africa with oil were impressive. However, the research was concentrated on the Western European transactions, thus leaving out the involvement of the countries supplying the greater share of the oil-the Gulf states. At that time it was not obvious that the biased picture given by the SRB was part of an ANC strategy, as it was not known how close the links were between ANC and SRB. ANC did not want to expose certain countries and thereby embarrass their "allies"-the Arab states, the Soviet Union and the East European countries, which would always support the ANC views when, for
instance, it came to UN resolutions. To ANC it would be more beneficial to put pressure to bear on Western European countries, not least on the Netherlands and the Nordic countries which harboured strong public opinion against apartheid. The influence of ANC on which findings by SRB were to be published-and which were not has later been disclosed by SRB in the book Embargo. Apartheid's Oil Secrets Revealed.

LO gave economic assistance to the Shipping Research Bureau, but at the same time repeatedly complained about SRB keeping some 50% of the oil supplies out of their records. The real reason for this was not known to LO and was excused by SRB as lack of detailed information. It is likely that LO would have taken a different line towards SRB and ANC if their close connections and strategies had been known. Not until 1986, i.e. after the oil transport sanctions were adopted by the Nordic countries, was this practise brought to an end by SRB which by now would also to a certain degree publish findings about the involvement of the Soviet Union and the Arab states in the oil trade. In the mid-1980s the political will to take parallel unilateral economic actions against South Africa was ripening in all the Nordic countries. First out was Denmark with sanctions adopted in May 1986. The other Nordic countries followed suit in 1987. In Norway, however, a change of government preceded this decision. When the Labour Party under the leadership of Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland took power after a conservative led coalition in May 1986, preparations for boycott legislation were immediately started. The sanctions, adopted in March 1987, severed all trade with South Africa and put an end to the oil transport on Norwegian ships. However, manganese could still be imported on licence, and only crude oil was covered by the transport boycott. LO was frequently in touch with the Government during the preparation of the boycott legislation and was largely satisfied with the outcome. In 1989 however LO demanded that the boycott should be extended to cover transport of all types of oil products, a demand which was not met. The Nordic unions were satisfied that the Nordic countries to a high degree had been able to act in unison on the boycott issue.

The role of the South African unions in the downfall of apartheid

When the apartheid regime was brought to a downfall through negotiations several factors contributed to this end. Of great importance was on the one hand the mass mobilisation inside South Africa and on the other hand the increased pressure from the international community. The mass mobilisation in South Africa included a number of elements-the church, local communities, the Black Consciousness and the liberation movements with ANC as the dominant force, and not least the trade unions.

A particular and important part of the contribution of the trade unions was their experience and abilities when it came to negotiations, which in the later stage of the apartheid 6poque and during the period of transition to democracy, were of
decisive importance for peaceful transfer and solutions. The unions possessed a
genuine willingness to achieve results through negotiations. The struggle
throughout the years for trade union rights—not least for the right to bargain—had
created a positive attitude to negotiations as a means to achieve progress and
improvements. Furthermore no other mass organisation had a similar tradition and
training in democratic decision making. The unions with their elected officers at
all levels and with their policy built on majority rule if compromises could not be
reached brought an important experience into the picture. Finally the
organisational strength and the striking power of the unions were of decisive
value. The unions had acquired experience in using the strike weapon as an
ultimate means if negotiations were not successful. Strikes as part of the mass
mobilisations forced the apartheid regime to sit down at the negotiating table, thus
contributing to a peaceful transition to democratic procedures in South Africa.
50 LO's congress resolution 1989. Letter from LO to the Ministry of Foreign
Affairs, 14 November 1989.

The assistance from the international free trade union movement, where ICFTU
and the Nordic unions played an important role, made it possible for the South
African unions to grow and expand at a rapid rate, thus becoming a decisive
factor in the overthrow of apartheid. The support from the Nordic unions was
based on the rank and file members who backed this policy and identified
themselves all the way with the struggle against apartheid. This was achieved
through the solidarity campaigns and information activities, as described above.
The South African workers built their trade unions in spite of tremendous
suppression, knowing what was at stake. Not only did this trade union movement
play a decisive role in the overthrow of apartheid, but also today it plays an
important and constructive role in building the new democratic South Africa.

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