

# American unionists demonstrate against apartheid

DURING the past several months more American union members than ever before have been involved in demonstrations against South Africa's apartheid system.

The demonstrations were called by black civil rights groups to protest against the military actions, detentions, and the firing of Sasol workers which followed the two-day stayaway in the Transvaal in November.

Unions soon joined in the protests outside the South African embassy in Washington and the South African consulates throughout the United States, with leaders of the AFL-CIO (the giant federation of American unions) playing a prominent role.

In symbolic gestures which received a great deal of publicity in the United States, union officials, members of the United States Congress, and other prominent Americans deliberately had themselves arrested for trying to enter the South African government's offices.

Because opposition to apartheid is such a popular cause in the major United States' cities, those arrested generally were released without being prosecuted.

Beyond symbolic actions, union members are now considering a broad range of other tactics to protest against apartheid.

'We have sent telegrams, letters and resolutions of protest to the racist government of South Africa, asking that it desist,' said the Newspaper Guild's president, Charles Perlik.

'They have gone unanswered and unheeded....It is time for an end to words and the beginning of action.'

'It is time to end American industries' involvement in this unspeakable system of apartheid.'

Some of the actions which have occurred or are planned include:

< Local and regional union groups are becoming more involved in campaigns in states and major cities to force withdrawal of public funds from corporations which do business in South Africa.

In many cases, public employee unions have played a major role in winning such campaigns by pushing to have their pension funds disinvest from those companies.

The Labour Committee Against Apartheid in New York is coordinating a conference in March on Labour and South Africa, which will be followed by a speaking tour in which unionists across the United States will meet with representatives of the emerging South African unions.

The conference and the tour

are expected to be an important step towards increasing worker awareness of the reasons for the anti-apartheid movement.

< Members of the longshoremen's union in San Francisco refused to unload South African cargo from a Dutch ship.

Their protest, which cost them about \$80 000 (about R40 000) in wages delayed the delivery of the cargo for 10 days.

A court then issued an order to unload the ship, which if disobeyed, could have busted the union. At that point, the workers voted to end their protest.

In addition to these activities, other possible tactics to support South African workers are now under discussion in the United States.

'We have the public's attention on apartheid more than at any time in American history,' said an official of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union.

'Now we have to design actions which use that public awareness to have real impact.'



A placard criticizes the 'Constructive Engagement' policy of American president, Ronald Reagan.



Just before Christmas last year, demonstrators sing freedom songs outside the South African Consulate in New York