

Maritime Unions Against Apartheid: Australian Seafarers ‘second to none in the international fight’

The struggle against apartheid in South Africa was a major international event of the twentieth century. It lasted almost the entire second half of the century, mobilised hundreds of thousands of campaigners who formed organisations across the globe, and brought action from the highest levels of international governance, the United Nations. Few peacetime events have been of such magnitude. Recognising the anti-apartheid movement ‘as part of the construction of an emerging global civil society during the post-war era,’ its relevance for the global history of the twentieth century is evident.¹

The role that organised labour played is an aspect of the anti-apartheid movement that is still insufficiently explored.² The organised opposition to apartheid involved hundreds of thousands of workers and their trade unions, as arguably ‘the best-organised and single most powerful constituency in the anti-apartheid resistance.’³ For them the significant context for much of the post-war era was the Cold War. While trade unions generally merit more attention, maritime unions had a particular significance. They anticipated the ‘transnational wave of mobilization in the 1960s’ and, as the focus of anti-apartheid strategists concentrated more on shipping, had, by the 1980s, formed a new organisation, the Maritime Unions Against Apartheid (MUAA).⁴ This article contributes to a growing conversation about the role of

¹ H. Thorn, *Anti-Apartheid and the Emergence of a Global Civil Society*, (Basingstoke 2006), 5.

² R. Southall, *Imperialism or Solidarity: International Labour and South African Trade Unions*, (Cape Town, 1995); G. Adler and E. Webster (eds), *Trade Unions and Democratization in South Africa, 1985-1997*, (London 2000); P.Cole, ‘An Injury To One Is An Injury To All: San Francisco longshore workers and the fight against apartheid,’ *Journal of Civil and Human Rights*, 1:2,(2015): 158-181

³ Adler and Webster, *Trade Unions and Democratization*.

⁴ Thorn, *Anti-Apartheid*, 66; Cole, An injury to one; sources documenting the anti-apartheid protests of Australian maritime workers include P. Limb, ‘The anti-apartheid movements in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand,’ in South African Democratic Education Trust (SADET), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, Vol. 3 International Solidarity, Part 2, (Johannesburg 2008), 907-82; D. Kirkby, *Voices from the ships: Australia's Seafarers and Their Union* (Sydney 2008); M. Beasley, *Wharfies: The History of the Waterside Workers' Federation*, (Rushcutters Bay, N.S.W. 1996); P.Cole and P.Limb, ‘Hooks down! Anti-apartheid

maritime unions as it traces the trajectory of the involvement of Australian seafarers, and explains how they took the lead in founding the MUAA.

Not surprisingly perhaps New Zealand seafarer Noel Hilliard claimed seafarers were ‘second to none in the international fight against apartheid.’⁵ Seafarers in the Seamen’s Union of Australia (SUA), and the Seamen’s Union of New Zealand (SUNZ), dockworkers in the Australian Waterside Workers Federation (WWF), and the US International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) which was under the leadership of Australian-born seafarer Harry Bridges, were among the first in the world, outside South Africa itself, to take action to end apartheid.⁶ Historians have sought to explain this early activism through comparative studies of Australian and US unions, mainly wharf labourers or dockworkers.⁷ We go beyond existing studies, taking the story through the 1980s, when Australian seafarers brought together other - European - seafaring unions in united action aimed at crippling the South African government’s access to oil. The formation of this new international organisation, the MUAA, also broke down the Cold War ideological divisions between the major international bodies, the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). That the goal of defeating apartheid was an intersecting struggle of postcolonialism overlapping with the Cold War is demonstrated in connecting these events of maritime unions’ anti-apartheid activism with Cold War alliances.⁸

activism and solidarity activism among maritime unions in Australia and the United States,’ *Labor History*, December 2016, 1-24

⁵ Noel Hilliard, ‘Wrongs are righted. Workers slighted,’ *Seamen’s Journal [NZ]* no.4 December 1995, 1; also in David Grant, *Jagged Seas: The New Zealand Seamen’s Union 1879-2003*, (Canterbury 2012) 288-9.

⁶ see Cole, *An injury to one; Cole and Limb, Hooks down!*; also P. Cole, ‘No Justice, No Ships Get Loaded: Political Boycotts on the San Francisco and Durban Waterfronts,’ *International Review of Social History*, 58, (2013), 185-217

⁷ J.S. Ahlquist and M. Levi, *In the Interest of Others: Organizations and Social Activism*, (Princeton & Oxford 2013); and Cole and Limb, *Hooks down!*.

⁸ Southall, *Imperialism or Solidarity*, 361; Thorn, *Anti-Apartheid*, 71, 69.

To ask, as seafarer Hilliard did, ‘Why did seamen embrace this cause so passionately?’ is to enquire into factors motivating seafarers’ mobilization for the cause. Hilliard’s answer to his own question that ‘they were (and are) internationalists’ needs to be explored for what this meant.⁹ We identify events prompting the timing of key actions to show the form it took. We hold that a deeper understanding of the role of labour in the opposition to apartheid flows from a perspective that illuminates internationalism, and a concentration on how internationalism sparked and shaped activism.¹⁰

We agree that maritime workers were mobilised early partly because of the nature of maritime work and the strong militant tradition their unions developed, factors of their workplace already well canvassed by other labour historians.¹¹ Ships and port cities were internationalised workplaces enabling the fermentation and transmission of radical political ideas and information in previous centuries. From the late nineteenth century this was perpetuated as ‘a remarkable rank and file militancy’ that could shape national agendas and was vital to international organising.¹² Seafarers, wharf labourers, dockers, longshore workers, who shared the international maritime world of work, also shared a union culture of solidarity that grew from the nature of that work. Thorn has argued that ‘travel, or mobility, was also a crucial aspect of transnational activism’ against apartheid.¹³ Mobility and travel were the first principal

⁹ Hilliard, Wrongs are righted; as has been done by R.Cahill, ‘Internationalism and the Seamen’s Union of Australia,’ *Hummer* 3, no. 2 (1999) <http://asslh.org.au/hummer/vol-3-no-2/internationalism>

¹⁰ D.Kirkby and S. Scalmer, ‘Social Movements, Internationalism and the Cold War: Perspectives on Labour History,’ *Labour History*, no.111 November 2017, 1-9; Thorn prefers the term ‘transnational’ as he distinguishes the anti-apartheid movement from an earlier internationalism, *Anti-Apartheid*, 47, xiv.

¹¹ Cahill, Internationalism and the SUA; B.Fitzpatrick and R. Cahill, *The Seamen’s Union of Australia, 1872-1972: A History*, Seamen’s Union of Australia, 1982; P. Cole, ‘No Justice, No Ships Get Loaded: Political Boycotts on the San Francisco and Durban Waterfronts,’ *International Review of Social History*], 58, (2013), 185-217; Cole and Limb, Hooks down.

¹² L. Fink, *Sweatshops at Sea: Merchant Seamen in the World’s First Globalized Industry*, (Chapel Hill 2011); see also G. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution*, (Cambridge, 1979); F. Broeze, ‘Militancy and Pragmatism: An International Perspective on Maritime Labour, 1870–1914,’ *International Review of Social History*, 36, 2, (1991), 165-200; E. Olssen, ‘The Seamen’s Union and Industrial Militancy, 1908-13,’ *New Zealand Journal of History*, 19, 1, (1985), 14-37; A. Couper, *Sailors and Traders: A Maritime History of Pacific Peoples*, (Honolulu 2008).

¹³ Thorn, *Anti-Apartheid*, 47.

characteristics of maritime work, in seafarers going to sea and wharf labourers who had been seafarers themselves or constantly worked alongside those who had travelled. This contact was vital in the transmission of knowledge and arguably helps to explain their early internationalism and anti-apartheid protests. We believe it also explains what led to the SUA taking the lead in the 1980s. That commitment to internationalism connected Australian maritime unions to international organisations – particularly the WFTU -which were the source of knowledge about events unfolding in South Africa. International initiatives taken in resistance prompted local actions and dictated their timing. Through these international organisational connections, maritime unions were drawn to join forces in the international anti-apartheid movement. Australian seafarers went a step further, however, and created a new organisation drawing on the strengths of the existing international bodies while also dismantling their political antipathies. Telling this story and focussing on this aspect sheds new light on an important, unprecedented, episode of contemporary history.

Segregation measures announced by the South African National Party government in 1948 which are taken as the start of the apartheid regime, formed a legal edifice brutally enforced by police violence.¹⁴ This was the matter which first drew Australian waterside workers' attention in 1951.¹⁵ Church clergy began speaking out and solidarity actions by Australian trade unions began a year later in protest against the South African pass laws.¹⁶ The campaign against the pass laws spread internationally, led by the African National Congress (ANC) and its allies in

¹⁴ N. L. Clark and W. H. Worger *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, (2nd ed, London, 2013), 22,28, 48-52; a point made by Andrew Molotsane and reported in 'The Struggle Continues,' *Seamen's Journal*, (October 1983), 266

¹⁵ 'Police Torture in South Africa,' *Maritime Worker*, (29 September 1951), 3.

¹⁶ examples of press reports of outspoken churchmen include *Adelaide Advertiser*, 8 September 1952, p.3; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 October 1952; *Northern Star* (Lismore) 21 September 1953, p.1; *Canberra Times*, 21 April 1958, p.2; B. Ellem, *In Women's Hands? A History of Clothing Trades Unionism in Australia*, (Sydney 1989), 262.

the South African Communist Party (CPSA). Resistance was bolstered with the formation in 1955 of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU).¹⁷ The passage of the Suppression of Communism Act 1950 made the definition of a communist so loose that it could apply to virtually any opponent of the government. It is easy to see this as the spur to actions by left-wing unions in Australia.¹⁸ The Communist Party of Australia had survived a similar attempt to outlaw it with a successful High Court challenge brought by the maritime unions (among others), and with the political defeat of a constitutional referendum.¹⁹ In South Africa, however, alleged communists could be detained without charges, consequently all three major organisations were banned and forced underground.²⁰ By the end of the decade they were working from outside South Africa to mobilise opposition internationally. They actively educated and cultivated an international resistance movement, which worked through existing organisations of labour. A Committee for a Democratic South Africa was founded in London. Resolutions were passed by the British Labour Party and the Trade Union Congress condemning the South African government for its policies.²¹ Members of the Australian Labor Party raised the issue in parliament.²² The Union of Australian Women sent letters of support and funds to ANC member and trade unionist Elizabeth Mafeking when she was gaoled in

¹⁷ Clark and Worger, *South Africa*, 60; E.S. Reddy, 'Notes on the Origins of the Movement For Sanctions Against South Africa,' paper circulated to members of the UN Special Committee on Apartheid, February 1965, Available at: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/1965>, (accessed 29 December 2016).

¹⁸ T.McDonald and A.McDonald, *Intimate Union: Sharing a Revolutionary Life* (Annandale,NSW,1998) 263

¹⁹ Fitzpatrick and Cahill, *The Seamen's Union of Australia, 1872–1972: A History*, (Sydney 1981), 235; F. Cain and F. Farrell, 'Menzie's War on the Communist Party, 1949-51,' in A. Curthoys and J. Merritt, (eds), *Australia's First Cold War 1945-53*, (Vol.1 Society, Communism and Culture, Sydney, 1984), 109-34; G. Williams, 'The Suppression of Communism by Force of Law: Australia in the Early 1950s,' *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 42, 2,(1996), 220-40; special issue *Australian Historical Studies*, 44, 1, (2013).

²⁰ Clark and Worger, *South Africa*, 58.

²¹ Naicker, Defiance Campaign, 88; these were reported in the Australian press, see e.g., 'UK T.U.C. Condemns Apartheid,' *Daily Examiner* (Grafton) (4 September 1952) 2; 'Uproar in UK Parliament re Apartheid,' *Canberra Times*, (9 December 1959).

²² speeches by Senator Donald Grant, Australia. Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, New Series, Senate, 5, (28 April 1955) 120, (7 June 1955) 688-91; speech by Senator William Aylatt, Australia. Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, New Series, Senate, 11, (28 August 1957), 58-9; question of Senator Patrick Kennelly, Australia. Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, New Series, Senate, 16, (12 November 1959), 1401-2; 'Why, Mr. Casey?' *Argus* (8 January 1952).

1959.²³

Cold War ideological positioning which was prompting solidarity actions in support of the ANC was also dividing the labour movement. The division of international unionism into two opposing camps in line with the Soviet-West divide at first hampered a unified international anti-apartheid campaign. The World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) was established in 1945 in the hope it would become the single overarching body for an international labour movement. Many unions and peak bodies in western democracies left the WFTU in 1949 to form an alternative organisation, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU).²⁴ The contest between the two subsequently influenced domestic labour movement politics in significant ways. The WFTU united unionists (such as the SUA and WWF) aligned with the Soviet Union, while the ICFTU brought together organised workers from many western bloc countries in active pursuit of an anti-communist agenda.²⁵ National unions were forced to align with one or the other as peak bodies took sides. The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) insisted Australian unions join the ICFTU. The maritime unions however stayed with the WFTU and reported regularly on its conferences and resolutions.²⁶

The WFTU first spoke out against apartheid as imperialist, capitalist and racist in 1949 when it passed a resolution, forwarded on to the UN, condemning racial discrimination against non-white workers, including those in South Africa. In the following years WFTU representatives

²³ S. Fabian and M. Loh, *Left-Wing Ladies: the Union of Australian Women in Victoria, 1950-1998*, (Flemington 2000) 33; on connections between Australian left-wing organisations and support for the ANC see T. McDonald and A. McDonald, *Intimate Union: Sharing a Revolutionary Life* (Annandale, NSW, 1998) 262-71

²⁴ A. Carew, 'The World Federation of Trade Unions 1945-1949,' in M. van der Linden (ed.) *The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions*, (Bern 2000), 172-3.

²⁵ D. McShane, *International Labour and the Origins of the Cold War*, (Oxford 1992); G. Myconos, 'The Globalisation of Organised Labour: 1945-2005,' (Basingstoke 2005); V. Devinatz, 'A Cold War Thaw in the International Working Class Movement? The World Federation of Trade Unions and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, 1967-1977', *Science and Society*, 77, 3, (July 2013), 342-7.

²⁶ Sheridan, *Australia's Own Cold War*, 114-29; Fitzpatrick and Cahill, *Seamen's Union of Australia*, 190-1; 'WFTU General Council meeting in Berlin,' *Seamen's Journal*, January 1952, 4-5; 'Elliott attends WFTU,' *Seamen's Journal*, (January 1952), 8

repeatedly raised the question at regional and global conferences.²⁷ At that time the ICFTU due to inner conflicts and disputes along ideological and organisational lines lagged behind the WFTU.²⁸ In 1959 an ICFTU conference called on the international labour movement to boycott South African goods and, with the withdrawal of the hard-line anti-communists from the US peak body the AFL-CIO, the ICFTU too became more active in working to end apartheid.²⁹

The South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) became a WFTU affiliate in 1956. A SACTU delegation then attended the WFTU Congress in Leipzig in 1957, giving ‘first-hand information about how the[ir] government ... was operating.’ Partially in the light of this evidence but partially in the mainstream of a general anti-colonialism drive, the Leipzig Congress made an appeal to trade unions around the world to take solidarity actions ‘to put an end to racial discrimination and the persecution of their fellow workers in South Africa.’³⁰ Simultaneously the WFTU instituted the International Trade Union Committee for Solidarity with the Workers and the People of South Africa (ITUCS).

The Leipzig conference was a significant moment in organised international trade union anti-apartheid action and provided the background and stimulus for Australia’s maritime unions. Two leading officials of the Australian maritime unions - Eliot V.Elliott, SUA National Secretary, and Jim Young, WWF Sydney Branch president - took part in the Leipzig congress. Elliott was on the central body of the WFTU, Young was an observer and a guest speaker. Both thereby gained insight into the situation in South Africa which they then brought back to

²⁷ Jan Dessau, *Ten Years’ Activity of the World Federation of Trade Unions in the United Nations*, W.F.T.U., [n.d.] 32-34, International Institute of Social History Archives, Amsterdam (hereafter IISG, Amsterdam)

²⁸ Southall, *Imperialism or Solidarity*, 37.

²⁹ Reddy, ‘Notes on the origins of the movement for sanctions,’5; see also Southall, *Imperialism or Solidarity*, on the AFL-CIO.

³⁰ WFTU. *South African Worker and WFTU - Shoulder to Shoulder*, (Johannesburg, 2012), 27; K. Luckhardt and B.Wall, *Organize... or Starve! - The history of the South African Congress of Trade Unions*, (London 1980), 378-81.

Australia.³¹ Alerted to the situation, the journals of the WWF and SUA then kept the membership abreast of events unfolding there with regular reports.³² Existing studies have identified the early 1960s as the important take-off moment of anti-apartheid activism but the maritime unions were already poised for action. By 1960 the UN General Assembly had declared apartheid a threat to international peace and security and had set up the permanent Committee Against Apartheid whose task was to keep the South African regime's policies and actions under constant review.³³

That year was a watershed moment in the anti-apartheid struggle around the world with what became known as the Sharpeville massacre. New Zealand seafarers called their first stopwork action in March 1960 and from then on 'Sharpeville Day' subsequently became an annual day of 24-hour stoppage by New Zealand seafarers.³⁴ Prompted by the women in Port Kembla branch, Australian wharf labourers in the port cities of Port Kembla and Adelaide launched open appeals to the Australian federal government to change its official 'callous attitude' to South Africa's policy, and sought to raise the question in the United Nations. SUA National Secretary Elliott also wrote to the South African Prime Minister. The SUA journal carried a full-page report of the events and several articles in the months following.³⁵

³¹ 'Australians Attend WFTU,' *Maritime Worker*, (5 November 1957) 1; 'A Fighting record, The World Federation of Trade Unions against Apartheid,' WFTU, [n.d.], Maritime Union of Australia Archives, Noel Butlin Archives Canberra, (hereafter NBAC), N38/1389.

³² e.g. 'World T.U.Movement [South African workers' bus boycott],' *Seamen's Journal*, October 1957, 11; 'Heroic African Mother,' *Maritime Worker*, 1 December 1959, 2; 'Boycott Rattles "Apartheid" Gangs,' *Maritime Worker*, 7 March 1960, 4.

³³ E.S. Reddy, 'The United Nations and the Struggle for Liberation in South Africa,' in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, Vol.3 International Solidarity, Part 1, (Johannesburg 2008), 53.

³⁴ Hilliard, Wrongs righted.

³⁵ 'Africa Protest by Pt. Kembla Women,' *Maritime Worker*, (20 April 1960), 6; 'All S.A Branches Blast Apartheid,' *Maritime Worker*, (18 May 1960), 4. *Seamen's Journal* (March 1960); 'Nelson Mandela -Australian Visit,' *Seamen's Journal*, (October 1960), 268; 'Support South African workers,' *Seamen's Journal*, (April 1960), 117-8; telegrams from ships crews [re South Africa], *Seamen's Journal*, (April 1960), 121, 131, 136; 'Apartheid in South Africa,' *Seamen's Journal*, (May 1960), 153, 187; 'Appeal from SATUC,' *Seamen's Journal*, (May 1960), 181; review of book about South Africa, *Seamen's Journal*, (May 1960) 185; 'Africa Awakes' *Seamen's Journal*, (December 1960), 420; 'South African TU Congress Policy Statement to admit trade unions of African workers to full membership,' *Seamen's Journal*, (17 May 1962), 98; 'ACTU consumer boycott SA goods,' *Seamen's Journal*, (May 1960), 188.

The next major impetus to action came after the UN Security Council imposed an arms embargo on South Africa in 1963 and the election of Harold Wilson's British Labour Party government in 1964 brought implementation of an (imperfect) arms embargo.³⁶ Sydney wharf workers then refused to service a vessel allegedly transporting rifles to South Africa. The WWF Federal Council heartily endorsed this rank and file initiative and officially stated that all union members would not load any arms or ammunitions destined for South Africa. The union asked the ACTU to impose a ban on the handling of all South African cargo, which the ACTU Executive refused to do, but the ACTU Congress authorised protests to the South African Consulate and for calls to be made on the UN and the ILO for more practical actions.³⁷ The trial and imprisonment of Nelson Mandela and other ANC leaders brought renewed international condemnation. The execution of ANC leaders including trade unionist Vuyisile Mini, Secretary of the South African dockworkers union, in Durban in 1963 added fuel to the growing fire.³⁸ Durban dockworkers had a long history of activism and militancy, and were among the first Africans to challenge the labour policies of apartheid. Many were active in SACTU.³⁹ In response to Mini's execution and that of other trade unionists, the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) resolved to urge affiliates to support the UN and to impose a boycott on South Africa.⁴⁰

That year the WFTU began arranging an anti-apartheid international labour conference in Accra, Ghana to which Australian maritime unionists were invited.⁴¹ Having discussed the

³⁶ Thorn, *Anti-Apartheid*, 75.

³⁷ WWF Federal Council meetings, 27 September, 1963, NBAC, N114/132; Minutes of WWF Federal Council Meeting, 24 September 1963, NBAC N114/132; J. Hagan, *The History of the A.C.T.U.*, (Melbourne 1981), 276.

³⁸ 'Vuyisile Mini: Worker, Poet and Martyr for Freedom,' United Nations 'Notes and Documents', No. 31/74, November 1974, in E.S. Eddy, (ed.), *The Struggle for Liberation in South Africa and International Solidarity*, (New Delhi 1992), 246-50; 'Sentenced to Death,' *Seamen's Journal*, (August 1964), 169; see also 'Increase Activity Against Apartheid - Protest Now,' *Seamen's Journal*, (August 1964), 169.

³⁹ Cole, 'No justice, no Ships', 196, 198.

⁴⁰ International Transport Workers Federation, 'Resolution to Boycott South Africa.', ICFTU, Folder 1845a, ITF 1964, IISG, Amsterdam

⁴¹ WWF Federal Council meetings, 27 September 1963, NBAC, N114/132

matter at their joint meeting, WWF and SUA officials made a collective decision to send a delegate to Accra. Gordon Harris, WWF Senior Vice President and Secretary of Fremantle branch, was chosen and the WWF proudly claimed he thus became the first Australian union official to pay a formal visit to the African continent.⁴²

The Accra conference held in March 1964, was a large international forum at which the members of nearly fifty labour organisations from Africa, Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe were able to share their experiences in fighting apartheid. They talked about holding protest rallies and marches, sending written objections to national governments and the United Nations, and raising donations to bring material help to the oppressed. In the light of the strategic importance of the shipping industry for South Africa's economy, particular attention was devoted to some instances where port workers declined to serve merchant vessels carrying South African goods. The effect of such actions prompted the conference to make a special appeal to Western workers to encourage them to refuse to handle ships and aircraft 'which have dealings' with South Africa.⁴³

Participation in that event enabled the WWF Branch Secretary to build a sound understanding of South Africa's racial problems as well as their possible solutions. On his return to Australia Harris submitted a lengthy report to the WWF Federal Office to detail the policies of 'the fascist regime' and claimed there was need to take action not only by unionists but by 'all freedom loving people.'⁴⁴ His other testimony emotionally stressed that 'South African people call for our support in their struggle. We can not let them cry out in vain. The person who has no

⁴² Ghana Conference, NBAC, N114/480; Correspondence between N. Docker, WWF Industrial Officer to WWF Branch Secretaries, regarding Harris' tour, NBAC, N114/480; 'Delegation for Africa,' *Maritime Worker*, (16 October 1963), 1; 'Solidarity against apartheid terror,' *Maritime Worker*, (20 May 1964), 3.

⁴³ *South African Worker*, 64-66.

⁴⁴ Report by G.W Harris on Apartheid and Arising from Attendance at the Union Conference – Accra, Ghana, NBAC, N114/480; see also 'Ghana Congress report – seamen call for action,' *Seamen's Journal*, (June 1964), 121.

sympathy for them is either a sub-human or a traitor to working class principles'.⁴⁵ Such a powerful appeal met an active response amongst the WWF Federal Council members who voted to organise for Harris a nation-wide tour around large Australian cities to aid 'the message he brings from this conference to be delivered to the maximum possible number of people.'⁴⁶

The Harris tour spanned nearly a month during which the WWF Fremantle branch secretary spoke at numerous meetings of WWF and SUA rank and file members, raising their political awareness of the apartheid problem. In early June 1964, when Harris' tour was drawing to its end, the WWF Federal Office sent a circular around the union's branches to suggest they 'take some demonstrative action' against ships transporting goods to or from South Africa.⁴⁷ The membership, now well educated on the political situation in South Africa, was eager to respond. Just several days after the leadership's appeal, several Melbourne port gangs refused to load goods on the vessel *Straat Clement* which was on a trade run to South Africa.⁴⁸ A number of similar actions took place in other Australian ports.

Objections in writing had turned into more concrete actions. A wave of stoppages occurred in Australian ports. From the early 1960s the United Nations regularly called on the participating states to implement a broad range of measures which could place a considerable international pressure on South Africa. The recommended actions included breaking diplomatic relations, closing ports to South African vessels, boycotting goods produced in that country, and banning exports to it.⁴⁹ Australia's maritime unions heeded the call. Stoppages in Australian ports

⁴⁵ 'Trade Union Freedom in South Africa,' NBAC, N114/480

⁴⁶ Correspondence between N. Docker, WWF Industrial Officer to WWF Branch Secretaries, regarding Harris' tour, NBAC, N114/480; Circular re South Africa (64/27), NBAC, N114/481; Circular re South Africa (64/35), NBAC, N114/481; G. Harris tour. Itinerary, NBAC, N114/480

⁴⁷ Circular re South Africa (64/35), NBAC, N114/481

⁴⁸ Enquiry in connection with the vessel 'Straat Clement' June 8th, 1964, NBAC, N114/480

⁴⁹ Letter of T. Roach, WWF acting general secretary to T. Mboya, Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs in Kenya, NBAC, N114/480

reached a peak by September, paralysing for a short period the whole of the Melbourne and Sydney waterfronts.⁵⁰ Australian maritime unionists refused to allow South African goods and produce to be imported into Australia, or simply delayed ships sailing to South Africa by keeping them in port for a few days. Their protests were firmly focussed on trade and economic relations between the former colonies.

That year the WWF Federal Office sent around to union branches a circular which provided an account of South Africa's political developments, including the oppression of local activists, as well as an outline of UN anti-apartheid decisions, but especially the 1963 Declaration for elimination of all forms of racial discrimination. Further proposing that rank and file activists boycott handling South African cargo, the document claimed that the union position 'must now be greatly strengthened by the decision of [the] U.N.O.'⁵¹ During the wave of stoppages in June-September 1964 public announcements were further made that those protests were 'in line with calls in The United Nations for economic sanctions against South Africa until apartheid [was] ended.'⁵² It was further indicated that the UN Special Committee on Apartheid had issued a report recommending the General Assembly and the Security Council to consider new measures to provide stronger pressure on South Africa, including 'an effective embargo' on arms and oils for that country.⁵³ Such a repeated reference to UN decisions and policies was a significant marker of Australian maritime unionists' internationalism as they opposed the Australian government's policy on South Africa, and sought to bring pressure for change.

⁵⁰ 'UN proposes action against South Africa,...seamen should again raise their voices...' *Seamen's Journal*, (February 1964), 32; 'Crew of s.s.Age write to South African Minister of Justice to release political prisoners,' *Seamen's Journal*, (February 1964), 39; 'Watersiders call for trade ban,' *Canberra Times*, (2 September 1964).

⁵¹ WWF Circular to All Branches, 're South Africa,' 2 June 1964, NBAC 114/481

⁵² 'Wharfies Ban South African Cargo in Anti- Apartheid Fight,' *Maritime Worker*, (3 June 1964), 1.

⁵³ 'More Hard - Hitting Action' on Apartheid,' *Maritime Worker*, (3 June 1964), 5.

In 1968 WWF Federal Secretary Charlie Fitzgibbon wrote to Albert Monk, the ACTU president, informing him of the proposal by the ANC to launch a global solidarity week.⁵⁴ Fitzgibbon also wrote to the ANC, in an expression of support for their struggle and sent a few condemnatory letters to the South African Prime Minister asking him to 're-consider the stand it [the South African government] takes on racial questions.'⁵⁵ Two years later Norm Docker, the WWF Industrial Officer, distributed around union branches a circular which described in detail the decisions of the International Olympic Committee and the English Cricket Council to impose sporting bans on South African teams.

Docker's document suggested that, in the absence of action from the ACTU or the ALP, Australia's maritime unionists should take the initiative by moving from 'condemnatory or denunciatory statements' to 'more direct forms of action including actual work stoppages on vessels handling goods to and from South Africa.'⁵⁶ Consequently wharf labourers prevented the unloading of cargoes from South African ships and Australian seafarers refused to allow South African cod to be served on ships' menus. This was followed by demonstrations against sporting tours such as the Springbok rugby team of 1971, and letters to national sporting heroes urging a boycott of South African cricket. The orchestrated international campaign was to gather increasing momentum in the 1970s as conditions deteriorated in the townships of South Africa, the UN called for a boycott of sporting contacts and announced that 1971 was to be the year against racism.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Letter of Fitzgibbon to A.E Monk president ACTU, NBAC, 114/481

⁵⁵ Letter of Fitzgibbon to Prime Minister Vorster, NBAC, 114/481; Telegram of Fitzgibbon to Prime Minister Vorster, NBAC, 114/481.

⁵⁶ Circular to All Branches and Councillors. 'South Africa,' NBAC, 114/481

⁵⁷ Limb, Anti-apartheid movement, 920; Gupta, 'Solidarity: India and South Africa,' p.1268; 'WFTU Welcomes UN Action on Racism,' *Seamen's Journal*, (February 1971), 31.

That year the WWF became an official affiliate of the ITF which operated under the ICFTU organisational umbrella.⁵⁸ This move brought the ant-apartheid fight of Australian maritime unionists out of its Soviet-alignment and into line with the efforts of millions of western-aligned workers. In December 1973 when the ICFTU first announced a global week of action against South African apartheid, Australian maritime unionists refused to service any South African flagged vessel over that period.⁵⁹ In the following years on many occasions WWF membership also responded to similar ITF and ICFTU requests by imposing short-term boycotts on handling South African cargo.⁶⁰ So effective and organised were these protests that the ITF General Secretary felt obliged to acknowledge them in an official letter to the WWF, stating that ‘it is a great satisfaction that we can always rely on our Australian affiliates to support a just cause.’⁶¹

The SUA did not join the ITF but its policies and actions were also driven by events unfolding on the international stage. In the 1970s SUA Federal Secretary Pat Geraghty served on the ILO Joint Maritime Commission. In 1973 in Geneva the ILO joined forces with both leading labour internationals – the WFTU and the ICFTU - and the UN Committee on Apartheid, to hold a large international conference to define an organised labour strategy against racial inequalities in South Africa. The event brought together nearly 400 delegates who adopted a resolution which proposed union activists from different countries express their solidarity with South African fellow workers by putting pressure on transnational corporations operating in that part of the world, rejecting the handling of South African goods, imposing a consumer boycott, and

⁵⁸ ICFTU, Folder 1845a, ITF 1964, IISG Amsterdam; see also [redacted for confidentiality]

⁵⁹ Campaign against apartheid, NBAC, 114/931

⁶⁰ Letter of Fitzgibbon to C.L. Craig, Executive Director, The Assn. of Employers of Waterside Labour, NBAC, Z432/55; Letter of Fitzgibbon to H.J. Souter, Secretary, A.C.T.U. January 10, 1977 A.C.T.U. NBAC, Z432/55; ‘South Africa Protest Ban,’ *Maritime Worker*, (7 March 1978), 13; WWF Circular 78/15, NBAC, Z432/55; ‘South Africa Ships Ban,’ *Maritime Worker*, (March 1982) 7. Extract from Federal Council Minutes, South Africa, NBAC, Z432/55; Letter of Stevens, Brisbane Branch Secretary to Fitzgibbon, NBAC, Z432/55; WWF Circular 81/64, NBAC, Z432/55; ‘Apartheidists’ Cargo Black,’ *Maritime Worker*, (October 1981), 13.

⁶¹ ‘Always rely...’, *Maritime Journal*, (15 February 1977), 4.

delivering a global week of action against the apartheid regime in December 1973.⁶² The next year members of the UN General Assembly finally passed a resolution to expel South Africa from their ranks.⁶³ Then in 1975 the UN imposed an oil embargo and two years later made the arms embargo mandatory. In the following decade there was a dramatic expansion in anti-apartheid activism. The industry of shipping and its workforce came to the fore.

The mysterious sinking of an oil tanker off the west coast of Africa in 1980 signalled the start of a new era of seafarer activism as it highlighted an illegal trade in which ships' officers and crew were intricately implicated. The supertanker was the *Salem*, whose sinking revealed 'a fraud which was to send first ripples then quite large waves through the international maritime community.'⁶⁴ Author Arthur Klinghoffer claims the sinking of the supertanker was significant as a particularly bold example of the increase in maritime fraud spawned after the oil crisis of the 1970s.⁶⁵ The greater significance for maritime unions, however, lay in its revelation that the movement against apartheid was increasingly being concentrated on the supply of oil. Support for South Africa from oil companies profiting from the trade was keeping the apartheid regime in power.

Oil was, in the often-quoted words of South African journalist Ruth First, 'the Achilles heel of apartheid.'⁶⁶ It was a vital resource for the maintenance of the South African economy and

⁶² R. Gumbrell-McCormick, 'Facing New Challenges: The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (1972-1990s)' in M. van der Linden (ed.), *The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions*, (Bern 2000), 399.

⁶³ 'The UN and apartheid: A chronology.' *UN Chronicle*, 31, (3 September 1994), 9-14; Reddy, *The United Nations and the Struggle*, 43-71.

⁶⁴ Elizabeth Mann Borgese, et al, eds., Report of the International Chamber of Commerce International Maritime Bureau (IMB): The First Ten Years, 1981-91', *Ocean Yearbook 10*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, 306-15 at 307

⁶⁵ A. Klinghoffer, *Fraud of the Century: the Case of the Mysterious Supertanker Salem*, (London, 1988); A. Klinghoffer, *Oiling the Wheels of Apartheid: Exposing South Africa's Secret Oil Trade*, (Boulder 1989); see also 'Salem', Shipping Research Bureau Folder 832-3, IISG Amsterdam

⁶⁶ Ruth First, et al., *The South African Connection: Western Investment in Apartheid*, (London 1972), 103, quoted in R. Hengeveld and J. Rodenburg, 'Introduction,' in R. Hengeveld and J. Rodenburg, (eds), *Embargo: Apartheid's Oil Secret's Revealed*, (Amsterdam 1995), 6; for an excellent summary of the development of the oil embargo see also Hengeveld and Rodenburg, 'The Last Peaceful Weapon,' in *Embargo*, 9-24.

therefore the racialised labour regime on which it was built. But oil had to be imported: carried in ships, crewed by seafarers, and unloaded in ports, at docks manned by dockworkers and wharf labourers. This gave tactical significance to maritime workers who occupied an important strategic position in the transport infrastructure of the economy, and it empowered their activism.

Being voluntary the oil embargo was hard to police. Even those countries which enacted embargoes and banned sales of crude oil found it hard to implement once ships were chartered out to non-citizens. A Shipping Research Bureau (Shirebu), an Amsterdam-based research group, was set up in 1980 by the Holland Committee on South Africa and the Werkgroep Kairos, two Netherlands anti-apartheid organisations. Its purpose was to monitor the oil trade and track tankers, shipping companies and charterers on behalf of the UN Special Committee against apartheid. It depended on details provided by ships' crews and port workers, and thus was able to keep highly accurate information of the methods used to circumvent the embargoes.⁶⁷ The delivery of covert supplies of oil required the cooperation of ships' crews and so, too, did efforts to prevent them. The story of the *Salem* illustrated this point.

The *Salem* was a Liberian-flagged supertanker which had secretly discharged nearly 200,000 tons of crude oil in Durban as part of international scheme involving South African officials and oil traders. As it was sinking, the crew abandoned ship and took to the lifeboats where they supposedly drifted for a day and a night before they were rescued by a nearby British ship. Suspicions about the cause of the disaster were raised when the *Salem's* crew seemed surprisingly clean for people drifting so long in lifeboats, and well-prepared for a supposedly unexpected shipwreck. They had managed to pack clothing and had boarded the rescue vessel

⁶⁷ Contribution of the SUA to the Seminar – Australians and Apartheid, Wally Pritchard's report. NBAC, Z129/305; Shipping Research Bureau, The Commonwealth and the Oil embargo against South Africa, NBAC Z129/305

carrying suitcases of belongings, an unusually large amount of money and cigarettes. In the lifeboats there were sandwiches, fruit and a large quantity of extra valuable equipment from the ship, of a kind not ordinarily found in lifeboats. Yet the shipwrecked crew mysteriously failed to rescue the *Salem*'s log. The captain of the rescuing ship also noticed there wasn't much of an oil slick for a very large fully-laden tanker, and other anomalies about the ship's location, its distance from its expected destination, the reports of explosions that supposedly caused it to sink, and the procedures for calling for help only after the crew were all in the lifeboats. All was dutifully reported by the rescuing crew. This immediately led to suspicion that the *Salem* had been scuttled and thus to a large-scale criminal investigation.⁶⁸ The perpetrators were brought to trial and successfully prosecuted. The principal instigator of the fraud – but probably not the actual scuttling – the ship's owner was given 35 year gaol by a US court. The criminal action of scuttling the ship had occurred to hide the illegal delivery of the oil cargo to South Africa, and its theft from Shell, a company which was also a target of anti-apartheid activists. The trial revealed that the deliberate sinking of the tanker was an act 'which combined an attempt to defraud insurers of the value of the cargo and a successful attempt to break sanctions on the supply of oil to the Republic of South Africa'.⁶⁹

Following the scuttling of the *Salem*, a new body, the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) now took the lead in investigating and publicising maritime frauds and the all too easy criminal actions of shipowners. The IMB was established as a division of the International Chamber of Commerce, with its sole purpose being the prevention, investigation and detection of maritime fraud. Membership of the IMB came from the shipping industry, and also included lawyers, insurers, bankers, and trading firms as it worked closely with the United Nations Conference

⁶⁸ B. South, Shell and the Salem – The Largest Marine Fraud In History, *Oil-Industry History*, 5 (2005), 85-88; Klinghoffer, *Fraud of the Century*.

⁶⁹ Borgese, '(IMB): The First Ten Years, 1981-91'; 'Case of scuttled tanker offers a rare glimpse at how South Africa eludes boycott to get oil,' *Wall Street Journal* April 1985, S.R.B. Files, Folder 832-3, 'Salem' IISG

on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). On the principle that many frauds were preventable - the means of prevention being knowledge - the IMB concentrated on gathering information for education and publicity and made its services available to anyone.⁷⁰ The IMB report on the *Salem*, by acknowledging the pressures on ships' crews to fall in with fraudulent owners, and recommending making ships' officers aware of the dangers, focussed on the crews as a means to monitor shipping activities.⁷¹ This coincided with developments that marked a turning point in enforcing the oil embargo and subsequently in the seafaring unions' involvement.

Shirebu was a small agency of just a few staff members. It was a private foundation established in response to the suggestion of the 1980 UN-sponsored Amsterdam oil embargo seminar to create a 'machinery to monitor all shipments of oil to South Africa.' Shirebu's rules stipulated that the main purpose of the organisation was to conduct research and associated activities on oil transport and supplies and provide the HCSA, Kairos and others (including Dutch authorities) with research findings. In 1983 a public relations officer was appointed to work alongside the director, who remained accountable for research. Shirebu's funding came from different sources. Many national and international organisations provided it with financial support, including the WFTU and the ICFTU.⁷²

The work of Shirebu was critical in the next steps that were taken by Australian unionists. In the very early 1980s the Danish Seamen's Union (DSU) established contacts with Shirebu to seek information on oil and arms shipments to South Africa on Danish-flagged vessels. The evidence they obtained enabled the union to launch protest actions against local shipping companies involved in that trade.⁷³ The WFTU is also likely to have then directly interacted

⁷⁰ Borgese, et al, 'IMB: The First Ten Years, 1981-91', 307-10

⁷¹ International Maritime Bureau Special Report, 'Crude Oil Cargoes Losses Through Theft and Fraud January 1985, S.R.B. Files, Folder 831,'Salem' IISG

⁷² Jaap Rodenburg and Richard Hengeveld (Editors) *Embargo: Apartheid's Oil Secrets Revealed*. Amsterdam : Amsterdam University Press, 1995, pp. 56, 373-375

⁷³ Henrik Berlau, 'Maritime Unions Against Apartheid', in *Embargo*, 296-305

with the Amsterdam agency. A confidential meeting between a WFTU official and the Bureau's Director and Secretary which took place in October 1983 and whose minute is deposited at the International Institute of Social History's archive, provides an indirect piece of evidence on preceding contacts between the two organisations.⁷⁴

During 1982, Brian Price - the head of the WFTU Western European Department and secretary of the International Trade Union for Peace and Disarmament (commonly known as the 'Dublin Committee') - met with the representatives of Shirebu in Amsterdam to discuss problems of the UN oil embargo on South Africa. At the end of the meeting Price recommended that Shirebu contact the Transport Department of the WFTU. In line with this suggestion Shirebu supplied their current publications to the WFTU. The WFTU forwarded copies of those publications to SUA National Secretary Pat Geraghty who had just become Chair of the Seagoing section of the WFTU Transport Department. At that time Geraghty was also a member of the nineteen-member Joint Maritime Commission of the ILO. Later in 1982 a WFTU representative again met with Shirebu in Amsterdam. Following this, the WFTU received a letter from Shirebu appreciating increased contacts with the WFTU and stating that 'excellent contact' had been made with Debkuma Changuli, WFTU Transport Department Secretary. The WFTU held its own meeting in March 1983 to discuss the possible contribution of WFTU transport workers' unions to enforcing UN oil sanctions. It was supposed also to discuss the question in person with Geraghty who had to come to Moscow in May 1983.⁷⁵

Whatever the timing and character of the early relationship between the WFTU and Shirebu, the pro-Soviet international played an important role in bringing together proactive maritime unions. In the early 1980s the Danish Seamen's Union was not an official member of any labour

⁷⁴ SRB 17 Oct 83. Confidential, 'Discussion about An International Conference of Maritime Unions for the Implementation of UN-resolution on Apartheid.' Main aspects, discussed with Walter Pritchard (Peter Sluiter, Janwillem Rouweler). Shipping Research Bureau, MUAA, Folder 628, IISG Amsterdam

⁷⁵ Meeting to Discuss Developments re Trade Union Sanctions against SA. March 18, 1983. NBAC Z129/222

international organisation, yet its leaders attended some maritime labour conferences arranged by the WFTU. The SUA forged an even closer link with the WFTU, by officially joining it in 1982. This move reflected the pro-Soviet ideological preferences of the SUA leadership as well as an easing of political tensions between the pro-Soviet and pro-Western labour camps. In recognition of the significance of the SUA to the WFTU immediately upon the affiliation, Pat Geraghty, SUA National Secretary, was appointed to the important position of chair of the Seamen's Section of the labour international.⁷⁶ Rank and filer Wally Pritchard was made the SUA delegate to the WFTU, and it was he who drove the first steps towards a new organisation, the MUAA.⁷⁷

In the early 1980s prior to Geraghty's WFTU appointment, the contacts between the SUA and the pro-Soviet international intensified. At the start of 1980 then SUA National Secretary Elliott attended in Budapest the celebrations of the Trade Unions International of Transport Workers (WFTU Department)'s 30th anniversary and the 31st session of its Administrative Committee. A letter of gratitude from the TUI claimed 'the leading bodies of our TUI and our veterans always remember with great admiration that your union was one of the founder-affiliates of our TUI and that Comrade Elliott was one of the Vice Presidents at the time of our foundation.'⁷⁸ In October 1980 John Benson, SUA Sydney Branch Secretary took part in the commemorative session of the WFTU in Moscow.⁷⁹ In 1981 the SUA Committee of Management approved Geraghty's participation in the WFTU TUI Conference held in Damascus. Geraghty also attended the WFTU Congress in Cuba in February 1982.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ 'T.U.I meetings Sofia and Bucharest. S.U.A. re-affiliates' *Maritime Journal*. (January 1983), 6-7.

⁷⁷ Kirkby, *Voices from the ships*, 80-1

⁷⁸ 'Thanks from Transport Workers International,' *Seamen's Journal*, February/March, 1980, 29.

⁷⁹ 'US Looks to a 'winnable' nuclear war,' *Seamen's Journal*, November, 1980, 240-241

⁸⁰ 'National COM Minutes,' *Seamen's Journal*, August, 1981, 205; Cuba hosts World Trade Union Congress, *Seamen's Journal*, March 1982, 49-50.

There were further direct contacts between the SUA and SACTU at that time. Zola Zember, a SACTU representative participated in 1980 in an SUA Committee of Management (COM) meeting to give evidence to union officials on racism and apartheid in South Africa. ‘After questions from various COM members and explanation to Comrade Zola of SUA policies of support and industrial action in opposition to the racist South African government,’ the COM resolved: ‘That the Union reaffirm its support and assist with other Unions in the sponsorship of a representative of the South African Congress of Trade Unions to visit Australia and speak at public and workers’ meetings.’⁸¹

Preliminary contacts between the SUA and the Danish seafarers made under the WFTU organisational umbrella were further strengthened at an international trade union conference convened by the ILO and the UN Special Committee on apartheid in June 1983. The purpose of that meeting was to enhance the contribution of organised labour in implementing sanctions against South Africa. In view of the importance of an oil supply to the country’s economy, the delegates called on governments, employers’ organisations and trade unions to secure the implementation of the UN oil and oil products embargo.⁸²

Connections made at the conference resulted in a joint consultation of the representatives of the SUA, the DSU and the ITF-affiliated and UK-based National Union of Seamen (NUS), to be summoned in London in October of the same year. The participants acknowledged that the oil embargo was a mainly preventive measure which was for the most part unsuccessfully undertaken by governments. Oil was still getting through due to the deceitful actions of many oil companies, shipowners, charterers and managers who were ‘escaping unscathed and well paid’, as the story of *Salem* had demonstrated. As Shirebu could provide relevant evidence it

⁸¹ COM Meeting, *Seamen’s Journal*, May/June 1980, 94

⁸² ‘The need for an international conference of sea-going unions for the implementation of UN resolution on apartheid.’, MUAA, Folder 628, IISG Amsterdam

was suggested that maritime trade unions might take a collective action against the violators, including holding ships at ports. To consolidate the effort it was proposed to call an international conference of maritime unions with participation of representatives from South African organisations, and both the ITF and the WFTU. To refine these plans it was decided to organise a new meeting in Copenhagen the next month.⁸³

There the three originating unions were joined by the British Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), Seamen's Union of France, West German OTV [Transportation Union] and Shirebu.⁸⁴ In enforcement of the oil embargo, the participants agreed to set up the Co-ordinating Committee on South African Arms and Oil Embargoes and continue to work with organising the international conference. Also present was an observer from the New Zealand Seamen's Union, Dave Morgan.⁸⁵ Their next meeting held in London in February 1984 changed the name of the Co-ordinating Committee to its new title of Maritime Unions Against Apartheid (MUAA). In advance of the forthcoming conference the committee decided to launch a preliminary protest campaign by drawing on the organisational strength of MUAA members. The program of action involved launching a publicity campaign amongst seafarers and waterside workers through union publications, leaflets and posters and sending written requests to shipping companies to seek assurances that they were not engaged in oil and arms trade with South Africa. The recommendation was further made to put public pressure on national legislators to reinforce and toughen sanctions against local companies supplying oil and arms to South Africa. Yet the most important aspect of the campaign was to make shipping

⁸³ Handwritten notes of the London meeting, MUAA, Folder 628, IISG Amsterdam; Copenhagen meeting. Background report, MUAA, Folder 628, IISG Amsterdam; The cooperation between the SUA and NUS on South Africa was simplified by SUA solidarity action during the 1981 NUS strike when British shipping 'lay strike-bound in ports around Australia' the NUS officially thanked the SUA for its 'tremendous cooperation and assistance' in the NUS strike for better pay and conditions. 'Links forged with NUS,' *Seamen's Journal*, May, 1981, 119; 'Solidarity with NUS,' *Seamen's Journal*, January/February, 1982, 44.

⁸⁴ List of Participants, Copenhagen meeting. MUAA, Folder 628, IISG Amsterdam

⁸⁵ Report to Committee of Management, NBAC, Z129/222; Agenda and Press-Statement, Copenhagen meeting NBAC, Z129/222; P. Geraghty and W. Pritchard, 'Maritime Unions call for action against Apartheid,' *Seamen's Journal*, (November/December 1983), 304-305.

companies breaking the UN embargoes abandon the trade by using the threat of short-term strikes.⁸⁶

The proposed trade union action was perceived, however, 'not as a means to punish the violators but as a means to discourage them from engaging in future activity of this kind. The onus for giving such assurance,' it said, therefore lay 'with the shipowners' agents and oil companies themselves.'⁸⁷ The SUA submitted three papers to the meeting - a draft invitation to potential MUAA participants, a draft appeal to seafarers and dockworkers and a list of organisational details for the prospective conference. Letters which explained the purpose of the MUAA were sent to the governments of a few Asian countries whose shipping companies were believed to violate the UN embargo. Separately, invitations to support the MUAA initiative were sent to a number of Asia-Pacific unions.⁸⁸

To secure wider support in implementation of these objectives the MUAA participating members actively used the network of their international connections. While the British unions brought into play their affiliation with the ITF, and thus the ICFTU, the SUA took advantage of its alignment with the WFTU to seek more help from the pro-Soviet labour camp.⁸⁹ To secure the success of the MUAA scheme Pat Geraghty was willing to discard the ideological differences between the SUA and the ITF and directly contacted Harold Lewis, Secretary of the pro-Western transport labour international in September 1985. His letter to Lewis emphasised that 'the question of apartheid and the Oil Embargo is one that transcends politics

⁸⁶ Co-ordinating Committee on South African Arms and Oil Embargo, NBAC, Z129/222; Report to Committee of Management, NBAC, Z129/222; ITF, South Africa, Apartheid, Mss 648/SF/2/3/48/1 and International Transport Workers Federation, Maritime Unions Against Apartheid, Mss 648/2/6/8, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick.

⁸⁷ Co-ordinating Committee on South African Arms and Oil Embargo, NBAC, Z129/222; Report to Committee of Management, NBAC, Z129/222; ITF, South Africa, Apartheid, Mss 648/SF/2/3/48/1 and International Transport Workers Federation, Maritime Unions Against Apartheid, Mss 648/2/6/8, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick.

⁸⁸ Report to Committee of Management, NBAC, Z129/222;

⁸⁹ Letter of P. Geraghty to I. Zakaria, WFTU Secretary, June 14, 1985, NBAC, Z129/222; Letter of P. Geraghty to H. Lewis, ITF Secretary, September 16 1985, NBAC, Z129/222

and the involvement of our own and the other organisations was not for seeking kudos for our own or any international body but rather an attempt to have world seafaring and dockers unions able to sit together to lend their support to this maritime struggle against apartheid'. Geraghty further stressed an effective collaboration with the WWF – an ITF active affiliate on the issue.⁹⁰ Likewise, Geraghty communicated with Frank Drozak - President of the Seafarers International Union and President the pro-Western AFL-CIO Maritime Trades Department who much welcomed SUA transnational activism aligning with AFL-CIO protests against the South African regime.⁹¹

The UN Committee on Apartheid also provided financial support to the MUAA.⁹² Separately, the MUAA established direct contacts with the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) to secure support outside the maritime unions in the South African democratic labour movement. The OATUU was an independent body affiliated with neither the ICFTU or the WFTU, yet SACTU - a long-existing WFTU affiliate – was an active OATUU member.⁹³

With the involvement of so many important international players, the conference of maritime trade unions which was eventually held in London in 1985 was a global-scale event which was co-sponsored by the UN Special Committee on Apartheid. The attendance list included the names of ANC President, SACTU Secretary, British Labour Party leader, and chair of the UN Special Committee against Apartheid, along with numerous delegates crossing the Cold War ideological divide from the ILO, the ITF, ICFTU and WFTU, and international and national political and anti-apartheid organisations. There were also in attendance the representatives of nearly thirty maritime unions, the WWF and both ITF and WFTU affiliates from all over the

⁹⁰ P. Geraghty to H. Lewis, September 16, 1985, NBAC, Z129/222

⁹¹ F.Drozak to P. Geraghty January 10, 1985, NBAC, Z129/222; P. Geraghty to F.Drozak, February 15, 1985, NBAC, Z129/222. more SUA's letters to different seamen's unions in Japan, Netherlands, Norway, German and US.

⁹² SUA COM meeting, 15/07/85. NBAC, Z129/222

⁹³ Report to Committee of Management, NBAC, Z129/222

world.⁹⁴ The conference declaration in general terms replicated the MUAA program, stressing the need to endorse the UN oil embargo and cut oil supplies to South Africa with the aid of trade union action including boycotts of ships.⁹⁵

The Declaration of Maritime Unions condemned shipowners and oil companies involved in violating UN resolutions, warned them that until assurances were received their vessels were liable to trade union action, and called on governments throughout the world to implement the resolutions and lift any legislation restricting trade union solidarity.⁹⁶

Following that recommendation just two months after the conference, SUA members detained in the port of Sydney two tankers that were chartered by a local company to transport oil to South Africa. To lift the ban the company's managing director had publicly to promise not to violate the UN embargo.⁹⁷ A few months afterwards the SUA's vigilance prevented a loaded tanker from calling at South Africa. The tanker *Tagasan Maru* sailed in May 1986 from Australia, with a cargo of Bass Strait crude oil destined for the United States. The tanker was listed in the shipping press as being bound for Japan and West Coast of the USA. Crew members of the Australian ship *Eastern Enterprise*, however, obtained information the vessel was heading for South Africa. The SUA officials took action and contacted the owner, a Japanese company, to make sure the vessel sailed to the official destination.⁹⁸

Even though the WWF was not an official party to the MUAA, the SUA initiative depended on support from the WWF, also the Firemen and Deckhands Union and the Ship Painters and

⁹⁴ Conference of Maritime Trade Unions. Attendance list. NBAC, Z129/222

⁹⁵ Declaration of Maritime Unions, NBAC, Z129/305

⁹⁶ Declaration of Maritime Unions on the implementation of the UN Oil Embargo Against South Africa October 30-31, 1985, *Seamen's Journal*, (November-December 1985), 325-6

⁹⁷ 'South African oil embargo activity successful,' *Seamen's Journal*, (January 1986), 40.

⁹⁸ Newsletter on the Oil Embargo against South Africa, No. 5, September 1986

Dockers.⁹⁹ In the latter half of the 1980s the membership of these unions undertook a series of actions against ships engaging in the oil trade to South Africa making the agents of these vessels as well as the management of BP Petroleum, Mobil, Ampol, Esso and Caltex oil companies, cease their operations. Concurrently, Australian maritime workers continued their short-term boycotts of South African cargo vessels, ‘which faced weeks of stoppages in all ports around Australia’.¹⁰⁰

Given the nature of global shipping operations, where even minor delays result in large financial losses, even the threat of industrial actions against South Africa -bound tankers, had serious implications for disrupting oil supplies. As Jim Salter, General Secretary of the British National Union of Seamen explained, ‘We all know from previous disputes with shipping companies that you don’t need a complete strike to have a major effect. Shipping companies take a lot of notice of 24-hour or 48-hour stoppages. By simply delaying ships from sailing,’ he said, ‘shipping companies incur substantial extra costs, their reliability becomes suspect and their availability to obtain charters at economic rates is jeopardized. This will automatically increase the risks and the costs of being involved in the supply of oil.’¹⁰¹

The importance of the MUAA campaign was well-perceived in the South African liberation movement. The address of Oliver Tambo, ANC President to the delegates of the MUAA 1985 conference applauded the maritime labour initiative ‘which the liberation movement regard as of crucial importance.’¹⁰² The ANC 75th anniversary conference also recognised the importance of MUAA action. Taking place in Arusha, Tanzania in December 1987 this was a

⁹⁹ W. Pritchard, ‘Maritime Unions Close the Net on Oil to South Africa,’ *Seamen’s Journal*, (November/December 1985), 329. Letter of P. Geraghty to H. Lewis, ITF Secretary, 16 September 1985, NBAC, Z129/222

¹⁰⁰ W. Pritchard, ‘Nelson Mandela – Australian visit,’ *Seamen’s Journal*, (October 1990), 269.

¹⁰¹ Newsletter on the Oil Embargo against South Africa, No. 3, February 1986.

¹⁰² African National Congress. Statement by President O.R. Tambo. NBAC, Z129/222

global-scale event attended by around 600 delegates from sixty countries representing government and non-government organisations, including trade unions. Mick Doleman, Victorian Branch Assistant Secretary represented the SUA at the conference. Elected as Vice Chair of the Trade Union Section he reported on Australian seafarers' anti-apartheid activism 'particularly the delaying of South African ships or ships trading to South Africa.' Doleman further provided 'an in-depth analysis' of MUAA operation which 'during the whole conference ... was held up as a particular example of concrete activity directed at the most vital activity of the racial regime, oil.'¹⁰³ The conference adopted a 'Program of action' which stated that with regard to the oil embargo action must be taken at 'international, governmental and NGO level to stop the fuelling of apartheid ... that existing sources of information such as the Shipping Research Bureau, Kairos and the Maritime Unions Against Apartheid should be used extensively in order to expose the attempts of the South African regime to circumvent the oil embargo.'¹⁰⁴

The MUAA campaign was actively supported by the ITF. The 1986 ITF Congress adopted a declaration which required affiliated unions to observe the oil and arms embargoes against South Africa. The delegates further urged seafarers and dock workers to take industrial action, campaign for effective sanctions, and to give maximum support for trade unions within South Africa. This message from the congress was the strongest statement ever issued by the ITF on South Africa.¹⁰⁵

On a global scale, according to Shirebu statistical data, there was a decline in the number of crude oil tankers calling to South African ports. While eighty-five ships delivered their liquid cargo to South Africa in the year 1983/84, the number dropped by nearly a third in the following

¹⁰³ M.Doleman to P. Geraghty, January 4, 1988, NBAC, Z129/305.

¹⁰⁴ International ANC Conference "Peoples of the World United Against Apartheid for a Democratic South Africa" : Arusha, Tanzania, 1-4 December 1987, 16 [WHERE IS THIS LOCATED?]

¹⁰⁵ Proceedings of the 35th Congress Luxemburg, 31 July to 7 August 1986, ITF, 1986, 111-112.

few years. The action of the MUAA was not the only reason for this relative success yet their effort was certainly one of the crucial factors.¹⁰⁶ In 1987 Shirebu announced that Transworld Oil, the main supplier of oil to South Africa, had announced it was withdrawing from its business ‘based upon an assessment of the economic, social and political environment.’¹⁰⁷ The MUAA campaign officially terminated in 1990 when Nelson Mandela was released from prison. White supremacist rule had not yet ended, but the ban on the ANC had finally been lifted.¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

Internationalism was a value identified closely with a commitment to socialism and often membership of a nationally-based socialist or communist party. Its meaning, however, was less doctrinaire than variable. Belief in internationalism provided the impetus for much industrial action by organised labour and drove many trade unions to express solidarity with their counterparts in other nations. We have seen how this occurred in relation to maritime unions opposing apartheid in South Africa.

The organised opposition to apartheid was initiated from organisations outlawed within South Africa and driven by an orchestrated international campaign of education through existing labour organisations. Particularly in the early years of the 1950s the WFTU was a critical international instrument in disseminating information to trade unions outside South Africa. Subsequently the ICFTU, followed by the UN General Assembly and the ILO, called for action to implement boycotts and bring pressure to bear on the South African government.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Flags of Crude Oil Tankers to SA ’80-’91,’ Shipping Research Bureau, Folder 501-2, IISG Amsterdam

¹⁰⁷ ‘South Africa’s Main Oil Supplier Withdraws,’ extract from Shipping Research Bureau Newsletter on the oil Embargo against South Africa, reported in *Seamen’s Journal*, (November 1987).

¹⁰⁸ P. Limb, *A Shared History: the ALP, the ANC and the Australian Anti-Apartheid Movement*, (Canberra 2012); see also ‘My Love for the ANC,’ in McDonald and McDonald, 262-71

Australian seafarers were not alone but were among the first when they responded promptly and concretely to the international calls for action. Their understanding of the significance of apartheid and the need to demonstrate resistance to it, stemmed from their identity of themselves as internationalists, with opportunities and responsibility for spreading the ideas they embraced.¹⁰⁹ This much was ideological and the South African government's persecution of communists was significant, although seafarer activism was also driven by their own experience of meeting people from all parts of the world and their own first-hand knowledge of apartheid's impact on their fellow-maritime workers: 'As a group of workers they were directly touched by apartheid in their industry.'¹¹⁰ Because of the amount of shipping passing through South African ports, which increased during the 1960s following the closure of the Suez Canal, many crews experienced the realities of apartheid first-hand, or through talking with shipmates who had called at South African ports.¹¹¹

The purpose and timing of their actions was nevertheless prompted by their educated awareness of events unfolding in South Africa and decisions taken in international forums which they and their officials attended. Theirs was not impromptu collective action coincident with transnational events. It was part of an orchestrated international campaign. They were specifically appealed to by the resistance movement. The 1959 ICFTU conference in Lagos urged all seafarers and dockers in democratic unions to withhold their services from firms trading with South Africa.¹¹² Subsequently the campaign against apartheid then also broke down the Cold War division between the two labour internationals, as the anti-communist

¹⁰⁹ EV Elliott, *Seamen's Journal*, (July 1977) 171; Cahill, Internationalism and the SUA.

¹¹⁰ Lachlan McDonald et al, 'Apartheid in the First Person,' *Seamen's Journal*, December 1972, 434; See for example the execution of dockworker Vuyisile Mini, 'Vuyisile Mini: Worker, Poet and Martyr for Freedom,' United Nations 'Notes and Documents', No. 31/74, November 1974, in Eddy, *Struggle for Liberation in South Africa*, pp.246-50; see also Cole, 'No justice, no ships', 185-217; Hilliard, *Wrongs are righted*, 1.

¹¹¹ Interviews with former SUA members and officials quoted in Kirkby, *Voices from the ships*. see also S. Macintyre, *The Reds: The Communist Party of Australia From Origins to Illegality*, (Sydney 1998), 415.

¹¹² Reddy, 'Notes on the origins of the movement for sanctions,' 5

ICFTU joined with the WFTU's long-standing anti-racism anti-colonialism campaign, culminating in the MUAA enforcement of the UN's oil embargo.

This story of the MUAA and particularly the role of Australian seafarers contributes to the debate today over how successful the transnational anti-apartheid movement was and whether regime change in South Africa was a consequence of external international pressures and economic boycotts impacting on business and influencing government. One view holds it was a consequence of internal struggle within South Africa itself, making the country ungovernable. Another argument prioritises the Cold War by claiming that the Western powers' support for the South African government - which was sustained by a shared fear of the threat of communism- disappeared with the end of the Cold War and the shift in the international power balance which occurred.¹¹³ This last suggests that more attention might productively be paid to the Cold War context in which apartheid, and the opposition to it, developed. The story of Australian seafarers and the MUAA is just one aspect. Remembering the anti-apartheid movement as a major episode of twentieth century history, means restoring vital dimensions in understanding the forces shaping twentieth-century politics.

¹¹³ Thorn, *Anti-Apartheid*, 2; Clark and Worger, *South Africa*, 6.