

EASTERN EUROPE

Poland's reprieve will not last forever

By Paul Bernstein

SZCZECIN, POLAND

A FOUR FERRY FROM COPENHAGEN pulled into Swinoujscie, Poland's westernmost Baltic port, we passed within a few hundred yards of Soviet naval training ships, their hammer-and-sickle and red star insignias gleefully visible in the early morning sun. Skinny teenage sailors-in-training gathered on the ship's decks, seeking relief from August's stifling humidity below decks.

The port city, ringed by several tall, modern apartment buildings, seemed prosperous. When we disembarked, the dockworkers looked portly and jovial, if a bit sleepy at this still-early hour. Where was the food crisis?

In fact, where was the air of crisis at all? Everything seemed surprisingly normal on this languid Saturday morning. The taxi driver offering to take us to Szczecin wanted to be paid in Western currency rather than Polish *zlotys*—a common Eastern European proposal. In the streets of Szczecin itself, young

Behind closed doors in an adjoining room, Solidarity's officers were meeting together with "consultants" (professionals who do not hold membership in the union, because they don't work in factories, but who nevertheless spend day and night working for the renewal process in Poland). They were strategizing for Monday's meeting between Solidarity's national committee and the Polish government—talks that had broken off the previous week with some acrimony. Two issues dominated the discussion: the food crisis and the still-restricted media.

From the bottom up.

Solidarity is a decentralized organization. Each regional unit develops its own opinions and passes them on to the national coordinating council where a consensus is hammered out before any negotiations with the government. In this case, the national consensus within Solidarity had boiled down to seven demands:

1. that the government establish a special office to handle the food crisis;
2. that Solidarity participate in solving the food distribution problem;
3. that the pricing of food be subject to "social control" and food rationing ended;
4. that Solidarity be given air-time on the state-run TV and radio;
5. that censorship be taken out of the hands of the Party and put into the hands of parliament, that any further prosecutions for violating censorship not include fines or jail sentences and that trade union publications that circulate "internally" to members be immune from any censorship;
6. that a law be passed confirming the legal status of the independent trade unions (so far they exist only by government agreement);
7. that workers' council be allowed to form in all enterprises, with power to select the enterprise managers and to oversee policy.

Already Solidarity has taken its own actions to realize some of these goals. To reach the public without censorship it publishes not only the one-page releases called *Komunikat*, but also an eight-page bulletin circulated within the factories to all members. A worker in Solidarity's press office held up the latest copies of both the bulletin and a more public journal issued by Solidarity but subject to state censorship. A large white blotch showed where censors had done their work on the public journal. The bulletin carried, word-for-word, what the censors had cut up out of the other document.

In the area of workers' councils, too, Solidarity is not waiting for the government to take leadership. In 18 of the nation's largest enterprises such councils are being formed: Lot, the national airlines; Huta, the huge steelworks near Katowice; Lenin Shipyards in Gdansk (where the strikes began last year); Warski shipyards in Szczecin (where confrontations took place in 1970); Cegielski factory in Poznan (scene of the 1956 uprising). Most have gotten to the point of drafting by-laws. In Lot, an elected council has already selected its nominee for the post of company general manager, but the government insisted on filling that post regardless of the workers' wishes. The two sides compromised by having the workers' choice become vice-manager. Poles we talked to—both within Solidarity and outside it—were not too pleased by that settlement.

But Solidarity presses on. To whatever extent these workers' councils achieve real power, the government will be forced to cooperate with them, because it is dependent on these large enterprises to maintain the national economy.

What next?

Important as these achievements are, one wants to know what sort of long-run vision Solidarity has for democratic Poland. Does the emphasis on indepen-



Roses and a protest leaflet on a Polish auto.

dent unions and workers' councils indicate a preference for fully independent enterprises and a market system? Has distrust of the state led to a desire for ending state ownership? What allegiance does Solidarity feel to socialist ideology when its leader wears Catholic symbols and leads striking workers in prayer? If Solidarity professes little faith in the ruling Communist Party, even after its reformative Congress, what system of political parties does it think Poland should strive for?

The options are now under discussion; alternatives are circulating through Solidarity's regionalized structure. None has yet been elevated into dogma. But the outlines of the present consensus are discernible.

For the economy, there is a prevailing desire for greater market viability of enterprises and an end to state subsidization of inefficient production and distribution. The Yugoslav model of "market socialism" based on worker-run en-

terprises comes to mind and was referred to by the Solidarity members with whom we spoke. But, also like Yugoslavia, the Poles seem uninterested in returning to capitalist forms of ownership; they seek rather to lessen bureaucratic state interference by inventing some native form of social control.

In the political realm, they believe in the principle of free elections with secret ballot and they admire the liberal freedoms and parliamentary democracy they see in their neighbor to the north, social-democratic Sweden.

Culturally, they support and are contributing to a renaissance of Polish national self-expression. The meaning of Catholic loyalties here is complex, and very different from what an American might expect. People we spoke with were reluctant to put their feelings into words, but our sense was that the public affirmation of Catholic symbols by the

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POZNAN 1956
nie ma winnych

WYBRZEZE 1970
nie ma winnych

RADOM 1976
nie ma winnych

BYDGOSZCZ 1981
nie ma winnych

**czas
zdać
rachunek**

Poster recounting earlier uprisings: "No one was guilty/It's time to deliver."

parents strolled with their children, seemingly unafraid of a possible invasion from the East German border barely 15 miles away. In a central square people at fast-food stands were buying "toasty"—hot sandwiches of cheese, tomatoes and mushrooms. No one looked to be starving, and the lines were no longer than at McDonalds.

Until last year, Poland had a six-day work week, but since the advent of Solidarity, Saturday has been a day off three times a month, and Szczecin's residents were out to enjoy their hard-won leisure.

At the office of Solidarity itself, however, the easy calm of the outside did not prevail. A small crowd was gathered around the front door, reading the latest issues of *Komunikat*, a press release issued by the union's regional headquarters, free of government censorship. As we entered the front room, a telex machine noisily pounded out a press release from the union's national headquarters in Gdansk. A pot of stew bubbled on a hot-plate nearby to feed the women who had stayed up all night handling the flow of communications. At a table near the other wall, a teenage boy was slicing folded copies of *Komunikat* so that they could be pasted up on store and trolley windows around the city.



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Poland

Continued from page 9

workers' movement served as a declaration of independence from the corrupted moral code expounded by the Party and an affirmation of human morality that connects Poland to other countries of the world. Certainly the fact of a Polish Pope has strengthened in many Poles a sense of national identity and of independent choice about where their country should go in the future. It takes Poland out of the Soviet orbit just one more step, and, from where they are, every small step counts for a great deal.

Between union and party.

Clearly, Solidarity is taking on more than just a trade union role. It really has come to represent the political voice of the Polish population—and this has drawn the ire of the government and the Party. "You are not keeping your promise to be a labor union," they accuse. "We have no ambitions as a political party," the union replies. They know full well that to try to stand as a party means standing in formal opposition to the Communists, which would create a breach too large for the Soviets to tolerate. So the heated arguments about Solidarity's role are not just a peevish fight about the correct label to apply; they reflect a central political crisis that both sides in Poland must solve, and solve soon, if the renewal process is to be given the time it needs really to transform Poland.

Poland at this moment is thrashing about in a political stalemate. The Communist Party has recovered sufficiently

from the shocks of 1980 to have convened its own national congress this July, where it elected a new central committee (the party's legislature) and a new politburo (its cabinet) and was willing to do these things by secret ballot. Stanislaw Kania, who until then had been only a temporary replacement for the discredited Geirek, now has a formal mandate from the more than 1,000 delegates elected by the Party's local committees across the land. And, as if to reflect its newfound sense of muscle after the Congress, the Party/government issued stern warnings that "if anarchy deepens, power can be brought to bear."

But of course, disorder is not the core of Poland's problem, it is only the symptom. The immediate problems of Poland are her economy—falling productivity and more than \$20 billion in foreign debt—and her oppressive bureaucratic system. The two are intertwined. Despite its internal reorganization, the Party has not come up with a comprehensive program to solve the country's economic crisis.

In contrast to the liberalization process in Czechoslovakia in 1968, the Polish Party has published no "Action Program" to show the public it sympathizes with their complaints and has a strategy for solving them. The Czechoslovak Party placed a program of economic, political, cultural and educational reforms before the public just four months after their renewal process started in January, 1968. The Polish Party still has not responded comprehensively to public concerns.

And until there is visible government movement toward reform the average working person seems reluctant to increase productivity. As one young woman told me when asked if the new freedom in Poland had excited everyone to

pull together and bring the country out of its crisis—"Why should we work harder? We don't know where our efforts will go; the government is so incompetent, wasteful and untrustworthy."

By contrast, Czech workers' despondency switched to enthusiasm in the summer of 1968. They voluntarily began to work Sundays without pay once actions by Czechoslovak authorities made clear that the leadership endorsed the public will. Specifically, the Czechs in June 1968 enacted two demands now on Solidarity's list: an end to press censorship and the legalization of workers' councils.



Kania is being deliberately vague.

In the absence of decisive government action, the Polish economy continues to slide. The government responds to an emergency by reducing rations or raising prices, but this of course merely inflames the public more. The food protests this summer were sparked not by hunger in the strict sense, but by public exasperation when basics like bread and wheat or

pleasures like cigarettes and vodka became harder to get. (Real hunger is being experienced in the region of Lodz, however).

But the resulting public marches do not produce more food nor redistribute what food there is. Shortly after I left Poland, Solidarity offered to boost productivity by encouraging people to return to work on Saturdays—on condition that Solidarity, not the government, be in charge of how the Saturday output is distributed. If the government agrees, Solidarity will have strengthened worker control at the factory level and gained a foothold for worker control of the economy at the national level—an enormously momentous event.

The politics of vagueness.

What is the Party waiting for? It is curious that the Party has been able to reform its internal structures in a manner that departs sharply from Stalinist East European party traditions, yet has not been so flexible about solving the nation's other problems. Or is it?

In Kania's behavior since taking office last autumn, there is a discernable pattern of *deliberate* vagueness that has had the advantage of at least keeping the Soviet leaders from knowing for certain what will come next. If Kania is truly in favor of a more democratic Poland, he may have decided early on to keep the specifics from Soviet view, in order to gain the time Poland needs to discover and put into effect its democratic forms. Certainly the Poles, under his leadership, have been more successful, this time, than any other Soviet satellite in not provoking a Russian attack while liberalizing their system. They've been at it a full year, while the Czechoslovaks persuaded the Russians to keep hands off for only eight months in 1968—the Hungarians for only a few weeks in 1956.

True to this scenario, when Kania was challenged to reveal his preferences during debates at the recent Party Congress he responded, somewhat slipperily, "We'll go neither left nor right; but straight ahead, for socialist renewal."

Such a strategy has its risks. The Polish people see only the vagueness; they have not been presented with enough clear evidence of democratic reform by this regime to offset the years of broken promises by Gomulka and Geirek. The people I asked about the possibility of Soviet invasion certainly didn't credit the Party leader with preventing it.

The Russians have not granted Poland a final reprieve; they have only doled out measured amounts of time. Understanding this, the moderates in Solidarity have wisely called for a two-month moratorium on the street demonstrations that most provoke the Russians. But whether they will prevail over the more radical members at the union's national congress later this month remains to be seen.

The Party, for its part, needs to use this interim to bridge the disastrous gap existing between itself and the people. Clear support for a few of the seven concerns uppermost in the public's mind might accomplish that. But it may again fall to Solidarity to take the initiative—not in the streets so much as in the Party chambers, where 20 percent of the membership belongs to Solidarity.

Solidarity, which has already moved considerably beyond its role as strike leader since August 1980, may have to abandon altogether the confrontation model whereby the union remains totally outside of the regime and Poland only makes progress when the Party's arm is twisted. To buy time, an alliance between Solidarity and reform-minded members of the Party is needed, and needed soon.

For it is the unpleasant truth that, though we may want to celebrate Poland's achievement of a full year of unprecedented freedom and creative socialism, no stable system has yet been put into place. It could all be washed away in a trice. Poland stands now, not at the threshold of a second year of a new system, but only at the second year of new possibilities for a workable system.

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If you think the air controllers are getting what they deserve, join the club.

Ronald Reagan thinks the air controllers and PATCO, their union, deserve exactly nothing.

No bargaining in good faith. No fair compensation. No better working conditions. No nothing.

Except a termination notice for every controller on the picket line and an indictment for every union organizer and leader.

A lot of people seem to agree with Ronald Reagan. Including a lot of people who never agreed with Ronald Reagan about anything before.

When Reagan implies that air controllers are paid too much already, these people nod their heads. When Reagan wraps himself in the flag and summarily fires and blacklists 12,000 men and women, these people flinch... but let it pass.

There's only one problem with this kind of thinking: the air controllers are not a special case.

They're average men and women who went out on strike because they had no other alternative. Not for trivial reasons. For important reasons. Like less stress on the job. More safety in the air. And the chance to vest in the pension system (most air controllers never make it to retirement).

Those are bargaining points any fair-minded American can stand behind. Even if you've never belonged to a union or gone out on strike, you can understand that people only fight when they absolutely have to.

You can also understand the message Ronald Reagan is sending to every employer and every worker in the country. Union-busting pays. Joining a union doesn't.

If the rest of us abandon the air controllers, who will be abandoned next? Where will we draw the line?

Reagan picked this fight against PATCO. If enough of us sit on the sidelines thinking this fight isn't ours, Reagan will win.

He'll pick the next fight just as carefully. And he'll win again. And again.

Until he's won it all.

It all comes down to this: Ronald Reagan is breaking a strike and busting a union. If you find yourself agreeing with Ronald Reagan, it's time to think again.

And time to start supporting the men and women fighting back all across America.

The air controllers and their families can't afford to lose this strike. Neither can the rest of us.

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Or to the LABOR LEGAL DEFENSE FUND, Box 42503, Washington DC 20015.

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SOUTH AFRICA

New unions set a fast pace



By James North

EAST LONDON, SOUTH AFRICA

THE SOUTH AFRICAN ALLIED Workers' Union (SAAWU) exploded onto the labor scene last year, enrolling 20,000 members in this medium-sized Indian Ocean port and staging strikes against a half dozen different employers. The alarmed apartheid regime sent Fanie Botha, its minister of manpower, on a special mission here to encourage employers to resist the militant new union. Four companies nonetheless disregarded Botha, caved in and signed recognition agreements; others settlements are on the way.

Now the union is aggressively going national. Its personable young leader, Thozamile Gqweta, claims 55,000 more members in other industrial centers, which would make SAAWU South Africa's largest black union federation. At the same time, two other organizations with a similar outlook—the Motor Assembly and Component Workers

constituted less than 1 percent of the black labor force), still regarded the two federations as dangerously militant, some younger black workers were disappointed at their timidity.

The first decisive break took place in Uitenhage in late 1979, where workers at the Ford assembly plant who had belonged to a branch of FOSATU's largest affiliate broke away and set up MACWUSA. That union, and a growing number of SAAWU and GWU branches that emerged the following year, refused point-blank to register and declared furthermore that they would speak out on political issues. In many cases, they worked closely with black civic associations in their communities.

One recent Saturday morning, SAAWU headquarters—several rooms in an aging office block—was bustling with activity. Shop stewards delivered union dues (each member pays about \$1 per month), then gathered for impromptu meetings. Idle workers, who in most cases had been fired for their union activities, came in to lend a hand with the office work. The men and women were overwhelmingly young, serious and purposeful.

Gqweta, who occupies an office that is bare except for a desk and a telephone, outlined the union's organizing procedure: "We wait until we get at least 60 percent membership in a particular factory. Usually we get 90 or 95 percent—the workers want it. Then they elect a five-member factory committee, plus a shop steward from each division. Any agreement that the committee signs must be approved by the membership."

Some East London companies have re-

But as one officeholder commented, "It didn't really matter. The workers just came in and managed the office until we were released."

Setting a militant pace.

The militant union movement is displaying a striking and unprecedented degree of working-class solidarity. Last January some 160 workers at the Firestone Tire plant in Uitenhage were fired after a wildcat strike. They approached MACWUSA for help. The union coordinated a sympathy strike, during which 3,000 workers at Firestone and the nearby Ford and General Motors plants walked out for two weeks in solidarity. Firestone backed off, promising to rehire the 160 workers.

The firebrand unions have also forced both FOSATU and CUSA to hurry to keep up with the pace. The result is a mounting strike wave that just keeps rolling along; nearly every day the newspapers carry reports of fresh work stoppages from all over the country.

A FOSATU affiliate recently won a significant victory at a Colgate-Palmolive plant in Boksburg, just east of Johannesburg. Colgate—ironically, in the past it had been rated a "model employer" in terms of the Sullivan Code, which purports to monitor U.S. investors here—first refused to recognize the union, then compromised but said it would not negotiate directly over plant conditions.

The company insisted the union first join the existing "industrial council," in which business and labor representatives from the entire industry bargain over industry-wide conditions. (Industrial councils, in which white unions have long par-

ing 6,000 workers took place at two separate gold mines in a single 10-day period. The miners were protesting the introduction of a new death benefit scheme that, ironically, actually represented something of an improvement. The men resisted it either because they misunderstood the scheme, or resented that it was introduced unilaterally.

Strikes or insurrection.

The more intelligent business leaders are coming to realize that as long as working-class unrest continues, it is better if it is channeled into organized unions, no matter how militant, which at least provide the possibility of communication and negotiation.

Paradoxically, foreign investment in South Africa also helps to promote a more benign attitude in some employers. Investment certainly strengthens the apartheid system overall, but it provides leverage to workers in local branches of the multinationals. Colgate, Ford and others are very much aware that overseas unions and anti-apartheid groups are monitoring their conduct here.

By no means are all employers showing stirrings of enlightenment. In April, the Sigma Motor Corporation, near Pretoria, dismissed 4,000 striking workers; Leyland, located in Cape Town, fired

Community ties allow the militant black unions to threaten more recalcitrant firms with a boycott.

2,400 strikers in May. In response, African National congress saboteurs blew up Sigma and Leyland auto showrooms in Durban, the third-largest city. (The ANC's labor wing, the South African Congress of Trade Unions, is not permitted to function inside the country. It exists in exile, and it almost certainly plays some undercover role in the current upsurge.)

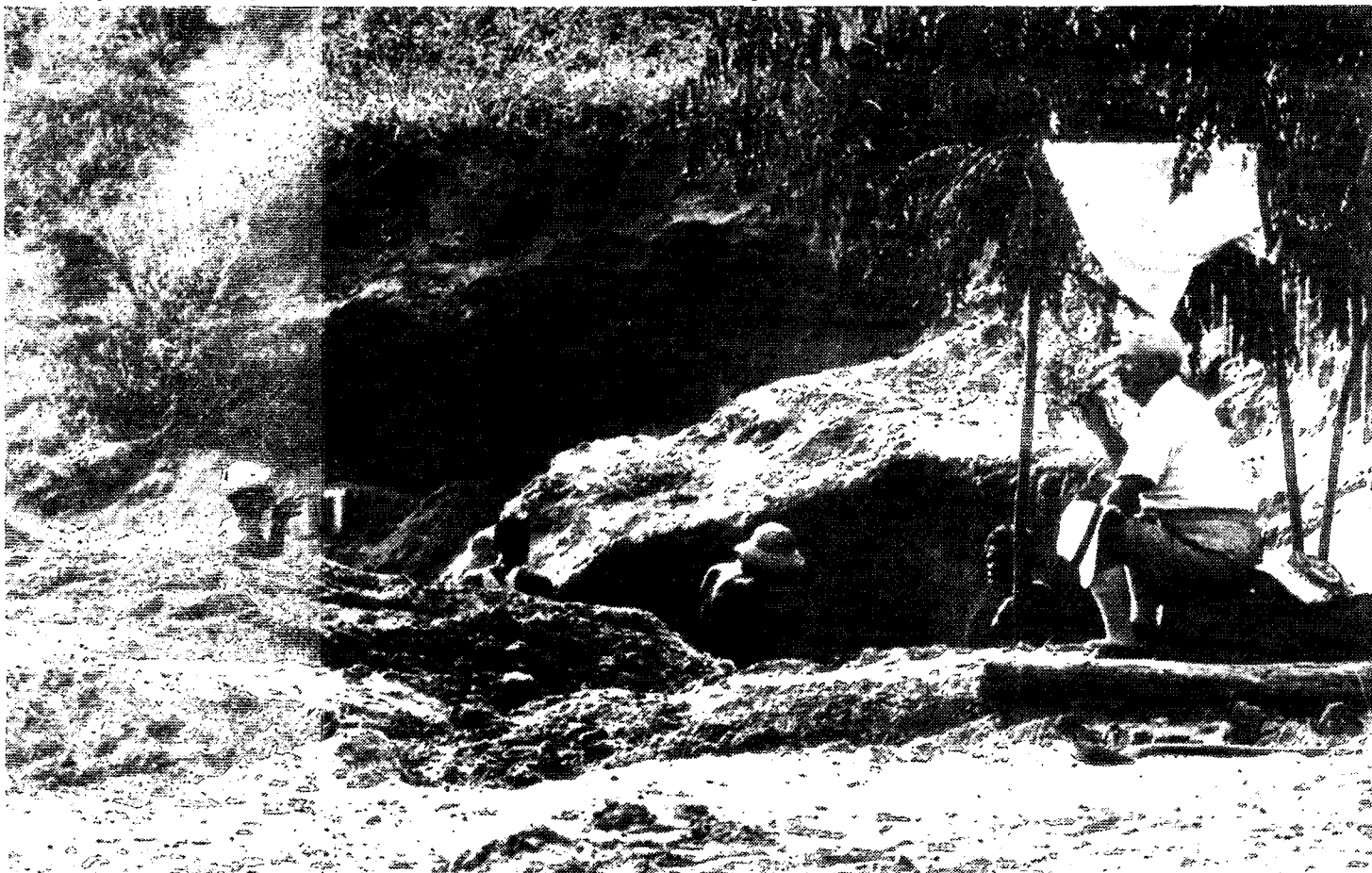
The regime's own intentions regarding black unions are not entirely clear. It introduced new, restrictive labor legislation into parliament last year—and then was forced to withdraw it after strong protest by the unions and even some employers. It is resubmitting watered-down bills to the current session of the assembly. The government would probably prefer to crush the unions, but it holds back for now because of pressure from some elements in the business community and to avoid an outcry overseas that could jeopardize continued foreign investment.

The black union movement is indeed, as Gqweta says, "going from strength to strength." But its gains should not be exaggerated. At best, only about 3 or 4 percent of the black workforce now belongs to unions. Vital sectors of the economy—mining, steelmaking, agriculture—are almost completely unorganized. And thus far, the unions have primarily confronted internationally-minded managers of large-scale enterprises, who are prepared to be more flexible than either the state (a significant employer here), or provincial owners of small and medium-sized concerns.

The enormous importance of migrant laborers in the economy—one estimate is that one out of every three black South African workers is a migrant—makes organizing even more difficult. Migrants typically are housed in closed, single-sex compounds, serving short-term contracts—forbidding conditions in which to build and sustain a union.

Moreover, the present upsurge has occurred during an economic boom, propelled in part by last year's high gold prices. Already the economy is starting to turn down and the unions will face layoffs and greater employer resistance to wage demands.

Several days after I spoke with Thozamile Gqweta, the South Africans swooped down, locking up him and the rest of the SAAWU executive committee. He's inside now, probably extolling trade unionism to his interrogators.



Union of South Africa (MACWUSA), based in nearby Uitenhage, and the General Workers Union (GWU), which originated in Cape Town, are also spreading their influence.

The success of the militant unions is a significant setback to the government's new labor policy. In 1979 it introduced its much-heralded "new deal" for black workers. The policy was in part intended to recognize black unions, but to require them to register officially and to comply with other conditions designed to limit their involvement in political and community affairs.

The Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) and the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA), both formed during this period, gauged that the regime could not be provoked. Affiliates of both organizations moved toward registration, and both concentrated on workplace concerns. Though many employers, unfamiliar with black unions (at that stage, organized workers

sponded to the SAAWU organizing drive by firing their work forces en masse and then recruiting replacements from among the large body of jobless or selectively rehiring the more pliable ex-workers. SAAWU organizers say bitterly a certain black strike-breaker in the East London area earns close to \$7 for every scab he provides. (This tactic is less effective in the more modern factories, which employ a larger percentage of semi-skilled or skilled workers that cannot be replaced overnight.) SAAWU is fighting this by organizing the unemployed workers. It has also called consumer boycotts against recalcitrant employers—a tactic, coordinated with community groups, which has been used increasingly nationwide in the past few years.

The government has come down hard on SAAWU and other like-minded unions. Nearly all the labor leaders have done stints in police detention. At one stage, more than 50 SAAWU leaders and organizers were locked up without trial.

icipated, are notorious devices for removing labor issues from the shopfloor to remote, bureaucratic conference rooms. Most black unions want the councils either abolished or drastically modified.) The FOSATU union refused, and threatened both a strike and a consumer boycott. In late June, the company surrendered.

Colgate's about-face illustrates one reason businesses are making concessions—the sheer fact of a militant, organized working class. But there is another reason some companies are grudgingly coming to terms with unions—they want to reduce the danger of explosive worker outbursts.

Starting in 1973 a number of spontaneous work stoppages have taken place, at times culminating in riots. In some cases, businesses did not even know the grievances, and searched frantically for someone or some organization with which to negotiate.

In late July, for instance, riots involv-