

South African Labour Bulletin

Interviews · Ike van der Watt · Robbie Botha
Norman Daniels · Deregulation · Kinross
Health and Safety · Unemployment Figures
Detainees at Cadburys · Railway Workers
Notford Mills Strike · Disinvestment
Economic Crisis · CUSA-AZACTU
Debate · Reviews · Economic Notes

**Northern Natal:
Meeting UWUSA's challenge**
Popa Green

The Strike at General Motors
Penn Adler

5441
S7
S6

South African Labour Bulletin

volume 12 number 1 Nov/Dec 1986

The South African Labour Bulletin

303 Geldenhuys, 33 Jorissen Street, Braamfontein, South Africa
P.O. Box 31073, Braamfontein 2017, South Africa
Phone 3398133

Editorial Board

Cape Town:

Johann Maree, Dave Kaplan, Debbie Budlender

Durban:

Rob Lambert, Ari Sitas, Shamim Marie, Bonginkosi Nzimande

Eastern Cape:

Andre Roux, Aswin Desai

Johannesburg:

Eddie Webster, Phil Bonner, Doug Hindson, Jon Lewis

Production: Jon Lewis, Pippa Green

Published since April 1974.

Eight issues yearly. Guidelines for contributors and subscription form on back page.

The South African Labour Bulletin is a refereed journal.

The views expressed in the contributions are not necessarily those of the editorial board.

Contents

volume 12 number 1, Nov/Dec 1986

	page
Editorial note	1
<hr/>	
Briefings and reports:	
Debbie Budlender	Deregulation 4
Pippa Green	Detainees struggle at Cadburys 5
Aasha Mehta	Strike at Scotford Mills 8
TAG	Health and safety on the mines 11
LMG	Kinross stayaway 15
Sarakinsky/Keenan	Unemployment in South Africa 18
Pippa Green	Organising railway workers 27
<hr/>	
Debate:	
David Kaplan	The current crisis and the unions 40
Leif Blomberg	Disinvestment: a Swedish view 44
<hr/>	
Document: The launch of CUSA-AZACTU	49
<hr/>	
Interviews: Norman Daniels	Leaving TUCSA 53
Robbie Botha	The death of TUCSA 60
Ike van der Watt	A new Labour Forum 67
<hr/>	
Articles:	
Pippa Green	Northern Natal: meeting UWUSA's challenge 73
Glenn Adler	The strike at General Motors 96
<hr/>	
Reviews: G Brown	Hard labour 116
S Marie	Divide and profit 118
Labour Research Service	Statistics for trade unions 123

Editorial note

The editorial board of the Labour Bulletin would like to thank Penny Narsoo for her contribution to the Bulletin over the last three years, during which time she has held the post of administrator. We wish her well in her new job with the Metal and Allied Workers Union.

The death of TUCSA

The death of TUCSA, long predicted, is now official. The executive has recommended that the Council be dissolved, and this move is sure to be accepted by a special conference of the membership called for December 2. At its height, 3 years ago TUCSA boasted a membership of half-a-million drawn from every "race" group. By the end membership stood at just over 100,000. It was the 40,000 strong Typographical Union - TUCSA's remaining largest union - which apparently proposed that the Council be dissolved.

According to TUCSA president, Robbie Botha, TUCSA's problems stemmed from the growing politicisation of the shop floor and the fierce rivalry with the emerging unions, and increasing polarisation between racial groups within the Council. (See interview with Mr Botha in this edition.)

The National Union of Garment Workers' Garmentworker (5.9.86) traces these divisions to the 21st conference of TUCSA in 1975, when a group of young unions - belonging to the Trade Union Advisory and Co-ordinating Council - were ejected from the conference on a technicality. TUCSA's non-political stance matched the increasing influence of the conservative unions within the Council. The Garmentworker highlighted the following actions of TUCSA: its failure in 1981 to act over the detentions of Emma Mashinini (CCAWUSA) and Tom Mashinini (NUCW); the refusal of the 1981 conference to even discuss the destruction of squatter dwellings at Crossroads; the inadequate response to the death of Neil Aggett in 1982 and conference rejection of a resolution from the Garment Workers Union condemning detention without trial. TUCSA's recent statements rejecting the call for public holidays on May Day and June 16 proved to be the last straw as far as the National Union of Garment Workers was concerned.

- editorial note -

Whatever the individual issues which have divided TUCSA members, to the outsider, it is very hard to understand how the Council managed to stay together for as long as did given the very different kinds of union traditions that were represented. Three years ago TUCSA broadly comprised 3 groupings: the more skilled craft unions (mostly in metal and motor); the less skilled industrial unions (eg. textile and clothing); and the white collar unions and professional associations. By the end of 1983 the craft unions - led by the Boilermakers - had begun to leave. According to one TUCSA veteran, this left a political vacuum, which was increasingly filled by the more conservative white collar unions - which in 1985 combined to completely oust the "left" candidates in the elections to the TUCSA executive.

This political shift occurred at a time when the members of the semi-skilled industrial unions were increasing pressure on their unions to take a firmer political position. In 1985 these unions - began to disaffiliate. By mid-1986 this had grown into a torrent with furniture workers, leather workers, textile workers and garment workers - nation-wide - withdrawing from an increasingly beleaguered TUCSA. (See interview with Norman Daniels in this edition.)

Financial problems also played a part. Affiliation fees, substantially increased in 1983, placed a heavy burden on the affiliates, who increasingly saw little return on their investment.

The question now arises as to what will happen to these ex-TUCSA unions. If we look back at the early disaffiliations of 1983-4 one thing is clear: these unions have remained independent of the new federations. In the case of the metal and motor unions, energies were rather devoted to re-establishing the South African Coordinating Council of the International Metalworkers Federation, which now has an affiliated membership of quarter-of-a-million.

(see SALB 9.6)

Similarly there are indications that the present collapse of TUCSA will, in the first instance, lead to a strengthening of sectoral-based union organisation. Unions representing over 170,000 workers in the clothing, textile and leather industries met in Cape Town on September 26 to discuss greater unity and to establish joint organisation. The unions present were: Garment Workers Union of the Western Provinces (50,000); Garment Workers Industrial Union (Natal) (40,000); National Union of Textile Workers (30,000);

National Union of Leatherworkers (26,000); Textile Workers Industrial Union (20,000); Transvaal Leather and Allied Trades Industrial Union (5,000); Textile Workers Union (Transvaal) (4,000). The long term aim is to merge together all the unions in this sector.

According to Mr Robbie Botha the demise of TUCSA may act to strengthen the organisation of professional workers and give a boost to the Federation of Salaried Staffs Association. It is not clear what the political implications of such a move would be.

One possible home for TUCSA's former affiliates will be the Labour Forum due to be launched in January 1987 - although the initiators are keen to point out that the Forum is not a federation, and that support is being canvassed from every section of the trade union movement. (See interview with Ike van der Watt in this edition.)

One outcome of the demise of TUCSA will be to make it increasingly difficult for state bodies to find credible trade unionists to participate on statutory bodies, commissions etc.

The disinvestment debate

We carry two items in this edition which bear directly upon the question of disinvestment. The first, an article written by the president of the Swedish metal workers federation asks what the consequences of a successful disinvestment campaign would be for union organisation in South Africa. He suggests two outcomes: companies would close down, or, more likely, they would be bought out by local South African capital.

In the meantime, workers at General Motors in Port Elizabeth are already facing these consequences. Glenn Adler shows that the "South Africanisation" of the motor industry has been underway for some time as a result of local economic problems, but that GM management are using the excuse of disinvestment to pull out at this particular time. The workers, at the time of going to press, have been on strike for three weeks, initially occupying the plant until the arrival of the security forces. Their unions have demanded a series of guarantees of financial and job security for their members. These demands go to the heart of management prerogatives and represent an attempt to constrain investment decisions in favour of workers and their wider communities.

Deregulation via the back door

The South African government professes itself in favour of "free enterprise" and the encouragement of small business in the interests of economic development. An Act has just passed which allows for, among other things, the exemption of certain employers from legislation governing minimum wages and conditions of work. [Temporary Removal of Restrictions on Economic Activities Act, No 87, 1986, in Gazette 10422, 10.9.86] Voices within both big business and the union movement have expressed opposition to these moves. Big business fears that exempted businesses will undercut them, as they will have lower costs (ie. wages). The unions fear both that workers will lose what little protection they have in unorganised sectors and areas, and also that employers up against organised workers could shift production from the areas where unions exist to areas where exemptions apply.

Few people have noticed, however, that even before the bill had been passed, deregulation had already been implemented. The Wage Act allows that the Minister, in making a determination, can exempt certain categories of employers and/or workers from the conditions laid down in the determination. In at least three cases over the last nine months this has been used to exempt smaller businesses.

Wage Determination 420, for the Hotel and Liquor Trade was published in July 1986. Exempted from the provisions are: (a) employers with fewer than 16 beds in their "establishment"; (b) any employer, no matter how big, in the first 12 months of operation. During the second 12 months, the employer need only pay 90% of the minimum wage. Wage determination 406 for the Commercial and Distributive Trade (of November 1985) does not apply to employers with fewer than 5 workers. Here again, all employers are not covered for their first twelve months of operation. Finally, Wage Determination 412 for Security Services, (ie. watchmen) does not apply to employers with fewer than 15 workers.

What is particularly disturbing about these three determinations is that they all apply to sectors which are notorious for paying low wages, and where the determinations are far from generous. The new determination for Hotel and Liquor has a minimum wage of R128 per MONTH, that for Commercial Distributive a minimum of R59.31 per week, and Security Services a minimum of R48,46 per week.

(Debbie Budlender, Cape Town, August 1986)

Cadburys workers win pay for detainees

Cadburys workers - members of the Food and Allied Workers Union - have secured full pay for three workers detained under state of emergency regulations following international pressure on the British-based company.

When the emergency was first declared, Cadbury-Schweppes opted to pay workers whose detention had been confirmed by the police at sick pay rates - the equivalent of 50 percent of the normal wage. It was not alone in this practise. Most foreign-based multi-nationals showed no greater willingness than local companies to pay workers detained without trial in full, although most stopped short of actually firing detained workers. (see P Green, "Emergency: who's paying whom", in SALB 11.8) A survey conducted by the Port Elizabeth Labour Monitoring Group last month (see SALB 11.8) found that not a single foreign-owned company in their sample was paying detained workers their normal wage, whereas several local companies had agreed to do so.

Shop stewards at the Cadburys plant in Port Elizabeth have pushed the management for full pay for three detained workers since the start of the emergency but only secured an agreement satisfactory to the workers late last month. After several rounds of talks with the company, Cadburys agreed to pay the families of two workers - Julius Nare and Thandi Saki - 50 percent of the men's wages and the union reported that Nare's wife has been given temporary employment by the company. But workers were concerned that the family of the third detained worker - Z Makaula - had received no financial relief at all because the police had not confirmed his detention, even though the family were insistent that he had been arrested by police on June 16 at his Kwazakhele home.

Although the company tried on occasions to confirm his detention, they were unsuccessful and company policy was that unless detentions were officially confirmed the worker was absent without leave. So for four months Makaula's family was without any income at all except for small amounts collected by the Cadbury's workers. It was not until October, when the Legal Resources Centre in Port Elizabeth managed to confirm his detention with the police, that

- detainees pay -

the company agreed to pay his family.

The families of Nare and Saki also found it difficult to meet their financial commitments on half the normal family income - about R67 a week. There was some confusion about Makaula's fate in the company, said local shop steward, Chris Menzi, because a supervisor had told him Makaula had been "taken off the books". However, a management spokesman later denied this.

Apart from pushing for payment, the shop stewards also asked the company to appoint a director of the company to visit detained Cadburys workers and investigate the conditions under which they were being held. However, according to a management spokesman, the police had told the company that only families were allowed to visit.

The workers were dissatisfied with almost all aspects of the company's response to the situation. They did not consider 50 percent of the the wage for a limited period of four months and a guarantee of employment for 180 days to be an adequately sympathetic reponse to the hardships workers were suffering under the state of emergency. They also felt the company had not pushed sufficiently hard to visit the detainees.

"We feel that if the company is sympathetic towards the problems which seriously affect workers they should show this in practise, with all the costs," said the shop stewards in a letter to the company.

The workers could also not help but notice the stark contrast between Cadbury's generous pay schemes for employees conscripted into the South African Defence Force and its attitude towards workers who were also absent from work involuntarily, having being detained under emergency regulations.

According to a handbook published by the company, Cadburys pays conscriptees on 24 months compulsory training 50 percent of the difference between the normal pay and their army pay, plus a further 25 percent of the difference twelve months after they return to work. For conscriptees on one to three month camps, the company will make up the difference between gross basic company pay and SADF earnings, while all employees on "border duty" receive their full wages in addition to any money they receive from the army.

In contrast, the families of detained workers, who were also involuntarily absent from work, were struggling to make ends meet on R67 a week, according to Menzi, and anxious about the future should their husbands be detained for longer than the four month limit set on the amount by the company.

About a month ago, after publicity about the plight of detained workers had alerted some international labour bodies, the workers decided to make contact with Cadburys shop stewards in the company's Birmingham plant in the United Kingdom, in an attempt to increase pressure on the local subsidiary. The Transport and General Workers Union in Britain, to which the British Cadbury-Schweppes workers belong, took up the matter immediately and sent a telex to the management at Cadburys London office: "We strongly support the view of our South African union colleagues that these people should be paid full wages during their detention otherwise their families are clearly in a very unfortunate position. Our view is that given Cadburys commitment to opposition to apartheid and the state of emergency the company should [accede to the requests] of these trade unionists suffering the effects of the intolerable regime in South Africa". A copy was sent to the local personnel manager in Port Elizabeth.

In a memo to Menzi less than a week later, the company said it had "reconsidered" its position on the payment of detainees, saying it would continue to pay detained workers on the sick pay rate, but for 180 days instead of for four months, and would pay workers the difference in their wages on their release provided they were not convicted of an offence. "Should the families find themselves in a difficult financial position we will consider loans to help them," said the message.

Menzi said the workers were satisfied with the company's offer but were surprised that "they were only sympathetic to workers in detention after the British unions had complained."

(Pippa Green, November 1986)

Scotford Mills

struggle against decentralisation

On September 18 about 150 clothing workers at Scotford Mills, Durban, were fired. According to an official of the Garment Workers Industrial Union, Yunus Shaik, the management of the company announced on or about June 23 to the workers its intention to relocate its factory to Ezakheni in KwaZulu. The management had said also that all of the workers in its employ would be retrenched. Although workers were advised of the retrenchment, they were not advised of the actual date and it was only on September 9, 1986, that workers were told that the effective date of the retrenchment was to be October 3, 1986. Management and union representatives had a meeting and an objection was lodged against the company's failure to notify the union of its intention to close the factory. The union also demanded severance pay of one week's pay for each completed year of service and full holiday pay.

Management offered severance pay of only R25.00 per worker, irrespective of how long they had worked at the factory. Holiday pay was refused. Worker representatives rejected management's offer. On Friday, September 12, management returned with the following offer on severance pay:

under 1 year service	R 8.00
1 - 2 " "	R30.00
2 - 3 " "	R40.00
3 - 4 " "	R45.00
Over 4 " "	R50.00

and the condition was a "take it or leave it". The offer was received with great disappointment by workers. Said one worker: I have been working in the clothing industry for 24 years. For the last seven years I have worked in this factory. I have never been absent for even one day. I was a collar-fitter. I was earning R72.00 per week and am the sole supporter of my family. They offered severance pay which we were not prepared to accept. We went on strike because what they were offering was not enough.

On Tuesday, September 16, the workers stopped work to protest against the company's offer. Their demands were again for full

holiday pay and for re-opening negotiations on severance pay.

On Wednesday, September 17, management issued an ultimatum to all workers. They either had to return to work or face dismissal. Towards closing time, the workers were fired. Scotford Mills management accused the workers of striking illegally and therefore no severance pay was given. The following day, September 18, the workers reported for work, but were locked out. The South African Police arrived and told them to leave the premises.

According to Yunis Shaik:

The work stoppage was justified. Management had treated workers very badly. They acted secretively and showed no understanding or sensitivity to their problems. Their intention was to spring on them and tell them that they were closing down. The industry is in a major recession at the moment. Workers who get laid off now, will probably be out of work for about six to 18 months. Now in the absence of severance pay it will make the situation that much harder.

This is a brief background to the issue; "But the true background begins with the decentralisation policy."

The garment industry in Natal, which is the territorial jurisdiction of the Garment Workers Industrial Union, has been particularly hard hit by the down turn in the economy. Retrenchments are reflected in the union's drop in membership: from 46,000 in May 1982 to 37,000 for May 1986. However, according to Yunis Shaik:

...of greater concern is the trend established by this recession of manufacturers leaving established areas of trade for the decentralised areas. The interesting thing about Scotford Mills is that the struggle there represents the struggle of the industry by and large. It is no longer just one factory; the frequency with which this is occurring is alarming.

Decentralisation is common particularly in the clothing industry. As a result about 13,000 workers have been retrenched. According to Mr Shaik:

We see this as an irreversable trend. Every one of the key or major clothing manufacturers have opened up plants there. It is only a matter of time until they completely move out.

The lure to these homelands is the extensive and diverse concessions and subsidies offered to private investors. These areas are

- clothing strike -

also notorious for the cheap cost of labour and the absence of union organisation. Given the circumstances, the workers are unable to negotiate for better wages. The following table is a comparison of the weekly wage scales of the decentralised areas and the established areas:

Occupation	Country areas	Decentralized areas	Established areas
Machinist	32.08 (av.)	20.00	74.50
Presser	32.80 "	20.00	74.50
Cutter	36.46 "	35.50	88.00
Layer	28.85 "	20.00	61.00
General Worker	28.15 "	18.50	61.00

SOURCE: GWIU

A meeting of the entire industry was called by the GWIU to discuss what can be done to help the Scotford Mill workers financially and otherwise, and to work out ways of fighting decentralisation. A call was made by workers for a work stoppage. A notice was then sent out to members of the GWIU to observe a peaceful half-hour work stoppage on October 16 to protest against:

- * the decentralisation policy which threatens to cause the destruction of the clothing industry in Natal and result in mass unemployment of garment workers in Natal;
- * the exploitation of workers in the decentralised areas in terms of wages and working conditions;
- * the absence of laws to protect worker rights in these areas and the repression of unions;
- * and the dismissal of Scotford Mills workers and in support of Scotford workers' struggle for severance pay, etc.

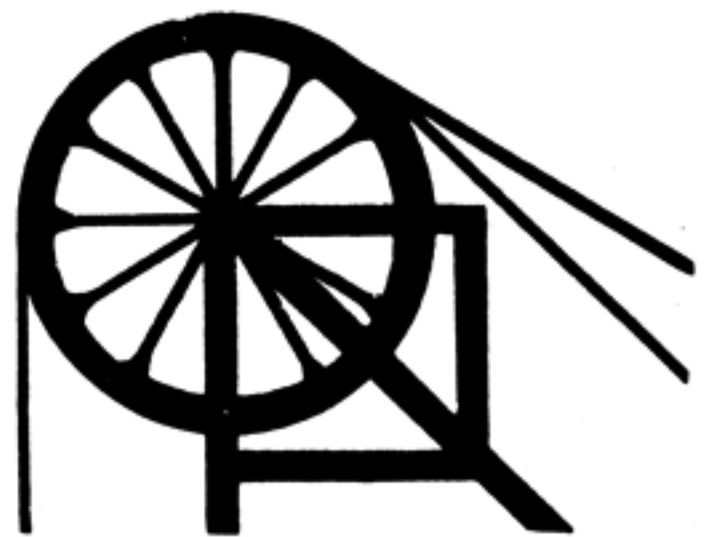
A meeting of all the garment, leather and textile unions was also held to discuss the problem of decentralisation. According to Yunis Shaik:

Obviously decentralisation affects some unions more than others. It affects us especially because we are labour intensive. However unified collective action is necessary. Thus far each union has dealt with the matter in a piecemeal fashion. However we have actually reached a point where the problem of decentralisation is affecting all unions.

(Aasha Mehta, Durban, November 1986)

KINROSS

health and safety in the mines



On September 16, 177 workers died at Gencor's Kinross Mine in the worst gold mining disaster in South Africa's history, and, after the Coalbrook Coal Mine tragedy in which 435 workers perished, the second worst disaster in the history of South African mining. Kinross has once again brought to the fore the severe shortcomings in the health and safety standards on South African mines. This article discusses some of the aspects of the Kinross accident and attempts to highlight the disregard for human life as the mining industry pursues more profitable extraction methods.

Polyurethane tunnel linings

The accident occurred at 9.30 am. when welding operations were under way to repair a broken rail. It appears that the welding gas cylinder caught fire and ignited the polyurethane lining of the tunnel. The fire spread quickly with the polyurethane producing large amounts of smoke and poisonous gas which, it is thought, was responsible for most of the deaths.

The use of the polyurethane material to line the tunnels underground has been severely criticised by experts. Initially Gencor and the Chamber of Mines claimed that they were not aware of the potentially lethal properties of the material. However, one week after the accident, the Technical Adviser of the Chamber of Mines admitted that polyurethane was known to be dangerous and that information circulars regarding the dangers of the material had been sent by the Chamber to member mines on four occasions between 1968 and 1982. In addition, after a fire at Buffelsfontein (Gencor's largest gold mine) in 1977, polyurethane was identified as an inflammable and therefore hazardous material. Gencor has stated that the material was applied six years ago at the Kinross Mine. This suggests that the polyurethane was used two years after the Buffelsfontein fire when Gencor became aware of the hazards. The material has also been outlawed in British mines since 1968.

- mines safety -

Fire extinguishers

Some of the survivors have alleged that there were no fire extinguishers either at the welding equipment or in the area where the fire occurred. Gencor's management has refused to comment on this issue saying that the matter was under investigation.

Mr Kisisi Mathumba, one of the welding assistants at the accident area, described to a British film crew how he tried to grab the burning cylinder to put out the fire. We can only speculate as to whether he would have been successful had a fire extinguisher been available.

Warning system

It appears that there was no warning system at Kinross Mine at the time of the fire. When considering the fact that bodies of the dead were found over an area of 1.5 kilometers, an effective fire warning system would have alerted those further away from the source of the fire. This might have given them time to escape and thereby possibly reducing the number of killed or injured workers. Also, the warning system, together with training in effective evacuation procedures in case of danger, would have eliminated the panic situation which caused much of the injuries. Many of the survivors have stated that they only became aware of the fire when they saw the smoke approaching their work areas.

Mine safety rating system

South African mines are rated for safety on the basis of a system which grants a number of "stars" to a mine depending on the number of safety points scored by that mine. A mine can be granted a maximum of 5 stars which indicates 100% safety. The Chamber of Mines has stated that the safety rating system used in this country is an international system drawn up by an organisation in Chicago. However, a team of British film makers investigating the claim found no such organisation in Chicago, but did manage to speak to the originator of the system (who is from Georgia). He told the film team that a mine in France used the system. He later withdrew this statement but stated that he was sure that a mine in Chile used the system.

The rating system certainly has shortcomings. For example, the absence of a fire warning device does not affect the safety points

scored by a mine. Also, evidence led during the inquest after the Hlobane disaster (in which 68 workers perished in an underground methane explosion) pointed to poor safety management, faulty machinery and inadequate methane testing equipment and procedures. Yet, at the time of the explosion, the Hlobane Mine had a 4-star safety rating.

Kinross recently dropped from a 5-star to a 3-star rating. According to the Mine Manager, this happened because of a few "minor" (but unmentioned) safety problems which had developed on the mine.

Visit by NUM's safety experts

On the day after the fire, Gencor agreed to a NUM request for their safety expert to inspect the accident area. However, when the NUM tried to confirm this, having already invited overseas experts, Gencor management would not allow the accident area to be inspected. Gencor later denied this refusal saying that they had not received such a request from the NUM. It is likely that Gencor had no alternative but to allow the inspection since both the Chamber of Mines and the Foreign Minister, Pik Botha, had previously stated their willingness to allow foreign experts to investigate the safety standards of South African mines.

As a result of this delay, much of the accident area had already been cleared when the inspection finally did take place. Also, Gencor invited a large number of people to the inspection which made a thorough investigation difficult for the NUM's experts.

Autopsy report

Severe criticism was raised by the pathologist acting on behalf of the NUM regarding the manner in which the autopsies were carried out on some of the victims of the accident. The pathologist claimed that:

- * The bodies had not been adequately preserved and decomposition had already commenced at the time of the autopsy.
- * The bodies were stacked on top of each other causing injuries which were difficult to distinguish from injuries caused before death.
- * Bolt cutters and an agricultural bow saw were used to open the bodies.
- * Details of the positions of the bodies in the mine were not given to the people doing the autopsy.

- mines safety -

- * Blood samples were not obtained from all the bodies for poisonous gas analysis. Only a few random samples were taken.

When these allegations were first raised by a film shown on British television, Gencor responded by saying that they were "blatant untruths".

Accident statistics

While the death of 177 people in one incident is a tragedy in any circumstances, it must be borne in mind that the South African mining industry kills approximately four times as many workers each year. Few of these deaths are even afforded a small newspaper article quoting the number of nameless workers killed.

The mining industry practice of quoting mine deaths in terms of the number of workers killed per 1,000 of workers employed somehow has the effect of psychologically reducing the severity of the problem. For example, the South African gold mining industry killed 1.15 and 1.05 workers per 1,000 workers in 1984 and 1985 respectively. However, the reality is that these figures translate to 1,127 workers killed in the two-year period.

South African mining fatalities are amongst the highest in the world and this can largely be attributed to two major factors :

- * the mining of areas to which access is becoming increasingly more difficult while ignoring the increased safety requirements in order to maximise profits, and
- * the system whereby a miner in charge of a number of work teams is paid a bonus based on his productivity while having the contradictory responsibility for implementing the safety requirements and procedures.



Kinross has again shown that much work has yet to be done before we reach an acceptable level of safety on South African Mines.

(Technical Advice Group,
Johannesburg, October 1986)

Kinross day of mourning



The Johannesburg Labour Monitoring Group monitored the stayaway on the mines on October 1, in response to the NUM's call to mark the day as a day of mourning for the 177 Kinross miners who were killed. Our monitoring included an extensive examination of the mining sector as well as surveys of sympathy actions in manufacturing.

The actions taken on the mines were undoubtedly the most significant in the history of South African mining. Estimates of the number of miners who commemorated their comrades killed in the Kinross disaster varied. NUM announced a total stayaway figure of 325,000 miners: 300,000 employed by the Chamber of Mines and 25,000 at non-Chamber mines. Managements estimated about 250,000. This is made up principally of stayaways at Anglo-American owned and Gencor mines. Although Randfontein Estates, a JCI owned mine said one third of the workforce of 14,000 had stayed away. (However, according to a later press statement, this figure totalled 10,000).

Goldfields said, of their workforce of 31,085, absenteeism rates were normal except at the New Clydesdale Colliery where 300 out of 400 workers had stayed away. Rand Mines said 2,800 of their 85,000 workers had stayed away.

Anglo American said 150,000 of their 180,000 gold miners had not gone to work, as well as workers at 7 of their 13 collieries. Gencor said 70 percent of its 97,000 miners had taken the day off, while 50 percent of its 14,000 colliery workers had done likewise. De Beers said 2,500 of their 11,200 miners from Kimberly and Finch mines had stayed away.

The LMG canvassed the managements of 20 gold mines and nine collieries. All the Anglo and Gencor mines for which there were responses (a total of seven) reported stayaways. We estimate a total of 22,000 colliery workers and 4,000 non-mining workers in the industry participated in the stayaway.

The LMG phoned NUM regional offices in an attempt to collect further figures. Regions contacted were Carltonville, Westonaria, the Orange Free State, and Secunda. Information on the Kimberley mines

- Kinross stayaway -

and on the Vaal Reefs Mines in the Klerksdorp region was obtained from the NUM head office. In Carltonville, stayaways were reported at Western Deep Levels North (employing about 20,500 people), at Doornfontein (a Goldfields Mine) and at Elandsrand (employing about 8,000 people). In Westonaria stayaways were reported at Western Areas (about 16,000), Kloof (about 14,000), a Nufcor Refinery (106 and West Rand Consolidated (about 6,000). In the OFS stayaways were reported at Beatrix (7,700), President Brand (19,000), President Steyn (22,000) and at three divisions of Western Holdings (39,000). The NUM head office said it had information on stayaways at the Gencor mines, St Helena and Unicel (total about 16,000).

IN Kimberley, the NUM head office reported a total stayaway of about 10,000 workers. In Scedunda, the regional office reported stayaways at Leslie, Winkelhaak, Kinross, Bracken mines and the New Denmark colliery. There were also reports of a stayaway at Vaal Reefs, which has three divisions, with a combined workforce of about 44,000. It is not clear what proportion stayed away or whether all three divisions participated.

Most of the NUM offices gave figure for mines only. These figures do not include mines from Witbank, Namaqualand, Witwatersrand, Phalabora and Klerksdorp regions (apart from Vaal Reefs). Nor do they include non-affiliates of the Chamber of Mines.

Including colliery workers, the LMG estimates of the stayaway are that close to 300,000 workers participated. Some of the figures for mines, which we obtained from both the NUM regional offices and mine managements we were able to cross check. At three mines there were discrepancies between management's figures and NUM's figures, accounting perhaps for some of the gap between their estimates. At Western Holdings, Anglo American said that 20,600 miners had stayed away - the workforce of one division. The NUM office said all three divisions had participated, accounting for about an extra 19,000 workers. At Kloof Mine, the management said there had been no stayaway, while the regional office thought there had and at Western Areas (a JCI mine), the NUM office thought the workforce had stayed away, while management said there had been no stayaway (accounting for about 16,000 workers). Other minor discrepancies were at the Unicel mine, where NUM said about 3,500 workers had stayed away while management said only 1,750 had participated.

We also received news from the NUM regional offices of various incidents which had taken place during the day. Most volatile, it

eeded, was Secunda, the region which includes Kinross. NUM officials alleged that police had intervened at the end of a two hour morning service for the dead miners which was held by Chemical Workers Industrial Union members from Sasol. The NUM official said police with dogs had chased people who were waiting for buses after the service at about 8.30 am.. Later in the day, there was an incident at Winkelhaak mine, when mine security had allegedly thrown teargas at miners who were meeting on mine property in defiance of a management prohibition. At Kinross itself, NUM officials reported that a "successful" meeting was held.

The Westonia region reported three people arrested from Western Areas, whom they later reported released. Also at Western Areas, NUM officials said the management had confiscated pamphlets advertising the day of mourning. At Kloof Mine there were reports of action fighting. NUM officials said they had approached management about the problem early in the day. At Welkom the NUM's offices were raided and 150 people were arrested at Vaal Reefs mines.

PWV: solidarity action

In response to COSATU's call on its members to take sympathy action the LMG surveyed COSATU-organized affiliates in the PWV area. Responses were obtained from 49 firms employing over 26,000 workers. Analysis of the returns show that over forty percent of workers engaged in some form of commemorative action. By far the most common action was a one to two hour memorial service at mid-day. One large retailer employing 9,000 workers, for example, reported that workers at 16 of their 30 stores engaged in a lunch-time stayaway. Several plants were, however, hit by a complete stayaway while in at least one instance workers left early in the afternoon. While management in a few cases paid workers for the mid-day meetings, the usual response was "no work, no pay, no penalty".

Port Elizabeth: solidarity action

The Port Elizabeth LMG found that out of 40 COSATU plants surveyed 39 experienced some kind of work stoppage ranging from 5 minutes to 3 hours. The majority of firms adopted a "no work, no pay, no penalty" approach, although 5 firms said they will pay in full.

Impressions gained are that support action was also taken among COSATU unions particularly in Natal, but that elsewhere support was very patchy.

Unemployment in South Africa

Mike Sarakinsky & Jeremy Keenan

This is an abbreviated version of a longer article soon to be published elsewhere. It is an attempt to ascertain, from existing data, the extent and nature of contemporary black (1) unemployment especially since the beginning of the "reform era", ie. about 1978

GOVERNMENT MEASUREMENTS OF BLACK UNEMPLOYMENT

According to the Director General of Manpower Planning, Dr Piet van der Merwe, "There is only one official source of unemployment statistics, and that is the Central Statistical Services." (2) As at June 1986, the official figure of black unemployment was 519,00

This figure would not be so ludicrous if the government did not claim that its method of calculation was in accordance with international definitional recommendations. As in the case of these recommendations an unemployed person is defined, amongst other things, as having attempted to have found work during the previous month. In most western countries such a definition is reasonable as the process of seeking work is associated with the registration for, and collection of unemployment benefits.

In South Africa, the vast majority of black unemployed workers are denied such benefits, and where they succeed in getting benefits from the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) it is only paid for six months. The result of this is that a very small number bother to apply to a labour bureau and register as unemployed.

There are many other reasons why people do not register at the labour bureaux as job-seekers, and why they are therefore not reflected in government unemployment figures. Some of these reasons are:

- (a) Many unemployed workers live too far from and cannot afford to get to labour bureaux.
- (b) The bureaux are usually part of the local magistrate's and/or local tribal authority offices. Presence at the bureaux may often involve harassment by some or other level of local authority.

- (c) The worse the unemployment situation becomes, the more workers know that there is little chance of finding work. There is therefore even less point in going and registering at the bureau.
- (d) Unemployed workers rarely get the unemployment fund benefits to which they are entitled. Many of them do not know about their rights in this regard and consequently have even less incentive to register at a bureau.
- (e) Research into the administrative practices and recordings of data in certain labour bureaux revealed three significant forms of worker abuse and maladministration:
 - (i) workers are often told not to keep on coming back and registering at the bureau each month as there is no work and the bureau will inform people when work is available. Just how it will inform people never seems to have been made clear. Workers consequently do not get registered as unemployed after the first month.
 - (ii) labour bureaux periodically write off several hundred registered unemployed workers. As the numbers build up, the clerks simply strike off 50% or more. In one such bureau the true number had risen to more than three thousand over the last few years, but each time the total rose to about one and a half thousand the clerk would strike off between five hundred and a thousand.
 - (iii) clerks in some of these bureaux stated that they had received instructions from higher up not to record unemployment. They said that the reason for this was too few clerks and too many unemployed workers. It was becoming administratively difficult to keep registering them all.

One point that is worth repeating here is that as absolute unemployment becomes greater, a relatively smaller proportion of the black unemployed bother to register at labour bureaux as they realise that there is little or no chance of getting work. They therefore see no point in making the effort and paying the costs of getting to a labour bureau. Consequently, there tends to be an inverse relationship between the real level of unemployment and the level of unemployment as recorded by the government. For example, the government is able to show that the number of black people unemployed today as a percentage of the economically active population is still lower than it was in 1978, at the beginning of the so-called reform area. According to the government, the black unemployed as a percentage of the economically active population is

- unemployment -

now 8.0%. As mentioned below, detailed micro-studies in both urban and rural areas indicate that this percentage is rarely less than 50%. For example, in Soweto at the end of 1985 the level of unemployment as a percentage of the potentially economically active population varied between 60% in the poorest areas to about 44% in the better off zones. In most bantustan areas unemployment is now well in excess of 50%, and in many cases as high as 70%.

ESTIMATING CURRENT UNEMPLOYMENT

Charles Simkins, in 1977, calculated black unemployment as running at 2,313,000. (3) In 1981, he modified his methodology and presented a revised figure of 2,004,000. (4) His calculations are generally accepted as providing technically the "best" figures for black unemployment during the 1970's and early 1980's. In our estimation of current black unemployment we take Simkins two figures as upper and lower limits.

We can then calculate the increase or decrease in employment each year by setting the number of employed each year (from the Central Statistical Services Quarterly Reports) against the generally accepted figure of 250,000 jobs that need to be created each year in order to keep unemployment static.

Between 1977 and 1985 there was a net decrease of 16,084 jobs. This we add to $250,000 \times 8$ years which gives us 2,016,084. We add to this Simkins 1977 figure of 2,313,000. Our upper limit is now 4,329,084.

Between 1981 and 1985 there was a net decrease of 181,634 jobs (between 1977 and 1981 there was a net increase in jobs). We add this to $250,000 \times 4$ years which gives us 1,181,634. We add to this Simkins 1981 figure of 2,004,000. Our lower limit is now 3,185,634.

1986 figures are not yet available, but given the recession we can reasonably assume no job creation and therefore add 250,000 for this year which makes our upper and lower limits 4,579,084 and 3,435,634 respectively.

The C.S.S. figures, however, exclude agriculture so we need to include them in our calculations. Figures up to 1980 are drawn from the Agricultural Census and since 1980 from the Population Census. Between 1977 and 1985 there was a net decline in employment in this sector of 230,581. We assume no less for 1986 as we

have no reliable figures for this year. We therefore add 230,581 to our running totals and get 4,809,665 and 3,715,634 respectively.

The C.S.S. figures further exclude domestic service, and owing to a lack of reliable data, we exclude this sector from our estimates.

Since Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, and Ciskei (the "TBVC states") became "independent" they have been excluded from the C.S.S. data. They were, however, originally included in Simkins calculations. We need, therefore, to calculate the increase in unemployment in these areas since "independence".

We use population figures for these areas provided by the South African Development Bank. They give figures for 1985, which extrapolated at a growth rate of 2.7% for 1986, give 6,805,310 as the total population of the "TBVC states".

The urban labour preference policy of the "reform era" has led to a shift in the geographic distribution of unemployment to the bantustans. It has therefore risen in these areas more rapidly than the overall national average.

Local micro-surveys (5) show that, on average, the potential economically active population (EAP) is about 55% of the total population of these areas. We take it to be 50%. They also show that, since 1977, on average, unemployment has risen by 150% in these areas. They further show that unemployment is, on average 55% of the EAP. Therefore $50\% \times 6,805,310 (=EAP) \times 55\% = 1,871,460$ which represents an increase of 150% since 1977. The increase in unemployment since 1977 is therefore 1,122,876. We add this to our running totals and get upper and lower limits of 5,932,541 and 4,838,510 respectively.

There is one possible error though. There is a possible double accountancy in the case of people who lost jobs outside of the "TBVC states" and then returned to these areas. Micro-studies show that about 40% of people unemployed in these areas have never worked before. Therefore, 60% of 1,122,876, approximately 674,000, represents the maximum double accountancy. We therefore reduce our running totals by 674,000 giving us 5,258,541 and 4,164,510 respectively.

A second method of estimating total black unemployment is as follows. Several rural and urban micro-surveys (6) show that, on

- unemployment -

average, unemployment runs at about 25% of the total black population, or 48% of the EAP (which is about 48% of the total black population). If we apply these percentages to the total black population of 26,082,000, we get a figure of about 6,5 million blacks unemployed.

Our figures are almost certainly conservative for the following reasons:

- * the 250,000 jobs needed annually to keep unemployment static is too low. The Director General of the Department of Manpower says his Department works on 300,000. We therefore have a potential underestimation for about 4 years of about quarter of a million;
- * we reduce our figures by the maximum potential double accountancy, ie. 674,000. It is unlikely that all those from the "TBVC states" who lost jobs returned to those areas. We therefore have a potential, but unknown, over-reduction;
- * we accept the known under-enumeration in the "TBVC states". For example, the South African Development Bank, whose figures we use, gives the total population of Bophuthatswana as less than 2 million. It is almost certainly around 4 million; the population of the Winterveld region of Bophuthatswana alone is about 2 million compared to an official figure of 545,000. We therefore have an unknown degree of under-estimation of unemployment in these areas;
- * the micro-studies from which we extrapolated trends were mostly conducted in various regions of the Transvaal. It is known that unemployment in these areas is less than in other areas of the country, eg. in the Eastern Cape, Ciskei, Transkei;
- * we exclude figures for domestic service from our calculations. It seems, however, that the recession has almost certainly led to retrenchments in this sector;
- * we have almost certainly underestimated the loss of jobs in agriculture. We assumed no loss in 1986. The drought and the recession have almost certainly led to a decrease in employment in this sector. Furthermore, according to the South African Agricultural Union, many farmers, who cannot afford to pay workers wages, are allowing workers to remain on their farms and to retain their accommodation in return for working as usual for the farmer, but without payment. These workers are registered as employed, but they are, in effect, unemployed in that they receive no cash income.

DURATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT

Even more serious than the increasing level of unemployment is the substantial increase in its duration. This has been noted in much contemporary research in both urban and rural areas.

For example, two extensive surveys of unemployment in the Pilanesberg area of Bophuthatswana, (7) one of the best endowed homeland areas in terms of job opportunities, revealed that the percentage of unemployed men and women who had been out of work for longer than two years had risen from 8.3% and 4.3% respectively in 1977 to 38.5% and 53.8% respectively in 1984. By 1984 36% of the unemployed had never been able to find work since leaving school. And, of those who had lost their jobs, the mean average time spent out of work since becoming unemployed was 5 years and 7 months. For women, the mean was 6 years and 6 months and for men 3 years and 8 months. In short, the unemployment situation had worsened dramatically between 1977 and 1984.

Other studies on the duration of unemployment show: (8)

- * that in the new industrial growth point of Richard's Bay the average duration of unemployment in 1984 was 12.3 months;
- * that in the Port Elizabeth/Grahamstown area (Eastern Cape), in 1984 29% of unemployed men and 23% of unemployed women had been unemployed for between one and two years, while 21% of unemployed men and 30% of unemployed women had been unemployed for more than two years. A measure of the desperation of these people is that 89% of unemployed men and 72% of unemployed women actively searched for employment at least once per week throughout this period;
- * that in 1980, at the peak of the last major economic upswing in the South African economy, research based on the "official" monthly surveys conducted by the government's then Department of Statistics (9) (now C.S.S.) showed that 29.8% of successful job seekers had been unemployed between one and two years, and that 46.3% of unsuccessful job seekers had been unemployed for more than a year, and that of these 15% had been unsuccessful in obtaining employment for more than two years.

In all parts of the country, for those who are unemployed the chances of finding employment are becoming progressively smaller. In the bantustan areas the chances of re-employment are now almost negligible.

- unemployment -

UNEMPLOYMENT DURING THE "REFORM ERA" (POST 1978)

The quantitative increase in black unemployment since 1978 is well illustrated in a longitudinal study of households in Soweto from 1978/1980 to 1985. (10) The main point to note as far as unemployment is concerned is that unemployment rose from 28%, 32% and 32% in 1980/81 to 46%, 52% and 60% respectively in 1985 in the three suburbs surveyed.

If we take Simkins 1977 figure of 2,313,000 and his 1981 figure of 2,004,000 and compare it to our 1986 figure of between 4-6 million, we can see that during the "reform era" unemployment has more than doubled.

DISTRIBUTION OF UNEMPLOYMENT

All surveys, as shown above, show a dramatic increase in black unemployment in South Africa over the last few years. The distribution of this unemployment, both geographically and demographically, is most uneven. For example, on a national regional scale, areas such as the Eastern Cape have suffered much more heavily than the PWV. However, the major geographical distortion in the distribution of unemployment is between the urban and bantustan regions. State policy during the "reform" era has been one of urban labour preference, the aim being to protect blacks in the urban areas from the ravages of unemployment with the hope of safeguarding the urban areas from further outbreaks of violence as experienced in the 1976 uprising. In short, state policy has been to intensify the relocation of unemployment to the bantustan areas.

For example one study showed that recruitment of labour from the bantustans, as recorded by the number of registrations of black workers, fell by 850,000 between 1975 and 1981. (11) This figure has certainly increased since 1981.

A good example of how the state's urban labour preference policy works can be seen at the industrial growth point of Rosslyn to the north of Pretoria and which is located on the South African side of the Bophuthatswana border. Rosslyn was established around 1974 to take advantage of the cheap supply of labour from Bophuthatswana. Workers from Bophuthatswana registered on twelve month contracts through the South African labour bureau in Rosslyn. This labour bureau is now closed and the building serves as a police station. Bophuthatswana workers are now unable legally to register work

contracts in Rosslyn.

The nearest labour bureau for Rosslyn is now in Pretoria. Many Bophuthatswana workers who have reached the end of their year's contract consequently cannot get their contracts renewed and are therefore dismissed. They are frequently replaced by workers resident in the black Pretoria (urban) townships of Mamelodi and Atteridgeville who are allocated the work in Rosslyn through the Pretoria labour bureau.

This urban labour preference policy and the relocation of unemployment into the bantustans has been one of the main causes of the dramatic increase in poverty in the bantustan areas. This increased poverty in turn is having a direct feedback on the level of unemployment in these areas. For example, the above-mentioned Pilanesberg survey found that one of the main causes of unemployment was poverty-related illness and disablement. Of the 36% of people who had never been able to get work, 40% were either too ill or disabled. Of those who had lost their jobs, 30% were because of illness.

As far as the age distribution is concerned, most of those who had never worked were young and could be categorised as school leavers. At present it is generally estimated that in most of South Africa's black townships, some 50% of school leavers are unable to find any sort of work. Of the already mentioned 30% of jobs lost because of illness in the Pilanesberg area, the majority were aged between 20-29. In short, the distribution of unemployment is becoming increasingly loaded against the youth.

In addition to the government's misrepresentation of unemployment, one of the main thrusts of the government's supposed "reform" has been to show that there have been significant improvements in the overall black standard of living. Two of the major arguments put forward by the government in this regard are that black "earnings" have risen substantially during this period and that there has been a dramatic decrease in the inequality of the distribution of income between racial groups. Both of these arguments are untrue, being based on the misrepresentation of data. A detailed analysis and explanation of this argument has shown that the overall situation of blacks as measured in terms of income, both individual and household, various poverty levels and the per capita distribution of income has deteriorated since 1976. (12) This is discussed in our forthcoming article in the next edition of the South African Labour Bulletin.

References:

1. "Black" in this article refers to African
2. Quoted in Engineering Week 22.9.86. Central Statistical Services is abbreviated hereafter to C.S.S.
3. C Simkins, "Measuring and predicting unemployment in South Africa 1960-1977", in C Simkins and D Clarke, Structural unemployment in South Africa, Natal University Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1978
4. C Simkins: "Structural unemployment revisited: a revision and updating of earlier estimates incorporating new data from the current population survey and the 1980 Population Census", South African Labour and Development Research Unit, Cape Town, 1982
5. In the Pilanesberg, ODI Moratele and Thaba Nchu districts of Bophuthatswana, the Lebowa Lowveld, Kwazulu, and KwaKwa
6. See footnote (5) above; also J Keenan, "A socio-economic profile of Soweto households during the "reform" era, 1978-1986", in Proceedings of the 1986 Manufacturing Management Convention, P.E. Corporate Services, Johannesburg, 1986; and the UNISA Bureau for Market Research, Regional Surveys in African Townships around Johannesburg and the East Rand, 1986.
7. J Keenan, The Pilanesberg Game Reserve (2 vols), 1984
8. J Hofmeyr, "Black unemployment: a case study in a peri-urban area of Natal", Carnegie Conference paper 123, University of Cape Town, 1984, pl6; D Gilmour and A Roux, "Urban black unemployment and education in the Eastern Cape", Carnegie Conference paper 120, University of Cape Town, 1984, ppl0-11; L Loots, "Black unemployment in South Africa: searching or queuing? An analysis of the current population survey", Carnegie Conference paper 118, 1984, Table 22
9. This Department suffered from the problems already mentioned regarding the C.S.S. That is, that it only dealt with work seekers who registered at a labour bureau (an estimated 8% of the total blacks unemployed, and consequently those who feel they have a chance of finding employment)
10. J Keenan, 1986, opcit.
11. M Lacey, "Feudalism in the age of computers", Black Sash Annual General Congress, March 1983
12. J Keenan, "Black (African) living standards and their effect on workplace performance", University of the Witwatersrand, 1985

SATS workers on track

Organisation of the railway workers is currently high on the agenda of the trade union movement in South Africa. This does not promise to be an easy task, however. Not only will workers have to deal with a management which has a history and structures which are complete anathema to the principle of "freedom of association", but, at present there are a number of distinct worker groupings or unions operating among blacks in this sector. The situation on the ground is confusing and there are marked regional differences in the incipient railway workers' organisations that have sprung up. Railway workers in some parts of the country have been severely harassed and detained, while in other parts, union organisers have been threatened. But there is no clearly unified stand in the light of this persecution of workers attempting to organise in a state corporation, which perhaps more than any other in South Africa, has distinguished itself as one which incorporates among the most repressive and antiquated labour relations practises.

The South African Transport Services

South African Transport Services (SATS) is one of the most powerful state corporations in the Western world. It comprises almost the entire transport sector of the economy (see R White, "An investigation into labour relations in the South African Transport Services: the dispute between the General Workers Union and SATS 1981-1983", unpublished honours dissertation, Rhodes University). In 1984, for instance, the transport sector contributed 7.2 percent to the total Gross Domestic Product in South Africa, of which SATS contributed 77 percent (CSIR Special Report Pad 56, "Transport Statistics", 1985). And out of a total of 339,352 employed in the transport sector in 1984, SATS employed 240,237, of which 110,160 were African, 109,710 white, 18,377 coloured and 1,990 Indian.

Until now SATS has had a tight economic hold over the whole transport sector, with a political and legislated control giving them a virtual monopoly. (see White, op cit) There are now some moves towards deregulation and privatisation of the transport sector, many of which are contained in a new act which will be promulgated next year. That act makes provision for doing away with the system of requiring permits for carrying goods on certain routes, and its implementation might mean the gradual privatisation of

- railway workers -

the road sector in SATS, according to a representative of the Transport and General Workers Union.

It is a key strategic industry controlling and responsible for most of the country's transport infrastructure. Unlike ISCOR or ESCOM, SATS is a sub-department of the state, and although it manages its own finances, provision for exchange of money between the central state and SATS is made through the SATS Finances and Accounts Act. The SATS General Manager is directly responsible to the Minister of Transport, who is in turn directly responsible to the state president. Thus there is a very high degree of centralised control on SATS and this is reflected in its rigid labour relations policies.

Organising the railways: past experience

SATS has in the past exercised a host of stringent controls preventing workers from organising independently and asserting collective power in any way. For a start, all strikes are banned in terms of the Condition of Service (SATS) Act, 1983. Strikes are extremely broadly defined in terms of the Act as "a refusal or failure to continue work (whether the discontinuance is complete or partial) or to resume their work or to comply with the terms or conditions of employment..." (quoted in White, op cit).

If a labour dispute exists, it is referred to a Conciliation Board, half the members of which are appointed by the Minister of Transport, including the chair, and the other half by the relevant staff association. There are 11 "in-house" staff associations to represent SATS employees in terms of SATS labour relations policy. The Black Staff Association was formed in 1981, and came to public light soon after the then General Workers Union (now merged to form part of the Transport and General Workers Union) asked that a worker's committee representing dockworkers in Port Elizabeth be recognised by the local (SATS) port authorities. By mid 1982, the BSA claimed 60,000 members.

SATS has a myriad other ways of controlling its workforce. A major one, that existed until 1983, was to classify the vast majority of African workers as "casuals". In 1983, the Internal Regulations changed, arguably after the threat of legal action when the chairman of the GWU dockers committee, Jeremiah Tolwana was dismissed on 24 hours notice after working for the railways for 15 years. African workers are now classified as "regular", "intermittent",

"casual" or "contract". Both the latter categories can be dismissed on 24 hours notice.

Until this year, SATS had its own police force, which, appears to have played a central role in quashing any independent workers' organisation, through arrests, intimidation and harassment.

Another frequently used means of controlling workers in the past has been to transfer them, at short notice, to distant depots, and organised groups were dispersed around the country in this manner.

The first independent union which tried to organise railway workers was the South African Railways and Harbour Workers Union, set up in 1936. (K Luckhardt and B Wall, Organise or starve. The history of SACTU, London, 1980) In 1955 SARHWU affiliated to SACTU and by 1960, claims the official history of SACTU, had 4,677 members in Durban, Port Elizabeth, Cape Town and Johannesburg. Luckhardt and Wall, acknowledge that "it was one of the most difficult industries to penetrate...", partly because each region posed particular problems and partly because of sustained repression on the part of the railways administration. In 1963-64 several SARHWU officials (who were also key political activists) were detained, banned or jailed. Two - Caleb Mayekiso of Port Elizabeth and Laurence Ndzanga of the Western Cape - died in detention.

One of the most dramatic episodes in the battle between SATS and their workers was in 1982 when SATS dockworkers, organised by the GWU, conducted a lengthy and sustained campaign for recognition of their committee. Railway workers in the East London and Port Elizabeth docks began to join the union in 1981-82 soon after the union had organised stevedores in four major ports. The SATS dockers, who worked on the quayside with GWU stevedores saw their workmates' wages rise rapidly after unionisation. "Under such conditions", said GWU general secretary David Lewis, "it was entirely natural that the SATS workers should be attracted to GWU...", although he admitted the union was "pretty nervous" about the consequences of organising railway workers. (Lewis quoted in White, op cit.) The union estimated that about 800 workers out of 900 employed in the Port Elizabeth docks joined the union, while it recruited about 400 SATS members in the East London docks.

The GWU committee made relatively mild demands. They asked that the committee (not the union) be recognised and that it be allowed to negotiate local disciplinary and grievance matters in the

- railway workers -

docks. But SATS would not budge from its position of recognising only the staff associations: "We can only recognise a trade union to negotiate with if we are happy and satisfied that this would lead to labour peace because that is our ultimate aim, said a Dr Coetzee, legal advisor to SATS. (quoted in White, op cit.)

White argues that the staff associations are an essential part of labour control in SATS and that "in terms of the bases on, and forms through which labour relations inside SATS are to be conducted, management and the staff associations proclaim an identity of interests." (see White, op cit for more details.) Certainly the BSA inspired little confidence among the Port Elizabeth dockworkers, and in 1982, the staff association was hit by mass resignations by workers who described it as SATS' "toy".

In September 1982, after Tolwana's dismissal and after several incidents of harassment of GWU members, the workers embarked on a limited "go-slow" in one department to press their demands that their committee be recognised. The "go-slow" came after top level interventions from local businessmen, national industrialists and the international trade union movement, including the International Transport Workers Federation. Short of calling a general strike in the ports, the union had used almost every available pressure.

But the workers were rounded up by police, put into lorries, driven out of the harbour and evicted from their hostels. When the rest of the workforce downed tools in protest, they suffered the same fate. There was talk in the union at the time of the stevedores downing tools on a national basis in protest, but it was decided that such action might cost the union its life.

There is little question that the SATS dockers were solidly organised in Port Elizabeth. It is indeed true that the GWU had a tiny proportion of the entire workforce of SATS as members. But the union had defined dockworkers as a distinct constituency. Furthermore, there is ample evidence that the railway workers, desparate with the intransigent SATS management, pushed the union into taking such a strong stand, with full knowledge of the potentially disastrous consequences.

Organising today

One reason why the GWU, while relatively small, played such a key role in establishing trade union unity, was because of their

experience with SATS. "One of the implications [of the dispute]" said Lewis, "has been to really add impetus to our desire to get involved in a union federation...it [the dispute] gave us a really clear recognition that there is just no way that SATS can be organised by one union [on its own]..." (quoted in White, op cit). Nevertheless, despite the existence of COSATU, there is still a potential problem of division among the railway workers. There are currently a number of unions attempting to organise SATS workers, and each region, moreover, has very specific features.

Perhaps the grouping that has attracted the most publicity recently is SARWHU, which was "launched" in October in Grahamstown. The word "launched" is a slight misnomer in SARHWU's own terms as it claims to be a revival of the old SACTU union, and was officially also represented at the COSATU launch in December 1985. It is strongest in the Transvaal, where, say its organisers, it has 10,000 members, as well as 4,000 members in the rest of the country. The union has been closely linked to the General and Allied Workers Union (GAWU) in the Transvaal and to SAAWU in East London. Union officials take great pride in the history of the union, its SACTU traditions and its historical link with the nationalist movement. Names like Moses Mabhida, Calber Mayekiso and Laurence Ndzanga are frequently mentioned and on the steering committee of the new union were old activists like Rita Ndzanga and Catherine Mavi, according to Transvaal organiser Johannes Ngcobo.

But there is only one member of the new SARHWU who was active in the old, says Ngcobo: "We are dealing with youngsters, so its us who is telling them the history. We are proud of this union. It has a history of unity. It was one of the first affiliates to CNETU (Congress of Non-European Trade Unions) and was also affiliated to SACTU." Today SARWHU is affiliated to the Congress of South African Trade Unions and the United Democratic Front.

It is an example of the regional differences apparent in SATS and their implications for organisation that, whereas the union seems reasonably strong in the Transvaal, it is relatively weak in the Eastern Cape - birthplace of SAAWU, the site of the dockworkers' struggle and an area where the old SARHWU had some presence.

Certainly in Johannesburg and the East Rand the union appears to be making some headway. A visit to the local offices reveals evidence of an intermittent, but nonetheless steady stream of SATS workers, with various problems. There are also signs that the SATS

- railway workers -

management is talking to the union when it takes up problems on behalf of individual workers. This is certainly a change from the attitude in 1982, when SATS refused even to acknowledge GWU letters to avoid conferring "de facto" recognition on them.

This is not to suggest that SARHWU has been left unfettered by the SATS authorities, particularly the railway police, who have arrested organisers on several occasions. SATS has also urged workers to use the staff association - a position which the workers have "stubbornly resisted" says Ngcobo.

The union has decided to run a major campaign - to be launched on December 16 - to get rid of the staff associations and to press for recognition of SARHWU. Asked what organisational lessons could be learnt from the GWU failure to move SATS in 1982, Ngcobo said it "proved that general unions cannot organise railway workers." SARHWU believed that private sector and public sector workers could not be organised in the same union. "One of the problems [of organising stevedores with SATS workers] is that the GWU did not have the majority of railway workers in the docks. Throughout the country there are about 10,000. If they had had a strong presence in all those ports, they would not have suffered like they did in Port Elizabeth," said Ngcobo.

That the GWU did not have a majority in every port has always been common cause. Today it is the basis for some criticism of the union's tactics, not only from SARHWU, but also from Eastern Cape workers who sit on independent committees and who have declined to join SARHWU. It is slightly ironic though that a union which has been initiated by officials from unions like GAWU (a general union in the true sense of the word) should attribute the failure of the 1982 dispute to GWU's "general style" of organisation, when the union had previously demarcated specific areas of organisation along industrial lines.

The Eastern Cape committees

There are major obstacles to SARHWU's organisational plans, though, in the form of a fairly substantial section of the workforce who are keener to start their own union than join one which they believe is too heavily dominated by officials at the expense of the railway workers.

For the past three years, railway workers in East London and Port

Elizabeth have been organising themselves into committees, but it is only this year that the idea of a trade union for railway workers has been discussed among them. The Port Elizabeth committee, which is comprised mainly of African permanent or "regular" workers in various depots in the city (but not in the docks), reports its first overt clash with SATS this year. On May Day, said a committee spokesman, railway workers obeyed the stayaway call. The next day, though, between 200 and 300 were dismissed from the goods shed in Port Elizabeth. "This is what first brought us together," said a committee spokesman, "because SATS had fired the casuals. We were permanent, but we could not see the distinction between us and the casuals because we were doing exactly the same job.

"So we went to COSATU for help [the local region] and asked that they should challenge the management in their factories that they should talk to the railways and ask why those people had been fired. The railways told those managements it was because the work was down but to our surprise they employed coloured workers in place of those black workers. And if you try to stay away and you live in the hostels, they send trucks in and force you to work. And if you are permanent and you stay away, you can lose a day's pay or you can be fired."

So a committee was formed, and at a general meeting shortly before the state of emergency was declared, 700 workers from 22 depots discussed plans for organisation. "Our intention was to approach COSATU and see what organisation we could affiliate to. They referred us to the Transport and General Workers Union, so we had talks with them and they were ready to assist us, but then [a local worker leader in PE] told us that the railway workers in East London had a committee so we decided to talk to them," said a PE spokesman.

The East London committee, which, according to local COSATU officials, represents about 3,000 railway workers in the city, was however more suspicious of existing trade unions. The hostility is based on "a bad experience of trade unionism", according to the official, "especially of SAAWU, to which most of them belonged." Like the Port Elizabeth workers, they felt insulted when SARHWU arrived "and didn't make contact with the railway workers". They saw this as undermining their committee. There were also objections to the constitution, which PE and East London workers claimed to see only one week before the launch and parts of which they complained did not give local branches sufficient local control.

- railway workers -

The East London workers also distrust SARHWU because of its close links with SAAWU. And also, like the Port Elizabeth workers they were not keen to join the Transport and General Workers Union, because, they said, union officials in the two unions had not been able to unite railway workers across the union divide in previous years. Now the committees are on the verge of forming their own National Union of Railway Workers, which plan also includes members of railway committees elsewhere in the country.

The railway workers of East London say one of the lessons of the GWU's battle with SATS is that workers cannot be organised regionally, but committees of SATS workers must be set up nationally.

However in spite of caution and lessons learnt from the PE docks members of the committees in both Port Elizabeth and East London have suffered harrassment at the hands of the railways and ordinary police particularly since the start of the emergency. A member of the Port Elizabeth committee said he was "threatened" by security police for not being a member of the staff association: "they said if I don't go to the staff association officials I won't get promotion and I will get dismissed. Then in June I was assaulted when I was first arrested."

About 35 SATS workers in Port Elizabeth - all members of the workers' committee - were detained for between two and three months under the emergency regulations. None were paid for the time they spent in jail, although most seemed to retain their jobs, according to the committee. Committee members have been transferred to remote depots, and some even dismissed.

The committees' relationship with COSATU is complex and differs on a local and national level. Both committees in the Eastern Cape have had extensive contact with worker leaders in the local COSATU region, many of whom are genuinely sympathetic to their cause. "They are fighting a just battle," said one prominent Port Elizabeth worker leader. But nationally, COSATU is bound to support its own affiliate, SARHWU, and although the committees, which will form the nucleus of the new National Union of Railway Workers, approached COSATU for financial assistance earlier this year, before SARHWU was officially revived, none was forthcoming. Now, said a PE committee member, "although the local people are sympathetic to us, they ask how they can help a neighbour to fight COSATU's own child." The committees which say they have organised similar railway workers committees in other parts of the country,

say they will organise independently without financial assistance from COSATU. Nevertheless, they are keen to join COSATU once the new union is formed, and say that at that stage they will negotiate with SARHWU.

There is an influential group of workers within the COSATU local, who have been sympathetic to the committees in the past, who argue that the railway workers should join SARHWU, and if they are unhappy about the constitution or the way in which SARHWU was initiated, they should attempt to change it from within. But the workers' committees in both East Cape towns are determined to push ahead and form their own union in Port Elizabeth because the workers contact with SARHWU officials has been problematic. In East London, for the same reason and because they associate SARHWU too closely with SAAWU, to which most of them once belonged, members of the workers' committee adopt the same position. Not a single member of the workers' committees in Port Elizabeth or East London attended SARHWU's launch in Grahamstown in mid-October.

SARHWU officials in Port Elizabeth, who are close to the situation on the ground, appear to be taking the problems seriously, unlike national officials who dismiss the committees as "opportunists". SARHWU claims to have about 700 members in the depots around the Eastern Cape, including the country towns, but admit that it is a problem "that other workers in Port Elizabeth and East London didn't recognise SARHWU". The local official said SARHWU had not intended to "undermine" the committees and was still keen to hold discussions with the workers. He admitted that "in East London we invited them to the launch [of SARHWU] at the eleventh hour and in Port Elizabeth we gave them an invitation but they did not attend because they said they were not clear on the venue. Although he did not agree with the committees' standpoint on SARHWU he understood their perception of the situation to be that "SARHWU was speaking on behalf of the railway workers without having a national membership and that we revived this union without consulting them. But we believe that this union is theirs and we hope we will be able to sort this thing out." SARHWU acknowledged that the union is mainly Transvaal based, but says the launch in Grahamstown was the "first step to becoming a national union".

It should be mentioned here that, although there are similar committees in other parts of the country, it is not clear how strong they are, and they may differ in character. In Johannesburg, for instance, the committee was formed after workers broke away from

- railway workers -

the former AZACTU affiliate, African Railway and Harbours Workers Union, and includes former ARAHWU officials, whereas the Port Elizabeth committee comprises only workers. It is a function of the specificity of each region, which the original SARHWU came up against, that the organisation of SATS workers in each area follows distinct and different patterns.

A unified transport union?

But in spite of the differences, the two union groupings agree on two points: one that railway workers should be organised separately from other transport workers, and two, that the first major campaign which should be taken up by organised workers is to "get rid of the staff association". The only way to protect railway workers from a defeat such as that suffered in the Port Elizabeth docks, argued one committee member, was "to plan for unity of all railway workers to come together and form one separate union. We need to organise independently so we do not get taken over by non-railway workers who do not experience our problem. We believe that the union should be formed by the workers."

SARHWU officials also believe that there are very particular problems involved in organising railway workers - mainly because of the peculiar conditions that pertain at SATS. "From my experience in the trade union movement, I don't see Pat Rogers at Putco sitting together with the Minister of Transport", said one. SARHWU argues that the GWU docks dispute proved that it was incorrect strategy to organise public and private sector workers in the same union, and that such organisational strategy prevented the union from concentrating on winning a majority among the railway workers who were thus left highly vulnerable. "We cannot afford local strikes or spontaneous strikes," said a Transvaal official, "if the workers are to strike it must be a national strike".

In spite of reports in the local press at the time SARHWU was launched, it does not seem that merger talks between the Transport and General Workers Union, which is the other key union involved in organising railway workers, or the independent committees and SARHWU is on the short-term agenda. COSATU, said a Transvaal SARHWU official, had encouraged the independent committees to join SARHWU and not to set up a rival union.

But the question of whether SATS workers should be organised with other transport workers or separately is one that is far from

settled in the union movement. The original COSATU resolution on National Industrial Unions "urged... affiliates to establish single unions" - in major industrial and services sectors. The transport sector was stipulated as "transport, SA Transport Services, cleaning and services", although the resolution also laid down that the Central Executive Committee would "evaluate the viability of the sectors outlined... with particular reference to problems which may exist in all sectors".

TGWU general secretary, Jane Barret, said organisation of the railway workers and a resolution of the issue with other unions involved in the sector was an immediate issue on the union's agenda. "Basically we are more convinced than ever that it is the correct strategy to organise the SATS and private sectors together."

There are a number of reasons for the TGWU position. One of the most compelling is to be found in the statistics, said one official. SATS employs over 70 percent of all transport workers in South Africa and it might prove problematic in the long run if 30 percent of the workers (assuming full organisation) were in one transport union, while the other 70 percent were separated from them in another union.

Another reason is the union's organisation in freighting, containerisation, and stevedoring companies which have "face to face dealings with SATS". The union said it realised after particularly tough wage negotiations this year that "we won't make any progress - on wages, on issues like May Day and so on - unless SATS is successfully organised." TGWU has historical links with the railway workers too. In Cape Town and Port Elizabeth, the union has established "a network of contacts"; in East London the union still has about 400 members; in Durban local organisers are in touch with workers who are dissatisfied members of the staff association; and in the Transvaal truck drivers, who are members of the union, work closely with SATS workers at one of the major depots.

The TGWU had tried to convene sector talks with other unions involved in the organisation of SATS workers, but so far has been unsuccessful. The union regards the matter as urgent all the more so because, it says, there is a noticeable trend towards privatisation in the railways, especially the road sector.

Apart from the organisational problems, the TGWU has a legal one - it is not registered to organise SATS workers. But it has decided

- railway workers -

to "fight the legal problems, once we have a base to do it."

Other unions

There are two other unions which might have to be taken into consideration in the organisation of SATS workers. The one is the African Railways and Harbours Workers Union (ARAHWU), now affiliated to the new CUSA-AZACTU federation. ARAHWU claims to have 200 members, mainly in the Transvaal, although also in Durban and the Transkei. SARHWU claims former ARAHWU members are joining the new COSATU union and does not see it as a threat to its own union. "These ARAHWU chaps are coming to us because ARAHWU is not part of the UDF and those workers want to be part of the UDF."

ARAHWU said it had dealt with SATS systems managers on a local basis and that so far they had "responded positively", over issues like dismissals and out-standing monies owed to workers.

Potentially more significant, though, is a sector of the BSA, now called the Black Trade Union of SATS (BTUS). The BSA (and its successor) is, at best, highly suspect among the other unions, at worst totally rejected. The GWU, in 1982, labelled it "the SATS personnel department, dressed up and registered as a trade union." Certainly, in the Eastern Cape, workers who are reluctant to join it risk harrassment from the SATS authorities and also risk their job security.

But the regional character of the SATS workforce is again apparent in developments in the BTUS in Natal, where 30,000 of the union's 60,000 members are employed. Recently a significant group of these workers brought a succesful Supreme Court application against the union president (installed in his position during the 1982 GWU dispute), whose position they claimed was unconstitutional. The constitution had been recently changed making it unnecessary for presidents to hold office at a local level, but the breakaway group in the BTUS argued that the changes were invalid. They also argued that it had been changed because the president, a Mr Mbewu, had recently been voted out of office at a local level. A recent article in Business Day described the event as "the tip of the iceberg of internal conflict within the union between the old guard and a newer and "more progressive" leadership based in the larger Natal and Southern Transvaal regions". (Business Day 13/11/86)

While taking over the union from the inside might be possible in

some areas, it was a strategy that was tried and abandoned by the independent workers' committees in the Eastern Cape, after they had been victimised for speaking out against the practises of the staff association at union meetings. There are also constitutional problems in that each of the nine regions has equal representation in the union regardless of its membership. Thus, even if the largest regions - Natal and Southern Transvaal - are successful, they would still have to persuade the other seven regions to follow suit.

Conclusion

It is unlikely that SATS, entrenched as its labour policies might be, can remain completely immune to worker organisation in the current climate in South Africa in the labour movement. SATS workers cannot be isolated from their fellow (unionised) workers, especially when the benefits of unionisation are so immediately apparent to people earning wages which are close to the breadline. According to workers in PE the starting wage for a labourer is R250 a month, while the top of the (labourer) scale is R347.

However, it is also unlikely that SATS will easily accomodate unions outside of its own in-house system. The reason which compels unions to organise the railways - its critical position in the economy - is precisely the reason why SATS will resist organisation.

Most of the unions are in the early stages of development. While conflicts in organisational style and strategy are apparent now, the unions might, as they develop, be able to forge sufficient unity to undertake the mammoth task they have set themselves.

(Pippa Green, October-November 1986)

The current crisis an opportunity for the unions

That South Africa is presently in the throes of an economic and political crisis is, by now, widely acknowledged. However, the precise nature of this crisis has, we believe, not been clearly defined. Moreover, the crisis has been presented by the employers and government, and largely accepted by the union movement, as a reason to moderate wage claims, generally to below the rate of inflation (see below). But lower wages will not solve the present crisis, only worsen it. By contrast, our analysis of the crisis suggests that it presents the union movement with a significant opportunity to advance the interests of its membership, principally by pressing for higher real wages.

The single most significant feature of the current economic crisis is that it is not a generalised crisis of profitability. By and large, company profits have been sustained or have recovered and there is every indication that they will improve further in the immediate future. Since August, according to the Financial Mail leader of October 3, over 50 industrial companies quoted on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange have reported improved profits. In addition, some of the largest groups, Anglo American and Gencor for example, have recently reported very high profit levels. The Financial Mail concludes: "...profits could be looking a lot healthier over the next six months."

The principal reason accounting for current levels of profits is that, over a number of years, the employers have been successful in limiting wage increases. Wage increases have been lower than the rate of inflation, leading to substantial reductions in workers' real incomes. Significantly, this is true of organised as well as unorganised workers.

According to a recently published survey, by Andrew Levy and Associates, wage increases in unionised plants in 1985-6 exceeded the average increase in black wages (11.3%). However, "unions were unable to compensate their members for the inflation rate." (Star 1.10.86) The findings of PE Consulting, which surveys the wages paid to 1,200,000 workers in 1,000 companies, are essentially similar. Jane Ashburner of PE Consulting states that the

gap between wages and inflation is "the worst in living memory". Her survey shows that workers' wages have lagged behind inflation for the last three years. According to SALDRU at the University of Cape Town, the average minimum real wage for labourers "is now lower than at any time since 1981."

But, in addition to benefitting from the payment of lower real wages, employers have also retrenched on a massive scale, especially in the last two years. With a much reduced wage bill, these "leaner" companies are now able to make "fatter" profits.

If capital continues to secure high rates of profit, based principally on their success in "moderating" (sic!) wage claims to below the rate of inflation and reducing the size of their workforce, what constitutes the current economic crisis? The answer is that capitalists are presently not investing, or at least not productively investing, the profits being made. Gross Domestic Fixed Investment has fallen dramatically. This is coupled with significant capital flight, mostly unrecorded, as plant and equipment are despatched for sale overseas where, at current values of the Rand, prices are significantly higher. The overall stock of plant and equipment is shrinking. It might even be termed an "investment strike" - a strike by capitalists who are unwilling to invest. The reasons for this unwillingness to invest are various and include the high costs of imported plant and equipment. But, the principal factor is certainly political uncertainty. In deciding to invest, capitalists take account of not simply current levels of profitability but, since investments mature over many years, future levels of profitability. There is currently too much uncertainty about South Africa's political future, whatever the present levels of profitability, to persuade capitalists to increase their investments.

Instead, they seek other outlets for their profits - and this is probably the principal reason why, for example, the stock exchange is presently booming. Unlike capital investment, however, other outlets for profit, such as stock exchange dealing, speculation, takeovers and capital outflow, do little or nothing to create employment. Thus the country is deprived of the investment it needs to grow and create employment for the two to four million unemployed.

Clearly, the only sure way of overcoming the capitalists' investment strike, is to take investment decisions out of their hands, and place them in the hands of the working class who will make

- crisis -

such decisions in the interest of full employment and an end to poverty. But the trade unions cannot wait for the replacement of capitalist power by worker power. They must respond now to the economic crisis which is also an investment crisis. The best way to do this is to demand massive wage increases, wage increases that are far higher than the rate of inflation, and to do so on a national level.

How can massive wage demands be justified?

- (i) Massive wage increases mean massively increased buying power in the pockets of the workers. This buying power will not stagnate in their pockets, it will be spent. Clothing, food, building materials and so forth will be bought and will therefore have to be produced on an increased scale, putting thousands of workers back to work. Factories will have to re-open or expand, and new factories will be built, to meet the increased demand for goods from the working class.

There will be a huge re-distribution of income away from profits to wages. Instead of the surplus wealth being drained from the country by foreign shareholders, or squandered locally on useless luxuries by our very own bourgeoisie, it will be used locally to raise the living standards of the poorest classes, increase local demand for locally-produced goods, and reduce unemployment.

- (ii) A virtuous circle will be created, as the multiplier comes into effect. More local demand for food, clothing and other consumer goods will have a knock-on effect in the basic industries and service sector. This in turn will create more demand for consumer goods which in turn...

Indeed, there is a significant school of thought in government circles at present that a rise in expenditure by low income groups, such as black workers, would stimulate the labour intensive consumer goods sector thus creating significant increases in employment. While too much should not be made of this, the so-called "inward industrialisation strategy", proposed by Jan Lombard, the Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank, for example, is consonant with higher real wages for black workers.

- (iii) Even the capitalists will benefit! At present their cry is

"insufficient demand for our products"! But individually they are unable to see that only higher wages can create that extra demand. Higher wages mean lower profit margins, yes, but these will be turned into higher profit levels on higher production.

It is true that many capitalists can point to their profit-and-loss accounts and say, with some justification, that they cannot afford higher wages. This is because wage increases at their factory alone will not lead to increased demand for their own products. Only a concerted, national campaign to raise wages generally will have the virtuous effects outlined above.

- (iv) One reason as to why workers have, in the past, been persuaded to limit their wage demands, namely the threat that higher real wages would encourage employers to introduce more mechanised processes, is far less believable in the present context. Capitalists are presently simply not willing to invest - least of all, given the value of the Rand - in high cost equipment, most of which must be imported.
- (v) Of course, not all companies are presently profitable. There are some sectors, such as the construction industry, where profit rates are very low. Many smaller companies are not profitable and bankruptcies are at a very high level. By contrast, the export sector, for example, has enjoyed very high levels of profitability. Any demand for higher real wages, on the part of the union movement, will have to recognise this uneven picture. However, this should not obscure the general situation. Moreover, some companies which are not presently profitable are part of the large conglomerates who are earning massive profits elsewhere in the organisation.

A concerted campaign by all trade unions to raise real wages will benefit the entire working class. It will also be an important test of the capitalist system. If the bosses are so mesmerised by their own individual balance sheets as to be unable to see that higher wages will boost the whole economy, then capitalism itself will become entirely discredited in the eyes of the working class.

(David Kaplan, Cape Town, November 1986: with acknowledgements to Gordon Young and Martin Nicol of the Labour Research Service)

Sanctions and disinvestment a Swedish view

In the current debate over the exact form of sanctions that should be applied against the apartheid regime of South Africa, few people have analysed in depth the exact meaning and impact of a full-scale withdrawal of all foreign companies from South Africa. In Sweden, there is a fierce debate about whether there should be a unilateral decision by Sweden to withdraw all investment from South Africa or whether Sweden should take part in internationally coordinated actions. In addition, few have spelt out exactly what the impact of full-scale disinvestment (which would go far beyond even the sanctions agreed by the US Congress against President Reagan's veto) would mean. In Sweden it is also felt that there is some confusion about exactly what are the demands from the democratic non-racialist organisations, including the unions, inside South Africa. As a contribution to this debate, Leif Blomberg, president of Svenska Metall (the Swedish Metalworkers' Federation) recently published the following article in the Swedish press.

Swedish companies and South Africa: the meaning of disinvestment

For many years now, Sweden has pursued a more extensive policy towards South Africa than most other countries. It involved giving substantial support to the political, trade union and other organisations which spearhead the resistance of the oppressed majority to the apartheid regime. Sweden has led the way with regard to economic and other sanctions against South Africa. At the same time we have been encouraging a maximum amount of international co-ordination in order for the sanctions to be effective. Svenska Metall has given its full backing to this policy as well as giving active support to the growth of democratic trade union organisations within the South African metal industry. Svenska Metall has extensive contacts and provides comprehensive support to our South African brother unions.

Developments in South Africa in recent months have struck a blow to those forces who had hoped for and worked towards democratic social transformation with a minimum loss of human life. The organisations which could represent the oppressed majority in such a process of change are being persecuted more than ever before and

many of their leaders have been imprisoned.

Some important changes have occurred in the conditions for pursuing Sweden's policy towards South Africa:

- * Severe attacks on opposition organisations have made it more difficult for us to support the opposition inside South Africa. Virtually all non-racist organisations in the country are now calling for sanctions of all kinds.
- * Calls for sanctions are now growing increasingly loud even in the USA and Great Britain, ie. two of the three main investor countries. Hopefully more and more countries will translate words into action to demonstrate their abhorrence of apartheid.

Against this background, Svenska Metall takes a positive view of the Swedish government's intention to adopt a tougher policy towards South Africa. The plan to launch a diplomatic offensive inside and outside the United Nations this autumn with the purpose of trying to achieve internationally co-ordinated sanctions is fully in line with our attitude to the problem. There is ample justification for emphasising the role of the UN in connection with sanctions and this approach by the government is consistent with sound traditions in Swedish foreign policy. We are therefore confident that the government will develop a policy which will make the most constructive contribution possible towards the struggle against the loathsome system of apartheid.

There is no doubt that in this policy on South Africa we are making a fundamental moral statement which is backed by the Swedish people as a whole. But it also entails selecting those methods which are likely to be the most effective in promoting democratic and non-racist developments in South Africa. If we fail to make the right choice, the best of intentions will be reduced to a magnificent but empty gesture.

At times the advisability or appropriateness of winding up Swedish companies in South Africa has been presented as the ultimate moral issue involved. The winding up of companies has almost come to be looked upon as an end in itself. This confusion between end and means arose because no one has actually specified what exactly is intended. The matter was always dismissed as a mere technicality which the government would take care of once the decision on principle had been taken.

- disinvestment -

But what exactly would this winding up of companies entail in practice? Well, unless we specifically settle for some other alternative, the following approaches will most likely be adopted by the companies:

1. The subsidiaries are sold to South African capital

Most of the companies are linked to the South African mining industry and are well run. According to information, virtually all the Swedish companies have had offers from South African capital in the last six months.

The "Toyota model" is a special case in which control has been retained without ownership. Toyota is the dominant automobile manufacturer in South Africa without actually owning the factories. This model would, however, be difficult to apply in the case of a total boycott from Sweden. To our knowledge, no Swedish company is planning to make such an arrangement but the possibility cannot be excluded altogether.

Therefore the most likely consequence of any decision to wind up Swedish companies would be for white South African capital to take over at reasonable prices. This will probably occur even before a formal winding-up decision or any other decision which would prevent further operations is actually taken.

In what way would the liberation struggle benefit by a handing over of Swedish subsidiaries to white South African capital interests on favourable terms, to what extent would it shake the system of apartheid? Would it help South African workers to deprive them in this way of the possibility of exerting trade union pressure via the Swedish parent company?

2. The companies are closed down

This is a less likely alternative and one which will occur only if a Swedish group is reluctant to sell out to competing firms. What benefit would South African workers derive from the fact that companies they have built up over decades are closed down?

Resorting to any of these alternatives in winding up operations in South Africa is clearly not going to further the struggle of the oppressed majority in South Africa. Have the truly leading non-racist organisations in that country specified that the sanctions

they want to see applied can be limited to the sale of a few Swedish or Nordic companies to white South Africans? The positive effects of a winding up of foreign operations will outweigh the negative ones only if this exercise is conducted on a broad and co-ordinated international scale. That is the only way in which sufficient political and economic pressure can be generated to make an impression on the system of apartheid.

For the time being, however, nothing seems to indicate that the main investor countries, Great Britain, USA and the Federal Republic of Germany, would be prepared to consider a winding up of their companies as part of a tougher policy towards South Africa.

If the intent of those who demand a winding up of subsidiaries on a purely Swedish or Nordic scale is to suggest other forms of transfer than those detailed above, ie. handing over companies to the workforce or non-racist organisations, then it is high time to say so. The following issues would then have to be considered:

- * How can Sweden help the workers take over companies which form an integral part of worldwide corporations and have access to their technical know-how, market organisation and assets?
- * How should a transfer be arranged? Should the Swedish state first buy companies and then hand them over?
- * If that is to be the approach, how can Swedish parent companies be prevented from selling off subsidiaries before the necessary legislation is enacted?

The closer you look at the specifics of a limited Swedish or Nordic exercise in winding up companies in South Africa, the clearer it becomes that this is not a fundamental moral option. The issue involved is rather whether we wish to deploy political means which could turn out to have the opposite effect of what we set out to achieve. I fail to see the merits or even morality of a policy which gives us a clean conscience but does not make any practical contribution to the struggle of the oppressed.

We hope that the government will be successful in its endeavours to bring about co-ordinated international sanctions. Svenska Metall also supports the plan to adopt a firmer Nordic policy towards South Africa under all circumstances. Although measures limited to the Nordic countries alone will not suffice to make

- disinvestment -

developments in South Africa take a turn for the better, it does prove to other, in this respect more important, countries that we are prepared to let action follow our words.

In deciding to set this example, however, we must take care to ensure that any action we take at least does not counteract the developments we wish to support. A campaign to wind up companies which was limited to the Nordic countries (ie. in practice Swedish) and which involved selling to South African capital would not meet this requirement.

It is also essential that tougher sanctions against South Africa be accompanied by increased economic support to the front-line states. The threats of the South African government to pass on the effect of tougher sanctions to neighbouring countries have to be taken seriously and, in some cases, this has already been seen to be done. The South African government seeks to retaliate against the call for sanctions. This blackmail by the South African government must be countered by extending substantial economic support to the front-line states. We must be prepared to grant very extensive and long-term assistance to these countries. It is therefore to be welcomed that our government is now taking initiatives which fill this requirement.

In some parts of Sweden tougher sanctions will have a negative effect on employment. This will apply in particular if sanctions either directly or indirectly make ownership links between Sweden and South Africa impossible. Then places like Fagersta, Robertsfors Ludvika and Sandviken will suffer. This is something we shall have to accept if we are serious about international solidarity. There is, however, no reason why the full burden should rest upon the workforce in the companies affected. The government must intervene forcefully to share out the weight of our policy towards South Africa. International solidarity must be rooted in a firm base of solidarity on the home front.

(Lief Blomberg, President of Svenska Metall, Sweden, 15.9.86)

The launch of CUSA-AZACTU

POLICY OF THE FEDERATION

Preamble

The philosophy, policy and ideological orientation of the federation will be based exclusively on the broad democratic aspirations of the most oppressed and exploited. The Federation shall forever strive to interpret on-going struggles of the working class in terms of a principled working class ideology and committing itself to the emancipation of labour taking note of the peculiarities and uniqueness of our situation from time to time.

We believe in the principle of worker unity based on the material conditions workers are exposed to. Further we believe in the principle of worker control based on anti-racism/non-racialism to build a non-exploitative democratic society based on the leadership of the working class. Our concept of a new Federation is a Federation which would unite the majority of organised workers in our country and express the true aspirations of workers.



The Federation therefore adopts the following principles:

1. Worker control
2. Black working class leadership
3. Non-affiliation to political organisations
4. Financial accountability within unions
5. Independent internal actions of unions within the framework of the Federation policy.

National liberation struggle

We the victims of continued oppression and exploitation in our daily lives commit ourselves to fierce opposition to these twin evils. The Federation as part of this broad opposition, believes that these evils can only be replaced by a democratic nature of society founded on the non-existence of any form of discrimination.

Further, the Federation recognises the fact that the entire country, balkanised or not, belongs to the indigenous people of our country.

To this end, the Federation believes that the most oppressed and exploited are the only ones capable of bringing about the desired transformation armed with the following principles:

- * anti-capitalism
- * anti-imperialism
- * anti-racism
- * anti-sexism

National and international relations

The Federation recognises the existence of other organisations committed to the same and similar goals as itself both nationally and internationally. In its relations with other organisations the Federation will maintain its autonomy and shall not seek to affiliate to any international confederation but shall reserve the right to relate to any of them so long as such relations shall be governed by or in furtherance of our ideological orientation.

Education

The Federation contends that no just and equitable system of education can thrive and function in an unjust and exploitative society. We are conscious of the fact that education is in the hands of the ruling class in order to promote, perpetuate sustain and maintain its self interest of racism and capitalism.

We note further that:

- * the present philosophy of education is governed by the apartheid system of divide and rule
- * that the present philosophy of education fosters the process of

alienation

- * the ultimate aim of education in the capitalist society serves the interests of the capitalist minority
- * colonialism and neo-colonialism are inherent in the present philosophy of education.

The Federation therefore commits itself to continuous research in order to develop an alternative system of education.

Sexism

The Federation recognises and believes that the emancipation of women is an integral part of the national liberation struggle, the guarantee of its continuity and the precondition of its victory. In our country black women are subjected to a triple form of oppression: class exploitation (as workers), national oppression (as a black person) and sexual oppression (as women). The Federation therefore commits itself to the total eradication of all these forms of women oppression in the process of the struggle to restore the dignity of women.

Foreign investment

The Federation recognises that foreign investment support and maintain the economic system in this country and that this system is geared at the maximum exploitation of the working class. Further the Federation notes that the Black working class which is responsible for creating the wealth of the country does not benefit from the natural and material resources which rightfully belongs to it. Therefore the Federation believes that foreign investment in our country is a further perpetuation of exploitation and oppression, and that its continued presence in our country is not in the interest of the working class. Further the Federation is committed to a full sanctions program for as long as the racist capitalist minority regime exists.

ELECTED OFFICE BEARERS

President:	James Mndawenni
Vice President:	Stewart Moletsane
General Secretary:	Piroshaw Camay
Ist Assistant General Secretary:	Pandelani Nefolovhodwe
2nd Assistant General Secretary:	Mahlomola Skhosana

CONFERENCE REPRESENTATION ON THE BASIS OF MEMBERSHIP

Union	Paid up	Signed up
Black Allied Mining Construction Workers Union	75,000	120,000
Black Domestic Workers Union	540	1,400
Black Electrical & Electronics Workers Union	520	2,001
Brushes and Cleaners Workers Union	3,000	4,000
Building Construction & Allied Workers Union	22,000	45,000
Domestic Workers Association of South Africa	3,000	5,000
Engineering & Allied Workers Union of South Africa	3,000	9,000
Food Beverage Workers Union	17,000	25,000
Hotel Liquor Catering & Allied Workers Union	4,500	10,000
Insurance & Assurance Workers Union of South Africa	4,000	4,416
National Union of Farmworkers	5,000	7,000
National Union of Public Service Workers	5,000	15,000
National Union of Wine, Spirit & Allied Workers	5,000	6,000
South African Chemical Workers Union	35,000	45,000
South African Laundry, Dry Cleaning & Dyeing Workers Union	5,000	5,000
Steel, Engineering & Allied Workers Union	20,000	40,000
Textile Workers Union	5,000	7,000
Transport & Allied Workers Union	10,000	32,323
United African Motor & Allied Workers Union	8,000	11,986
Vukani Guards & Allied Workers	5,000	7,000
<u>General Workers Unions (Observer status: no voting rights)</u>		
African Allied Workers Union	3,500	6,000
Black General Workers Union	7,450	9,030
National Union of Workers of South Africa	1,500	3,000
Total	248,010	420,156

Norman Daniels: leaving TUCSA

The Textile Workers Industrial Union (TWIU) was one of the last unions to disaffiliate from the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA) before its demise. The SALB interviewed Norman Daniels, general secretary of TWIU, in July 1986, before news of TUCSA's dissolution. Daniels was regional secretary of TUCSA in the Western Cape and served on a number of TUCSA's committees.

The TWIU, which now has a membership of 20,000 started in 1937 and was one of the founding members of SACTU in 1955. Piet Beyleveld, then TWIU general secretary, became the first president of SACTU. Much of SACTU's leadership was decimated by state action in the early 1960's, and soon afterwards the TWIU left SACTU. It remained unaffiliated until it joined TUCSA in 1968.

SALB: Can you explain where the motivation to disaffiliate from TUCSA came from and what the reasons were?

Daniels: The motivation came at a national level and at regional levels. After a lengthy discussion we decided to disaffiliate and this point of view was unanimous. A common theme at our congress was the need to show that we were determined to use whatever legal means necessary to eliminate apartheid. All our members come from the underprivileged groups and although some might have the vote in the tri-cameral parliament, our members do not see this as improving race relations. In fact, as far as they are concerned the tri-cameral parliament increases polarisation.

SALB: So your reasons for leaving TUCSA were mainly political?

Daniels: Yes. Also, from our point of view TUCSA was becoming very expensive. That, coupled with a situation where our people were suffering under apartheid, whether in the workplace, or the school, or the home - it didn't matter. TUCSA seemed to be very quiet about it. TUCSA did not raise its voice in a meaningful way against many of these things. The impression was that TUCSA was very close to the government and this was increasingly difficult to explain to our members.

SALB: Was it not possible to use the internal structures of TUCSA to transform it? Alternatively, are the structures democratic, but

- interview -

an influx of right-wing trade unions has made it difficult for your political viewpoint to be heard and taken into account?

Daniels: Well, they say you get the people you deserve. At TUCSA's conference people were elected and it was believed they would represent TUCSA properly. The constitution has not changed. It is right to say that the inflow of people with more conservative ideas has changed things. This goes back a while. At one stage, when TUCSA was at its peak, it was seen to be the champion of the under-dog. It was seen to be fighting all sorts of laws that kept [African] people out of the negotiating machinery.

One should give credit to TUCSA for playing this role in the labour field. But when those changes [in labour legislation] came after the Wiehahn Commission [in 1979], TUCSA seemed to feel it had done its job and the steam went out. The amendment of labour legislation did not affect other parts of apartheid. So it is not inflexibility in the structures of TUCSA that was a problem. But a problem was the outflow of unions whom, if they had stayed, might have balanced TUCSA more.

SALB: When did the TWIU start getting disillusioned with TUCSA?

Daniels: About three years ago. We actually tried to get unions not to disaffiliate in the hope that we could swing TUCSA around to a more acceptable image. We tried to get the major unions, like the Garment Workers Industrial Union of Natal, the Motor Industry Combined Workers Union and the Boilermakers to stay, but too late.

SALB: You have spoken about TUCSA's political image. What about its image on the factory floor though, specifically its image with regard to the then independent unions which made major gains in the seventies at the expense of TUCSA parallel unions?

Daniels: As far as the hostility between emerging unions and TUCSA goes, the emerging unions wanted a place in the sun and in many instances the only place they could get was by going for the established unions. We are trying to get a bit more sense into the labour field and we feel, at this stage, it would be wrong to get involved with either TUCSA or COSATU.

SALB: you are not going to affiliate with another federation?

Daniels: No. The only people who can look at affiliation in our

union is the national executive committee and they have taken a decision to disaffiliate. At the moment I could not speculate where we are going to go, whether it be to CUSA or COSATU or UWUSA. We find ourselves unaffiliated and in the company of a lot of other unions - most of them ex-TUCSA unions - representing about 500,000 workers. We feel we should look at the labour field very carefully and find a common modus operandi.

SALB: What is your opinion on the labour scene in South Africa at present? Can you comment, particularly, on how the launch of COSATU last year and the recent formation of the Inkatha-backed UWUSA have affected labour relations?

Daniels: Well that affects everyone, not only us, and particularly in Natal. But we certainly do not want to get involved in a battle between federations. We are not going to take sides.

SALB: In Natal, though, one ex-TUCSA union, the Garment Workers Industrial Union has supported COSATU in its stance on some things. For instance it supported the demand that May Day be a paid public holiday and negotiated the day off for its members. But TUCSA has not supported the demand for either May Day or June 16 to be paid public holidays. What is your position on the matter?

Daniels: As a trade union we are committed to fight for June 16 and May 1 as paid public holidays. The reasons for each holiday are different but the principle is that these days have great meaning to our people.

SALB: Are you aware of what other unions in TUCSA might think about TUCSA's official position on these holidays?

Daniels: Within TUCSA there is a lot of unhappiness about its stand. It says it accepts the principle of Labour Day, but that it should be on another day from May 1. This is now the tragedy of TUCSA. One of the reasons why we stayed so long in TUCSA was that it was the one non-racial organisation in the country when there was apartheid all around us. TUCSA stood like a beacon and showed that non-racialism could work. But ultimately we failed to take along all sections of the population with us.

SALB: For a long time TUCSA excluded African workers from its ranks. In fact it was formed on the basis of exclusion of unregistered [African] unions. When did your union join?

- interview -

Daniels: We went in after all discrimination had been removed. It must have been about 1968/69, but we only went in when TUCSA's doors were open. Then we had about 2,000 members.

SALB: Where did the motivation to disaffiliate from TUCSA come from?

Daniels: The resolution came from three branches: the Eastern Cape, Johannesburg and Cape Town.

SALB: Was there dissatisfaction amongst your members though, or was it leaders in the union who pushed for disaffiliation?

Daniels: No, it was a grassroots decision. People must accept one thing and that is that our first loyalty is to our members and because members joined our union for a particular reason, so we affiliated to TUCSA for a particular reason. This applied not only to our union, but to unions throughout the country.

We were amongst the first to open our doors to all races. That's how we started - as members of SACTU. At the first opportunity we opened our doors and obviously that meant we were becoming a far bigger, more verbal and active union. We were fulfilling the role and aims mapped out for us by the founders of our union.

SALB: What did you do as regards African membership before the law allowed African members to belong to trade unions?

Daniels: Prior to Wiehahn we tried to be as democratic as possible. We tried to canvass the feelings of people who were workers but weren't our members. We tried to have access to as many workers as possible and tried to build the union into a force.

At the time we were still a very small union and we were very weak. We had about 7,000 members then. During negotiations, particularly with the Frame Group, we were very weak. We couldn't think of a strike, because by no stretch of the imagination could we say we represented the majority in the industry. So, when as a result of Wiehahn it became possible, we recruited black workers.

Prior to 1953 we had Africans in the union and later (after the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act, which prohibited Africans from joining registered unions, and which divided unions racially) there were big fights among unions about whether to register or to deregister. Those were the days when people said "lets make

common cause and deregister". But then we realised that we would not then be able to be parties to industrial councils.

African unions were always around, but when the Nats came in they made it very uncomfortable for people. For example, our union was decimated. We had officials banned from 1953 onwards. Employers were told they couldn't make deductions from black workers for the union. That led to the demise of our union and many black unions.

But this process goes way back to when the old Trades and Labour Council was disintegrating, before the formation of TUCSA and then SACTU. SACTU was 90% black. The main reason for the old T&LC to go out of existence was over the black union issue and when TUCSA was formed it was formed on the basis of excluding blacks.

SALB: Can we come back to the more recent past to talk about TUCSA's relations with the then emerging independent unions. When the emerging unions were set up, one of their pronounced objections to the TUCSA parallels was that the latter had little worker control or sufficient internal democratic practices.

Daniels: Well, TUCSA was a federation of independent unions. It was a loose federation, it had no control over a union such as ours. For instance, if we wanted to go for June 16 as a public holiday, it had sweet-all to do with TUCSA. That's why we could accommodate people of different political persuasions. It was not a tight federation like some of the others.

SALB: But, superficially at least, there did seem to be common threads that ran through TUCSA unions, in the way they operated. I recall, for instance, at TUCSA conferences, few unions had worker delegates who spoke - it was overwhelmingly officials.

Daniels: There I will go along with you, I suppose I can only say that officials were more au fait with the resolutions. We didn't have the worker participation we might have liked.

SALB: But do you think there is a difference in the organisational style between the individual unions, as a whole, in TUCSA and the then FOSATU unions, say?

Daniels: Yes, there were different attitudes. The established unions had built up standards and procedures, and therefore I would argue that there were different perceptions between the two

- interview -

[groupings of unions]. The newer unions at first wanted nothing to do with the industrial council or registration, but the majority of them have since registered or decided to participate.

On the other hand, the older unions have realised that they must get involved at a more grassroots level. Both the older unions and the newer unions have learnt a hell of a lot from each other. For instance, if I look back there were once great differences between TWIU and the [COSATU affiliated] NUTW. But now we work very closely on some issues and if we look at the constitutions, we find they are on a par. We are finding one another, which means there has been a learning process which benefits workers.

SALB: In that light, how do you interpret the COSATU slogan of "one union, one industry" and what is your opinion on that?

Daniels: We believe in it. That was our original motivation for registering only for the textile industry. This has always been accepted by us. But now you have an "allied" this and an "allied" that, therefore the fragmentation of industrial unions has come from the newer unions.

SALB: But many TUCSA unions operate or did operate under a closed shop system. What is your opinion of the closed shop and do you think it interferes with freedom of association?

Daniels: The closed shop does not prevent people from belonging to another union. It has been proved so many times. As far as the slogan goes, I can see that in the food industry there are serious moves afoot to have broader, bigger unions, rather than two or three. But in other industries, I'm afraid it seems just a slogan. But it is essential to work towards it. You cannot have a continuing situation on the factory floor where unions vie for the same people and brothers fight brothers and unions are weakened.

SALB: Can you explain what kind of cooperation you have with NUTW?

Daniels: Well, we cooperate by serving on common wage committees and in some cases we have common agreements, whereas before we were quite distant, quite apart.

We don't want to jump the gun. We are an old union and a national union. Wherever NUTW operates, it operates in an area for which we are registered. But where NUTW has established itself, we have not

gone in to try and win members over. The conflict has come where we have had to defend ourselves.

But it is incumbent upon everybody who calls themselves a trade unionist to talk to others about common interests and to try to resolve some of the problems with which we are faced.

SALB: To return to your disaffiliation from TUCSA. You said the reasons were mainly political. Were there any others?

Daniels: Yes, it was getting very expensive to belong to TUCSA. The affiliation fees are 10c per member per month, so members were paying near to R2,500 a month. But, on the political side, TUCSA has sent me a statement they made condemning the detentions of trade unionists. [TUCSA expressed its "abhorrence" at the "arbitrary" action taken by the authorities against South African trade unionists.] I think they are realising that they have to get into the market place.

SALB: But has TUCSA any clout left?

Daniels: Not amongst blacks. But it is realising that it needs to change. It is not a matter of them having any clout, but moving closer to the people to make themselves more acceptable.

SALB: The TUCSA statement seems far stronger than the one they made about three years ago when one of their officials was detained. TUCSA refused to condemn detention without trial.

Daniels: Yes, times change. The problem with TUCSA is that it hasn't changed with the times.

SALB: Can you comment more on your future outside of TUCSA, with reference to your operation in the garment and textile industries. What will your future relationship be, for instance, with the Garment Workers Union in the Western Cape, which is still an affiliate of TUCSA? [The GWU-WP has since left TUCSA - ed.]

Daniels: We have always cooperated with them in a consultative textile, garment and leather workers' organisation and the international federation to which we are all affiliated. The consultative organisation could be the medium through which we can get a closer understanding of one another's problems.

Robbie Botha: the end of TUCSA



Below we publish an interview with Mr Robbie Botha, President of the Trade Union Council of South Africa conducted by the South African Labour Bulletin on October 29. Mr Botha is also General Secretary-Manager of the Mine Surface Officials Association, a post he has held for 33 years. He sits on the Board of the Unemployment Insurance Fund and the National Manpower Commission and is the labour representative on the Executive Committee of the National Manpower Commission. He sits on the National Regional Development Advisory Council and is labour representative on the Economic Advisory Council. It is his second term of office as President of TUCSA and he was re-elected unanimously.

SALB: The Executive of TUCSA has recommended that the federation be dissolved. How do you account for TUCSA's demise?

Mr Botha: TUCSA was founded in 1954. Throughout the first 25 years of its existence TUCSA fought for the right of all workers to take a full and equal part in our labour relations institutions and structures. At times this was a very lonely fight indeed, and in the 1960s our insistence upon the rights of black workers almost caused the break up of the organisation itself. In later years TUCSA contributed significantly towards the establishment of the Wiehahn Commission, and to the work of that Commission.

The early 1980s was the period of most rapid growth, and at one point TUCSA had (counting both paid up and non-paid up members) an affiliated membership of over half a million workers. Ironically this very growth contributed to TUCSA's present decline, for it happened at a time when greater polarisation between the races was taking place in society at large, for reasons very evident and not necessary to dwell on here. This polarisation is perhaps the most important factor in TUCSA's demise. It is a tragedy, and demonstrates the difficulty of maintaining the middle ground in South Africa. The middle ground is fast disappearing and I can only hope that the lesson will be taken to heart by everyone - that something must be done to promote reconciliation and move

away from polarisation.

Another difficulty confronting TUCSA was its inability to compete with the emerging unions as far as provision of benefits for affiliates was concerned. The reason is that we were entirely dependant upon income from the affiliates, whilst it is common knowledge that unlimited cash resources were placed at the disposal of emerging unions by overseas sources. TUCSA was precluded from receiving this sort of assistance from overseas organisations because it was alleged that TUCSA worked hand in hand with the government. This was of course a biased attitude and a misrepresentation of the true situation that prevails - that is, that TUCSA represents its affiliates and most of the unaffiliated unions at national level on, for example, the National Manpower Commission, the Unemployment Insurance Fund, and apprenticeship training boards, etc., and therefore we made a very valuable contribution on the part of labour as far as legislation was concerned.

I might also add that TUCSA itself has always been wary of such assistance, believing that "he who pays the piper calls the tune".

A further factor which adversely affected TUCSA's existence was the continuous threats on shop-floor level made against the membership of affiliates of TUCSA - including burning and bombing of houses, necklacing, maiming of children, etc. - unless the individuals forced their union to either resign from TUCSA or they must themselves resign from their union. The effect was generally to weaken membership of TUCSA affiliates and as a consequence the income derived from a depleted membership with the consequent effect on income ultimately payable to TUCSA. In several instances affiliates were forced to resign for the reason that they could no longer afford affiliation fees to TUCSA. All of which had the effect of reducing facilities such as training, education, and provision of legal advice to affiliates.

The prevailing situation with regard to the Labour Relations Act is also not conducive to assisting traditionally registered trade unions in carrying out their responsibilities. At the present time a dualistic system prevails. Section 4 of the Labour Relations Act provides for unions to register in terms of the Act and this limits their area of operation and scope of interests to their certificate of registration. Section 4(a) of the Act provides for those unions who do not wish to register to apply for simple certification. There is no limitation on area of operation or scope of interests.

- interview -

In consequence one finds that general workers' unions are competing with trade unions for membership support and the latter are at a distinct disadvantage in terms of their registration.

SALB: How was the decision taken to recommend dissolution?

Mr Botha: The decision was taken by the National Executive Committee of TUCSA to call a special conference of TUCSA for December 2 and to recommend that TUCSA be dissolved. The NEC is elected by all the affiliates on the basis of TUCSA's democratic and non-racial constitution. Comments made now by ex-affiliates that TUCSA is run by whites in the interest of whites are unfair. Those ex-affiliates voted the present leadership into office.

SALB: It has been said that TUCSA was unable to adequately represent such a diverse membership: low paid semi-skilled workers on the one hand and more privileged clerical workers on the other hand. Was this a factor?

Mr Botha: In its "Statement of Intent" TUCSA stated clearly that it wished to represent all sections irrespective of skill or status. In fact, you have the situation where a white collar union resigned recently saying that TUCSA was doing too much for black unions. On the other hand some black unions withdrew saying that too much was being done for the whites.

Any multiracial federation will run into this difficulty until the political dispensation has been clarified by the government and every member has the vote so they can select their representatives at national level. COSATU and CUSA are uniracial despite non-racial constitutions. The effect has been for polarisation to take place on the basis of colour and political attitudes.

SALB: Broadly speaking 3 years ago when TUCSA's membership was at its height there were three categories of workers: those organised into craft unions (mostly in the metal and motor sectors); semi-skilled workers in industrial unions; and the white collar unions and professional associations. At the end of 1983 the craft union started to leave TUCSA. More recently, during 1985/86 the semi-skilled unions have been leaving. How do you account for their withdrawal?

Mr Botha: Within TUCSA splits between different categories of workers were not evident until very recently. This was an entirely

new trend at the time that MICWU and the Boilermakers withdrew. The decisions to withdraw were to a great extent politically motivated. To us workers were workers, irrespective of status or skill, blue collar or white collar.

SALB: What is likely to happen both to those unions which have disaffiliated, and to those left in TUCSA who will have no federation once TUCSA dissolves? The white collar unions, for example, will they find a home in the Federation of Salaried Staffs' Associations?

Mr Botha: All the unions that disaffiliated from TUCSA have not sought affiliation with other federations. They remain independent.

For the existing affiliates I don't know. I can only say that a great tragedy has befallen the traditionally organised unions of South Africa. Labour, in the form of a multi-racial federation, has now temporarily lost the opportunity to make an input at national level and also at international level.

The Federation of Salaried Staffs' Associations was formed in 1966 and the MSOA was a founder member. However, Fedisal never got off the ground, partly due to an ineffective part-time secretariat. But it continued to exist and there is a possibility that some of the affiliates may apply for membership of the Federation which would, I understand, consider - if this happened - changing its name and constitution to accommodate unions that are representative of members other than salaried staff.

SALB: Have there been any consultations with the South African Confederation of Labour?

Mr Botha: There has been no communication. But some time ago we wrote to all unions in the interests of labour to attend a meeting at which we could discuss differences and establish points of common interest in order to make representations collectively to the powers-that-be. There was a fair response from unaffiliated unions and associations but the initiative was ignored by others.

SALB: There is now proposed the establishment of a loose Labour Forum to be launched in 1987. How do you see this initiative?

Mr Botha: The idea of such a Forum was originally proposed by TUCSA in order to bring together unaffiliated unions into a body

- interview -

so that TUCSA could consult with them before making representation to government.

The Labour Forum, I understand it is not intended to become a trade union federation.

SALB: In your opening statement you stated that growing polarisation and politicisation was one of the reasons for TUCSA's decline. What then, in your opinion, should be the political role of trade unions?

Mr Botha: In modern day South Africa it is absolutely impossible to completely divorce labour situations from politics; for example the pass laws, Group Areas, Mixed Marriages, detention without trial, etc. - all of which affect union members intimately and regrettably has an effect on their work situation, thereby forcing the trade union to become politically involved. I do not, however, think it is the place of trade unions to support sanctions, disinvestment, or to demand the release of Nelson Mandela as a threat to employers whilst endeavouring to reach agreement over conditions of employment. Pure politics has no place in the trade union movement.

TUCSA resolutions over the years and its annual representations to government are now being implemented over issues such as mixed marriages and pass laws. The population of South Africa is now, to and extent, picking the fruits of TUCSA's endeavours.

SALB: The last few years have been characterised by intense rivalry between TUSCA and the emerging unions, how did this state of affairs come about?

Mr Botha: The rivalry was between affiliates of different federations which then carried through to the national level. As a democratic body TUCSA does not interfere unless invited by an affiliate.

This drift into confrontation could have been halted had the government at the outset insisted that all unions must register under the Labour Relations Act. By preventing a dualistic system we would have avoided friction resulting from poaching by non-registered unions. This would have lead to the growth of an orderly trade union movement in South Africa and not the chaos that currently prevails.

THE PARALLEL TRADE UNION

Why TUCSA
opposes boycotts
and sanctions

TUCSA
fights
Communism



LEADERSHIP MANUAL FOR SHOP STEWARDS

ISSUED BY
TUCSA



THE CHALLENGE to SOUTH AFRICAN TRADE UNION LEADERSHIP



TALKING POINT

TALKING POINT

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

TOO OLD TO WORK
TOO YOUNG TO WORK

TRADE UNION OF TRADE UNIONISTS

- interview -

SALB: Has not one cause of friction been the existence of the closed shop? Emerging unions have argued that workers should be allowed to join the union of their choice and that this infringed their freedom of association. What is your reply to this?

Mr Botha: The argument against the closed shop is one-sided. When I apply for a job to an employer certain conditions are laid down: for example, I may be obliged to become a member of the pension fund or the medical aid scheme. I can accept or reject the job and the conditions that go with it. By the same token if the offer of a job is linked to trade union membership the same choice exists and in that way I can exercise freedom of association.

Also a union, based on a majority vote of its members, negotiates the closed shop with the employer. The members have a right at any time to vote out a closed shop.

The closed shop assists unions to be effective in negotiations with employers. It prevents a situation where the majority negotiates successfully on behalf of the minority of non-members who are invariably first in line for the benefits negotiated by the union.

SALB: What in your view has been TUCSA's major contribution to labour in South Africa?

Mr Botha: If one considers the present Labour Relations Act and the contributions which TUCSA made to that, and if one considers the evolutionary changes - the many discriminatory laws being changed - one can relate all of this to the efforts of TUCSA in years gone by. My feeling is that TUCSA in its active years made a contribution towards South Africa and its peoples. It is in the records of TUCSA for all to see; what we have endeavoured to do. For this reason it is a great tragedy that the significance of having a well-organised and sophisticated trade union federation of the nature of TUCSA should no longer be appreciated.

van der Watt: the Labour Forum

Below we publish an interview with Mr Ike van der Watt, leader of the Boilermakers Society and Chairman of the Working Group established to launch the new Labour Forum.

SALB: How did the idea of the Labour Forum come about?

Mr van der Watt: The main reason we started to think along these lines was that after we [the Boilermakers Society] withdrew from TUCSA we found ourselves in a vacuum. We found we could not operate in isolation from other bodies. There was no real mechanism for dialogue or contact with other unions. Even if we were to have joined another federation then that would have limited contact and communication just to fellow members of that organisation.

The other area that I believe is important is that of information. We are aware of labour-orientated information on Europe and the USA, but no equivalents in South Africa. Statistics here are collected for the benefit of government or management. It is necessary that information be collected specifically for the use of trade unions and should be distributed to all unions.

SALB: Could you specify what type of information?

Mr van der Watt: This would include information on the current level of wage settlements; trends towards automation; shifts in membership between areas and sectors; and the need for ongoing monitoring of economic conditions. For example, in Europe statistics are kept which show the shift of labour from blue collar to white collar occupations. No such data is available for South Africa. The Labour Forum would collect such information on an ongoing basis through regular questionnaires to the unions involved in the Forum. The Forum would collect and analyse the information and then distribute it to all unions. In other words, the Forum would be a service organisation. It would not be membership based.

SALB: In what way would the Forum differ from existing service organisations which offer a similar service?

Mr van der Watt: It would be different in this respect, that it will be wholly financed and controlled by the labour movement.

- interview -

SALB: Is the finance for such a project likely to be forthcoming from trade unions?

Mr van der Watt: This is the million-dollar question. Unions are notoriously slow in paying their bills and there could be difficulties here. But I feel that if we can get it going for a year or two it would generate enough credibility to be viable.

We do not rule out outside funding particularly from other labour movements, but I believe in the initial stages it is important to get it off the ground relying on unions inside South Africa. My experience is that if we start with outside funding you will not get the commitment and without that there would be a slim chance of success. But once labour has got this thing off the ground, using our own resources, it is much more likely to succeed.

SALB: How did the Labour Forum come to be formed?

Mr van der Watt: Over a year ago I raised the idea with a group of trade union leaders. Originally there was little enthusiasm. Some time later I was visited by leaders of four unions who were interested and wanted further details. After that we decided to send a circular around to all unions in South Africa and a meeting was organised for July 28. Nineteen unions were represented and there was heated debate. Some unions present saw it as an attempt to start another federation. But there was enough support to establish a steering committee. At that meeting TUCSA unions were heavily represented and Robbie Botha was made Chairman of the Steering Committee. The Committee had one meeting which was disastrous and at the second meeting I was asked to take over. Mr Botha has not been back since. The Steering Committee drafted a brief document which was circulated to all unions and contained objectives, principles and proposed functions of the Labour Forum. [see appended document.]

On August 3 a second meeting was convened of 26 unions. It was decided that more information was needed on finance and how the Forum would operate. A Working Group was established to look at these practical aspects and to approach unions to get pledges for financial support for an initial period of six months. Thereafter the unions would be required to give a final decision.

At a meeting on October 3, 33 unions attended and a further 15 sent apologies. At that meeting it was decided to go ahead and

launch the Labour Forum in January 1987. The task of the Working Group was to get firm commitments from unions and to enquire about premises, equipment and staff by November 13. On that day we will decide whether enough finance has been secured. But I can say now that it looks reasonable.

SALB: What trade unions have attended the initial meetings?

Mr van der Watt: We have avoided saying who is involved at this stage so as not to be immediately placed in a particular pigeon hole. We have had only one outright rejection - from MWASA - and I feel that that was because of a misunderstanding of what the Forum intends. Unions from all federations and the entire political spectrum have attended our meetings.

SALB: What about the charge that this is a home for ex-TUCSA unions and that it was established as an alternative to TUCSA?

Mr van der Watt: We need to be linked with all sections of the union movement if we are to succeed. But I am convinced that if we can get it operational you will get a new attitude.

Right at the beginning I said that we were not against any federation. I asked a TUCSA Management Committee member to take this view back to TUCSA and I did the same with the IMF, the CMBU [Council of Mining and Building Unions] and COSATU. It was raised in TUCSA, but Robbie Botha responded by trying to launch it as an annex to TUCSA. At the second Steering Committee meeting I objected to TUCSA's involvement and said that I would withdraw. Robbie got upset and he withdrew.

SALB: What structures are envisaged for the Labour Forum?

Mr van der Watt: The staff would be research type people with no policy forming function. Merely a service to trade unions. The staff would be controlled by an elected management committee of three, nominations to be sought throughout the South African trade union movement. Elections would be on the basis of one union one vote. The management committee would look at the daily running of the Forum. There would also be a monthly meeting to which any union could send a representative. There will be no executive committee because the Labour Forum has no policy functions.

There is an open-ended aspect of the Labour Forum. Take the

- interview -

question of disinvestment, I travel abroad and they want to know what the trade union attitude is. There is no way you can give a straight answer because we do not know. I can only speak for the Boilermakers Society. We need to be in a position to say 60% believe this or that. There is no way we can co-ordinate this without something like a Labour Forum. The same is true with questions of detentions and the state of emergency, we need to get an overall picture of how labour feels. There is often broad agreement which is not always appreciated. Collecting this kind of information is a tool for pressure which could be used by unions.

SALB: But what if you just show that trade unions are divided over these kinds of political questions?

Mr van der Watt: The Labour Forum should not attempt to unite workers. It simply exists to collect information so that this can be used by unions. The Labour Forum could start to open peoples' eyes, to present them with information which they cannot ignore. It is a mechanism for unions to investigate and find these things out. At present there is absolutely nothing to gauge union views.

SALB: With the demise of TUCSA do you see increased support for the Labour Forum from unions traditionally affiliated to TUCSA?

Mr van der Watt: There was a tremendous vacuum even before the death of TUCSA. There was a large group of unions who did not want to affiliate to any federation for various reasons. But they were looking for something like the Labour Forum where they could have some links with other unions.

SALB: Without members does the Labour Forum have any corporate identity. Can it issue statements for instance?

Mr van der Watt: If the Forum started issuing statements it would be seen as a rival to other organisations. Perhaps statements could be issued on the basis of research and information collected. But the Forum's job is to collect information, make it available to union bodies, then let the federations issue the statements, using information supplied from the Forum if required.

SALB: What is your response to the charge that you are trying to establish a new federation?

Mr van der Watt: I hope so - but not by converting the Labour

Forum into a federation. It may be instrumental in getting unions and federations together. One federation is my goal - but this is not possible at this time. I would be totally opposed to any move to establish another federation and the Labour Forum as such could not be converted into a new federation.

SALB: Your aim is to achieve financial self-sufficiency from union contributions, yet you have no system of membership. Is it possible to achieve the one without the other?

Mr van der Watt: The Forum will be initially financed out of donations based on commitments for the first six months and then we will work on a six-monthly basis. The donor unions will remain anonymous. We cannot continue indefinitely like that and we will have to look outside for donations to establish a trust. But we will continue to get donations from the unions and I feel that if we spread the burden across a large number of unions it will be possible to finance the Forum largely from trade union sources. But it must be a donation. It cannot be a charge which would involve notions of membership. Unions must believe in the concept in order to contribute. But non-donating unions are also welcome. The main problem is to sell the concept to unions at the moment. There is a lot of suspicion especially among the federations. It is no point waiting until we have convinced people. Rather we must get it off the ground and in a year's time show what we have done and then go back to those other unions.

I believe firmly that there is a need for such a body. But I don't believe it has to come into existence at all costs. If it doesn't serve the purposes intended I will be the first to advocate disbandment - and it would be easy to stop, much easier than getting it off the ground. If it fulfils a need it will be successful; if not, it will vanish.

DOCUMENT: The proposed Labour Forum

The Steering Committee recommends the establishment of a loose and informal body, which for the purposes of discussion here will be called the "Labour Forum".

The structure: This body would not be membership based, but would

be sponsored by interested unions. At the beginning, certainly, the Labour Forum would be a very small operation, with one or at the most two people being employed in the office. The Labour Forum would be entirely independent of any union grouping or federation, and would be guided by a panel of (say) four sponsoring unions.

The functions: The Labour Forum would primarily be a means whereby trade unions in South Africa could communicate with one another and exchange information. Through the Labour Forum unions could also seek support and co-operation on specific issues, the Labour Forum could become the focal point for disseminating South African labour opinion. The Labour Forum would also initiate research on opinion concerning broad labour issues.

The mechanisms: Unions seeking support/co-operation on specific issues would communicate with the Labour Forum, which would then draw up a discussion document/questionnaire for circulation to all trade unions in South Africa. The Labour Forum would then analyse and communicate the response to the union concerned - and all unions in South Africa.

Concerning the broader issues, the Labour Forum would constantly be monitoring and identifying issues of concern to South African labour. Such issues would include, for example, public holidays, hours of work, labour legislation and any other issues pertinent to the labour movement. The Forum would also on its own initiative draw up documents to circulate, to gauge reaction to current developments. Through the data gathered in these ways, an information bank on South African opinion would be built up for the use and guidance of all unions.

Objectives: The Labour Forum as proposed should also be seen as a communication channel and facilitator. Along with its practical functions as sketched above, the major objective of the Labour Forum will be to build up relationships and understanding between unions in South Africa. This objective of building bridges of trust and co-operation should not be confined to any particular sector/s of the labour movement in South Africa, and, for example, in the research process set out under "Functions", all trade unions in South Africa should be canvassed for their opinions, and likewise all unions should be encouraged to use the channels of communication offered by the Labour Forum. The Labour Forum could also develop into a useful channel of communication between South African unions and other bodies.

Northern Natal: meeting UWUSA's challenge

Pippa Green

About 40 shop stewards - Metal and Allied Workers Union members in Richards Bay - listen intently as one of their number relates the slightly scornful thoughts expressed to him by a non-union member when almost every union leader in the region had been detained under emergency regulations: "he was one of those who said he could not see how coaches could move without a locomotive. But that very person is on the road now because he didn't have a union to protect him. We here, are very proud to be in MAWU because we manage to protect ourselves and it is not easy for employers to dismiss us." The speaker is a worker at the largest company in the Richards Bay industrial complex, Alusaf, a giant aluminium smelter, employing more than 2,500 people. He has come to the meeting wearing a thick strand of beads in the colours of Inkatha. He is, apparently related to Kwazulu chief minister, Gatsha Buthelezi. He is relating his sardonic homily in response to a series of questions about workers' attitudes to the new Inkatha-backed union, the United Workers Union of South Africa (UWUSA).

It is now six months since UWUSA held its inaugural rally on May Day at the Kings Park stadium in Durban. The rally was a major event; at least 60,000 Inkatha supporters attended, Buthelezi arrived at the stadium in a helicopter and thousands of stick-wielding "amabutho" took up prominent places on the sports field in front of the podium. The major aim of the rally was to "embarrass [COSATU] politically by demonstrating Inkatha's support amongst the African urban and rural community." (1)

Perhaps it was fortuitous for UWUSA's initiators that COSATU leaders made critical statements about Inkatha and included the Kwazulu homeland in its criticism of the bantustan policy. But unionists in Northern Natal do not believe that anti-Inkatha remarks were the sole spur to the new union. For several years previously, they point out, FOSATU had a strained relationship with Inkatha in the area. The FOSATU unions, too, were the only potentially serious political opposition to Inkatha in the area and in the past two

- northern Natal -

years there have been serious differences between Inkatha leaders in the community and union leaders over issues like the consumer boycott and the bus boycott in Richards Bay/Empangeni.

"What [the COSATU leaders] did when they criticised Inkatha was to open the door and make room for us to discuss these things. In FOSATU the situation was already unbearable [in relation to Inkatha]. So Inkatha has helped us even further by creating UWUSA," said a local union official. And Simon Conco, UWUSA general secretary, said, before the new union was officially launched, that while UWUSA was a "new initiative our battle to establish a union has been going on since the early 1970s." (2)

Inkatha and the trade unions: steadily strained relations

In his address at UWUSA's inaugural meeting at Kings Park on May Day, Buthelezi recalled how, when FOSATU was due to set up its Northern Natal region in 1979, "an anti-Buthelezi and an anti-Inkatha line reared its ugly head once again... Black workers in the Empangeni-Richards Bay area insisted, because of my deep roots in their struggle, that I should inaugurate the setting up of FOSATU in the Richards Bay area. Again Mr Alex Urwin (sic) [then of FOSATU now of COSATU], opposed the suggestion. However, the workers voice demanding that I should be invited to the inauguration of FOSATU at eSikhawini became so strong that Mr Urwin had finally to abide by the wishes of Black workers - many of whom were members of Inkatha."

Even after COSATU had attacked him he said, "[I did] not want any of my fingers in a trade union pie... But when Inkatha members challenged me to assist them, I could not refuse them that assistance."

According to union sources, the Northern Natal region was considered absolutely key in the establishment of the new union. (4) Firstly, it is true that there is a sizeable proportion of Inkatha members among the union members. Secondly, UWUSA was conceived in the Empangeni-Richards Bay region by a few disaffected members of FOSATU affiliates and thirdly, Inkatha has been the only political organisation operating in the area.

But it is equally true that the initiators of the new union appear to have underestimated the impact the democratic trade unions have made on the region in the past seven years - both in terms of organisational practises and in terms of the real confidence

workers have gained by seeing the fruits of their shop-floor strength and unity in the markedly better wages and working conditions that have prevailed since the unions arrived.

Buthlezi, by saying he could not refuse Inkatha members assistance in forming a new union, was speaking from the same ideological premise that has characterised Inkatha since its inception. As Gerry Mare and Georgina Stevens point out, (5) Inkatha has, ideologically, had a populist appeal denying differences between classes. At the same time though, they argue, Inkatha has engaged in "class specific economic action", which has brought it into conflict with the working class and community interests and "will increasingly do so."

In a detailed account of Inkatha's economic activities, (6) Mare and Stevens have pointed out that "it is erroneous to equate workers membership (in Inkatha) with the direct representation of worker interests." Inkatha, they say might have as members large numbers of Zulu-speaking workers, but it represents the interests of capital. During the days of the fledgling trade union movement, however, there were tendencies in Inkatha which were supportive of workers' struggles. Witness the role that Barney Dladla played in the 1973 Natal strikes. It was even mooted at one stage that Dladla should serve on the Trade Union Advisory Co-ordinating Council (a forerunner of FOSATU). During a strike at the Alusaf plant in Richards Bay in 1973, he supported the workers' demands for higher wages and threatened to halt the recruitment of workers from Kwazulu. But, argue Mare and Stevens, the relationship even then was "troubled" and the ambivalence of Inkatha's relations to the trade union movement expressed itself in conflicts between Buthelezi and Dladla.

Mare and Stevens point out that there are two broad ways in which Inkatha has become more structurally involved with capitalism: one is the involvement of capital in Kwazulu and with certain people in positions of authority in Kwazulu; the other is the direct participation in and initiation of projects by Inkatha, such as its own investment holding company, Khulani Holdings, as part of its participation in tripartite companies in Kwazulu (tripcos). Khulani Holdings was registered in 1979 with 660 shareholders. Its first subsidiary was Khulani Brown Wholesalers, 49 percent of which belonged to W G Brown, a Tiger-Oats subsidiary. One of the directors of Khulani Holdings was Simon Conco, now general secretary of UWUSA. (7)

- northern Natal -

Conco's position is an irony that does not escape workers. He was, until recently, on the board of directors of Kwazulu Transport, while at the same time holding down a job as general secretary of UWUSA. Several shop stewards were quick to mention the contradiction and even employers in Richards Bay described him as a "capitalist" who had no business running a union. His position is a manifestation of what Mare and Stevens have sketched as the contradictory relationship between Inkatha's interests and working class interests, over which the disguise of populism is growing thin.

Relations between the union movement and Inkatha in the region have become increasingly strained during the past two years. (8) A local union official said two major developments had resulted in the alienation of a fair degree of genuine support Inkatha had among workers: one was the bus boycott in Empangeni/Richards Bay during the early part of 1985; the other was the threatened boycott of white shops to protest against the 1985 state of emergency, and its subsequent abandonment because of Inkatha's fierce opposition to the campaign. (9)

The bus boycott, which lasted almost four months, resulted in a fare reduction and a promise on the part of the Empangeni Transport Company to consult community and union representatives over future fare increases. But it also ended in considerable tension in the commuters' committee - a body made up of representatives from the three main townships in the area - Ntseleni, Ngwelezana and eSikhawini. eSikhawini is the newest township in the area and is probably the largest working class area, housing most of the workers employed in the Richards Bay industrial complex, which was developed as a deconcentration point in the early 1970's. Eight of the ten members of the eSikhawini Committee were trade union leaders, while the committee from the other two townships comprised "official leaders" - Kwazulu MPs and councillors, who objected to the absence of similar leaders in the eSikhawini Committee. (10) The committee was chaired by Conco, and included Jeffrey Vilane (then MAWU president and now vice president and COSATU regional vice chairman), Jeremiah Ntombela (then senior shop steward in the Transport and General Workers Union, now president of the union and COSATU regional chairman) and M P "Sicefe" Gumede (then Paper Wood and Allied Workers Union executive committee member, now UWUSA national organiser).

In April, three months after the boycott had started, Conco tried

to call it off in Ngwelezana and Ntseleni and continued negotiations with the bus company, while police and employer pressure increased. But "those representatives of the boycott who were remaining within their mandate were not involved in these negotiations." (11) At this stage, too, the KLA tried to implicate the United Democratic Front in the continuation of the boycott and labelled some unionists as UDF members. (12) Byerley suggests that Inkatha's initial involvement in the issue should be seen as an attempt "to gain control of an issue which it did not initiate", whereas the unions, which had been established in the area since 1977, saw their involvement in the boycott as an opportunity to establish a more democratic mode of organising around issues pertinent to the community.

What is notable today, more than a year after the boycott, is the perceptions of union leaders who recall it as one of the first manifestations of division between the Inkatha-linked authorities and the trade unions. Said one union official: "The Inkatha stand was quite evident. They tried to crush the boycott. Conco called the whole boycott off and when the people of eSikhawini continued boycotting buses he blamed the unions for being anti the Kwazulu Government. Then they [the "official leaders"] started calling people names, like they called Vilane a Swazi who could not rule. Basically, they were getting scared because the union leadership was taking over the eSikhawini leadership."

The proposed boycott of white shops, to protest against the 1985 state of emergency, was another contentious issue. The FOSATU unions in the region approached the Inkatha leadership to ask for support "because the workers decided we could not isolate Inkatha", according to a union official, but Inkatha had told the union delegation that a boycott would result in white shopowners cutting off black traders and refusing them stock. "But they also called us "UDF" and accused people of coming from Durban to burn their shops... there was never really a proper discussion. So we called it off because it seemed as though it was going to lead to a confrontation situation. But what Inkatha did not realise was that even though we called the boycott off, it was not really a defeat for us, because our members discussed it and asked why these people were opposing this sort of thing. The issue of the consumer boycott helped to politicise people," said the official.

But an even more decisive point in the cooling of relations was the attack on Jeffrey Vilane, and the burning of his car and house. On

- northern Natal -

April 23 this year, a week before UWUSA was launched, a large group of armed men gathered in front of Vilane's eSikhawini house in the early hours of the morning. A petrol bomb was flung through his front window and he looked outside to find his car on fire and men armed with fire-arms in front of his house. Vilane woke his children and helped them out the back door. As he was escaping, minutes later, he was shot in the arm by a man with a revolver.

"There were mixed feelings about the attack," said a MAWU official, "some people were shocked, but the dominant feeling was one of anger, not only among Alusaf workers, but in the whole of COSATU. When we called a COSATU shop stewards' council, this hall was really full and the shop stewards were angry. There was no feeling of fear and the workers started talking about what to do in the case of such armed attacks. The Alusaf workers knew who shot their leader. After the anger had been allowed to run, the workers began to discuss it, and we realised that this was only the start of it.

"One of the things that was decided at that meeting was not to stand on platforms and attack individuals in UWUSA or Inkatha or the Kwazulu Government. We said "let us rather plan things". Because if you stand up and attack the Kwazulu Government, your members will not fight you, but they will not support you, meanwhile Inkatha will mobilise to attack us. So we strengthen ourselves by preparing for the future and that means consolidating our organisation." (13)

Effects of the state of emergency in the region

COSATU's Northern Natal region was without doubt the hardest hit by detentions under the state of emergency. The COSATU region is defined as the area north of the Tugela River and includes the large industrial areas of Empangeni/Richards Bay and the Isithebe area. The region has about 10,000 members, compared to about 90,000 members in the Southern Natal region, which includes the inland regions of Newcastle and Ladysmith. In an affidavit brought before the Supreme Court in Durban in August to secure the release of detained trade unionists, COSATU education officer, Alec Erwin pointed out that although Northern Natal was COSATU's smallest region "it is the only region which has suffered such extensive and wide ranging detentions..."

At least 22 organisers and shop stewards in the Richards Bay/Empangeni region from COSATU-affiliated unions and from the Motor

Industry Combined Workers Union (MICWU) were detained under emergency regulations. "By contrast," said Erwin in his affidavit, "the Southern Natal region which functions in exactly the same way... has approximately 90,000 members in its affiliated unions and with the exception of two organisers employed by its affiliated unions in Newcastle" not a single official or shop steward was detained.

Erwin pointed out that the COSATU Northern Natal region and Newcastle both fell within the Northern Natal division of the South African Police. "The only inference which can be drawn is that their arrests and detention result from a conscious decision by the police officers responsible... either to destroy or to handicap severely the activities of [COSATU] and its affiliated unions in the area of the Northern Natal command."

The detentions came in two waves - six key officials and office bearers - Jerry Ntombela, Jeffrey Vilane, Willis Mchunu and Vincent Mkhonza of MAWU, Tom Mkhwanazi of FAWU and Matthews Oliphant, COSATU regional secretary, were detained shortly before the emergency was officially announced. But three days later, on June 15, police entered a venue where a COSATU regional executive council was being held and simply detained everyone present.

Other unions in the Newcastle area - affiliates of the Council of Unions of SA (CUSA) - were also affected by detentions.

Unionists in the area, who have since been released from detention are certain that UWUSA played some role, even if it was indirect, in the detentions. Erwin articulated some of these suspicions in papers before the court. (14) UWUSA, he said, had been the only union unaffected by the detentions. It had been "most active and vigorous in recruiting support in the Empangeni/Richards Bay area, Isithebe and Newcastle and the effect of the detentions... is to leave UWUSA unhampered in these efforts whilst limiting the ability of the affected unions to respond to this challenge." A number of the individual detainees said in affidavits that they had been questioned about the relationship between their unions and UWUSA, or COSATU and UWUSA, while some were asked their views on Inkatha.

The effect of the detentions - particularly on UWUSA's operations in the area - are clearer. Several workers and union officials complained that UWUSA had approached some companies and "asked for recognition" while COSATU members were in jail. Coming less than two months after the attack on Vilane's house, many shop stewards

- northern Natal -

saw the detentions as linked to attempts to destroy their unions: "UWUSA thought it would be able to take over our members when our leaders were detained," said a MAWU shop steward.

The UWUSA national organiser, Gumede, is quick to distance himself from the detentions, though. Gumede said he was "not happy" that so many trade unionists had been detained under the state of emergency. "I don't see why the Government should interrupt a unionist's work unless he starts involving himself in political affairs. But I was really shocked when I saw that all the Northern Natal unionists had been detained." He said UWUSA had not asked for "recognition" in factories in the area but had asked for access to workers, in order to recruit members. There was an important distinction between the two requests, he said.

What constitutes an "involvement in politics" is of course the important question in the area. Many of the Alusaf shop stewards, for instance, argue that UWUSA, being so closely linked with Inkatha, is an example of the undesirable situation of a political organisation involving itself in the labour field. And, in part, an answer to the inference that those unionists who were detained were involved in "political issues", COSATU regional secretary, Matthews Oliphant, described how surprised the unions had initially been at the widespread detentions: "When the state of emergency was declared there was no reason why we as trade unionists should have been affected, because there is no UDF or AZAPO in this area that we could be associated with..." There was a suspicion, he added, that there was some sort of pattern at least in the initial detentions, which was particularly apparent in Newcastle.

"If you look at those detained they were from unions with no recognition agreement, for example, TGWU has had a recognition agreement for two or three years with the local bus company and the TGWU organiser was the only one of four key unionists not detained. Those detained were actively involved in organising, for instance, workers at ISCOR and Defy. This made us reach a conclusion that in a way the state must have been helping UWUSA to organise."

But there is no sign that the majorities in organised factories have been threatened during the emergency, even though, according to some officials, shop stewards meetings did not take place with the same regularity because of an intimidatory and frequent police presence at the union offices.

Union organisation in the region

The most striking feature of the Empangeni/Richards Bay industrial region is the number of small firms it incorporates. According to the chairman of the Zululand Branch of the Natal Chamber of Industries (ZNCI), R A Barbour, out of 112 members of the Chamber, 88 employ less than 150 people. Alusaf, the giant aluminium smelter in Richards Bay, is the largest employer in the region with about 2,500 employees. Other large employers are the Richards Bay Coal Terminal (about 600 workers), Richards Bay Minerals (about 1,500 workers), the Mondi Board Mill at Felixton and the paper mill in Richards Bay, Triomf and the Tongaat-Hulett's Sugar Refinery.

With the exception of the Hulett's Refinery, all of these plants are organised by COSATU-affiliated unions and have had recognition agreements in operation for some time. Richards Bay Minerals was organised by the National Iron, Steel, Metal and Allied Workers Union (NISMAWU), which was once affiliated to the United Democratic Front through the National Federation of Workers. However, the union has now disbanded and merged with MAWU. Tongaat-Hulett's has a recognition agreement with Selby Nzibande's National Sugar Refining and Allied Industries Employees Union although the security guards in the firm belong to the TGWU. Nzibande's union, allegedly established with the support of the sugar companies, affiliated to Inkatha in 1984. But in 1985 an official found irregularities in the union's accounts and Nzibande fell out of favour with the Inkatha leaders. (15) So the relationship between UWUSA and the sugar union is difficult to determine, but according to TGWU members at the refinery, UWUSA has no presence there.

By far the strongest unions in the area are the former FOSATU-affiliated unions, especially MAWU, which was the first to establish a presence in Richards Bay. However, the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (CCAWUSA) has also established some presence in the larger retail stores with which the union has a national agreement. But, according to a Checkers shop steward, the union has had more difficulty securing a strong base in the smaller shops and foresees a tougher battle with UWUSA on that terrain. The Food and Allied Workers Union is organised and recognised at four major factories in the area as well as at a number of small food factories. One of the FAWU factories is at Ngwelezana, in Kwazulu itself, but FAWU shop stewards and officials say there have been "no complaints" about UWUSA in any of the factories in which they organise.

- northern Natal -

The Transport and General Workers Union, which has its strongest regional presence at the Richards Bay Coal Terminal, where TGWU president, Ntombela works, has also organised the municipal workers in Empangeni, and in trucking firms and building products industries. It has about 2,000 members in the Richards Bay/Empangeni region. A major gap in its organisation is amongst workers employed by the Empangeni Transport Company. The RBCT workers are, according to unionists and employer sources, less solidly opposed to UWUSA than appears to be the case in Alusaf but even then, only a handful of RBCT workers have joined the new union. However, as was the case in Mondi, the small group who have done so are a potentially disruptive force in the factory.

Ntombela said the effects of UWUSA had been twofold in the factory: on the one hand, the formation of the new union had turned previous Inkatha supporters against Inkatha because of its obvious support for a union which threatens to divide workers on the shop floor. "We had people who happened to join UWUSA, maybe because they were accused of being ANC, UDF or whatever if they supported COSATU, but now they are following their inner feelings and coming back to the union," said Ntombela. On the other hand, UWUSA's presence is causing conflict with the management on a wider range of issues than would normally be the case. "After we completed our wage negotiations," recalled one RBCT shop steward, "The management came up with the information that UWUSA had written to them to request a meeting and they were considering meeting with it. We asked them on what basis they could do this as UWUSA was not representative in the factory. They stated quite clearly that although UWUSA hasn't got a majority they would meet and explain the situation to them... We quarelled and told them that if they carry on with UWUSA they must know that they are doing it on their own. We told them we are against bosses' unions."

The Paper Wood and Allied Workers Union - in which the key UWUSA initiators were both senior office bearers - has lost two Zululand furniture factories recently. One of them was the workplace of D J Mtiyane, once a PWAU president, now a strong supporter of UWUSA. However, local COSATU officials put the loss down to local dynamics. The area where the factories are situated, they explain, is "very rural", where people live in communities under tribal chiefs. But PWAU is reported to have retained its strong presence at the two Mondi Mills, despite Gumede's defection. In the Felixton Mill, which employs about 500 workers, shop stewards have been discussing union unity and the possible effects of UWUSA. Since UWUSA's

launch, six months ago, only two people have submitted resignations to the union.

At the Sappi factory in Mandeni (near Isithebe), shop stewards told officials that workers "showed some confusion" shortly after the massive May Day rally at Kings Park to launch UWUSA. Many were Inkatha members and were "confused because they had to be loyal to PRAWU as well as to the Zulu monarch", explained a COSATU official. According to unionists in the area, the workforce is relatively stable and most of the workers, who have been there since the factory's establishment in 1973, are middle-aged or elderly men. Many workers were recruited by "traditional" methods. The workers tend to come from the same area and, certainly the older ones, were recruited through hierarchical tribal structures. But some of the initial problems appear to have been, at least partially, solved by holding a series of seminars with workers to discuss union policy and COSATU's policy, including its controversial resolution on disinvestment and its stand on bantustan policy. (16)

"At the end of two days", reported a COSATU official, many workers said clearly that they were members of Inkatha, but they agreed on one point: that Inkatha had made a mistake by forming UWUSA... One old man told us that he had resigned from the Mandeni Branch of Inkatha and gone to his tribal home to join Inkatha there. He said he was doing this because the local branch of Inkatha refused to give COSATU meeting places and because they had tried to get workers to resign from PRAWU... So we are trying to develop these discussions on COSATU policy with shop floor leadership." (17)

In MAWU factories, said a union official, "we said to workers: have you sent your shop stewards to the management to tell them to pack off. Inkatha is just using cheap propoganda by saying the unions want to deprive workers of jobs... But where Inkatha loses the battle is that we talk simple language: we go direct to the townships and factories and I must say we have had success."

The Metal and Allied Workers Union has about 4,000 members in the Northern Natal region, including those in Isithebe. The union's strongest and oldest factory in the area is Alusaf, where MAWU has about 1,600 out of the 1,800 production workers as members. (18) MAWU has a majority at nine factories in the area - four in Richards Bay/Empangeni and five in Isithebe. All except one are on stop orders and all except three have signed recognition agreements with the union. There are only two big factories - both in

- northern Natal -

Isithebe - comprising about 750 workers, at which the union has not organised a majority, although it has members in both. It has lost members at three smaller factories in Isithebe in the past two years, either through strikes or through the dismissal or retrenchment of key union members. Because the industrial court does not operate in Kwazulu, it has often been difficult for the union to fight victimisation cases. (19) At one factory, where 18 MAWU members were "retrenched" the company even re-employed 18 others shortly afterwards.

MAWU is organising another five factories in Richards Bay/Empangeni, some of which were inherited from NISMAWU. Of these, the largest employer employs 50, the smallest, 12. Vincent Mkhonza, formerly a NISMAWU organiser, now with MAWU, stressed the importance of organising all the small firms, because of their preponderance in the area. In each of these factories the union is experiencing problems with apparently obstructive managements, who are reluctant to negotiate recognition agreements although MAWU has majority membership in all the plants.

It is in the smaller factories where the unions fear the influence of UWUSA because, isolated, the workers are relatively weak. MAWU has provided detailed allegations of management's stalling on recognition agreements in these factories. At one factory, with a workforce of about 50 and a union membership of 40, management has delayed signing a recognition agreement on the grounds that it must get exemption from the industrial council to do so. Meanwhile, says MAWU, its members are being retrenched.

In another factory with a workforce of 12 and a union membership of 10, management has allegedly told MAWU members they will not be retrenched if they leave MAWU to join UWUSA. At a scrap metal company with a workforce of 35, workers report that management "openly" say they do not want a COSATU union at the plant but would prefer UWUSA.

Isithebe, which is about three kilometres away from the industrial area of Mandeni, but defined as part of the Kwazulu homeland, is the area where MAWU is experiencing the most problems. Those problems, though, do not seem to originate principally from any vigorous organisational campaign on the part of UWUSA, but rather from what union leaders describe as an obstructive attitude on the part of various managements, many of whom shelter behind the fact that Isithebe is a decentralised area in a homeland which is

entitled to exemptions from portions of the labour legislation pertaining in South Africa.

Organising in a homeland

Isithebe is a deconcentration point within the Kwazulu homeland. The former FOSATU unions have been campaigning for several years to have South African labour legislation extended to include workers in Kwazulu, who are not protected through legislation which applies to workers in the "white" areas of South Africa.

In terms of the National States Constitution Act of 1971 homeland governments have the power to make their own regulations in the labour sphere. According to an article by labour lawyer, N Haysom (20) Proclamation R84 of 1970 also sets aside all sections of the Labour Relations Act in homelands, including minimum wage legislation, in an obvious attempt to entice investors to decentralisation points in the homelands. In 1984 the Kwazulu Legislature attempted to reintroduce the Wiehahn amendments into the homeland by amending the (then) Industrial Conciliation Act. However, according to Haysom, the legislature overlooked the fact that the original act did not apply in Kwazulu. The applicability of the new act (which, unlike the central statute allows unions to affiliate to political parties) has been the subject of some legal dispute. (21) In 1984, the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union went on strike at Imbali Breweries which is owned by the Kwazulu Development Corporation (KDC) in support of a demand for a minimum wage of R300 a month. The company disputed union claims that it fell within the ambit of South African labour law, as it was situated in Kwazulu. (22) Although the wage dispute was settled, the question about which law applied was not. Now, according to Mare (23), it has been established that South African labour legislation applies in Kwazulu, but "growth points" like Isithebe are subject to exemptions on provisions which would normally cover minimum wages or the Industrial Court. Thus there are still no legal safeguards for workers.

Before UWUSA was launched and before the attack on Vilane's house, Vilane stressed the importance of extending South African labour legislation to cover union members in Kwazulu, particularly in Isithebe, which now has industries employing about 15,000 workers. (24) In 1982, Vilane said, the FOSATU regional representatives asked the Kwazulu government to extend South African legislation to cover Isithebe. The two major concerns of the unions were the

- northern Natal -

lack of minimum wage protection and the possibility that the Kwazulu government might introduce clauses in its own legislation, as Bophuthatswana had done, stipulating that unions in the area must be registered in Kwazulu.

Ntombela, speaking at about the same time, said that managements which had refused to recognise unions had told union representatives that they had been informed that no unions would be operating in the area. "So we tried to push them to the court only to find there was no law under which we could take them to court. So we in FOSATU had to run up and down to Ulundi to try to force them to review the legislation... This legislation hasn't been passed yet and workers have still got no legislation protecting them. So it is clear, even to a child, that the Kwazulu Government has no interests of the workers at heart..." (25)

Six months have passed since the launch of UWUSA and workers in Isithebe are experiencing the same legal constraints, preventing them from going to the Industrial Court over a dispute or enforcing a minimum wage. Alusaf workers are even more distrustful about UWUSA's objectives than they were six months ago. "The shop stewards are asking why UWUSA does not organise all the Kwazulu government employees first, so that they will get the same benefits as we get here," said Vilane. "Here we are getting R2,40 an hour. We are not saying that is enough in terms of the rising cost of living, but our monthly wages are much better than those of the Kwazulu government workers. The shop stewards would like to ask UWUSA how that union thinks it can help them when they are getting, say, R10 a week..." (26)

MAWU is presently fighting a battle with one factory in Isithebe, the terms of which have been made more difficult because of the factory's location. The factory, Lennings Manganese, is a JCI subsidiary and, according to the JCI industrial relations spokesperson employs 325 workers of which 267 are MAWU members. The union negotiated stop order deductions in February this year, but is still battling to sign a recognition agreement. After months of negotiating, the union and management representatives are finally sitting down to draw up a recognition agreement, but have deadlocked on the second point: the definition of which Labour Relations Act to stipulate in the agreement.

When the formation of UWUSA was announced said a union organiser, "negotiations virtually came to a standstill. When we approached

them about the recognition talks, management openly said that they were waiting to see whether workers would like to join UWUSA." In an incident which has incensed the union, management released three workers, including a MAWU shop steward, during working time, to go to the house of a local town councillor. There the workers found UWUSA organiser Gumede who asked if they would introduce him to other workers in the factory with a view to recruiting members.

The union is wary about taking industrial action to hasten the signing of the agreement "because strikes have been used to crush us in Isithebe in the past". In 1984, said the organiser, there were several strikes, some of which resulted in the dismissal of shop stewards. Because labour legislation is an inadequate protection for workers in the area, legal cases cannot be taken up to fight victimisation.

The JCI spokesperson disagreed that management was trying to stall on the recognition agreement. Firstly, she said, management structure at the plant was "very shallow" so only the general manager could negotiate. The other problem concerned what legislation applied in Kwazulu. She admitted that the company had sent the shop steward and two other workers for talks with UWUSA representatives, but said MAWU was being too "sensitive" about it. "If I were them I would be more worried if we had released workers without a union shop steward... We are not actively encouraging any trade union to deal with us and UWUSA is not more favourable to us than MAWU... But the situation is that UWUSA is affiliated to the Kwazulu legislature and they have a right to come and see what is going on in their political area. If a Kwazulu MP wants to come here to look around, will MAWU accuse us of being linked to him?"

The impact of UWUSA on the shopfloor

It is no easy task getting membership figures or details of recognition agreements from UWUSA. M P Gumede, national organiser, said the union had members in Isithebe and had negotiated recognition agreements in factories "but I don't want to disclose how many... we have some textile and clothing factories, some paper factories and some metal factories..." In Richards Bay/Kwambonambi, the union had majority membership at two paper factories and two furniture factories at Port Durnford. But he could not give a figure for the number of members the union had thus far recruited.

call to the union's president in Durban, P S Ndlovhu also failed

- northern Natal -

to elicit more definite information. Ndlovhu said he could not give the information without permission from the union's general secretary, Conco, who is now based in Johannesburg. Asked for details on membership and recognition, Conco said that he "was very far removed from the scene" at that point, "but if you get in touch with the Durban office they might be able to help you". He eventually agreed to provide the information the following week but was then unavailable despite repeated attempts to reach him.

In spite of the new union's apparent reluctance to part with information, it would be naive to suppose that it has been unable to recruit members. Whether it has signed recognition agreements is not clear. According to a report in the New Nation (27), UWUSA claimed to have signed 200 recognition agreements since its launch - on average more than one a day - a claim dismissed by COSATU as entirely unrealistic. According to van Niekerk (28), by early May UWUSA had "picked up three plants in the Transvaal... and [had] claimed majority at a number of plants in Natal", including the two furniture factories mentioned above and at two paper factories formerly organised by PWAU in the Newcastle/Ladysmith area. Nevertheless, Conco's claim in April (29) that some COSATU unions might join UWUSA seems to have come to nought.

UWUSA also claims, according to the New Nation, to have had over 100,000 applications for membership and to have processed only 35,000 of these. It is almost impossible to verify these figures without UWUSA providing details of where their membership comes from, though. While it is common cause that UWUSA have made headway in some factories and that they have members in factories organised by COSATU unions in Northern Natal, their claims to 200 recognition agreements and a 100,000 strong membership are difficult to reconcile with the experience of the former FOSATU unions which have been organising workers for the past 14 years and have seen nothing like the rapid rise in membership claimed by UWUSA.

There is another theme, relevant here, which gets repeatedly stated by organised workers in Northern Natal, and that is the marked material benefits which union organisation has brought them. The TGWU, for instance, negotiated a 55 percent pay rise for municipal workers in Empangeni this year, and TGWU members at the building materials firm, Fondor, are now among the highest paid in the region, earning R2,96 an hour. A Corobrick shop steward said that before TGWU organised the factory last year "the wages were very bad. We were earning R58 a week, now we are

earning R103 a week. When UWUSA was formed there were no workers' in our factory who were interested, although they approached us. They see it as just being against our union."

A RBCT shop steward said that since the union's arrival in the plant four years ago, the wages had risen 100 percent. "When UWUSA was launched there were some people with mixed feelings about Inkatha. But I think what brought them back is the way in which we handle union matters.. the way we win wage increases and fight dismissals.." A TGWU member at Tongaat-Hulett's said UWUSA had tried to recruit at Hultrans, the cartage section of the refinery "but their members were dismissed and when no-one from UWUSA came to protest they lost interest and said that the union must have been supported by employers..."

Protection against dismissals is one of the first things mentioned by Alusaf workers when asked to compare the pre-union era with the present. "The first thing that MAWU did when it arrived here was to close the gate," recalls one shop steward.

It is this sort of tradition and reputation which the COSATU affiliates - particularly the previous FOSATU unions - have established in the region and it is likely to prove a major battle for UWUSA to undo the confidence which organised workers have in their unions. The gaps, for COSATU, are at smaller factories where there are no recognition agreements and at unorganised factories. A major gap is in the textile and clothing sector in Isithebe which employs about 5,000 workers. (30) The National Union of Textile Workers has not been able to organise there for various reasons, one of which is the vagueness of Kwazulu labour legislation and inadequate legal protection for newly organised workers who might be victimised. According to Oliphant, the SAAWU-linked SATAWU had also planned to organise textile workers in the area, but so far there is no indication of what progress it has made. But it is the most vulnerable area for the COSATU affiliates. UWUSA's Gumede claims to have recognition agreements with textile and clothing factories in Isithebe, although he has not provided details.

UWUSA strongly denies COSATU unions' claims that it has "organised" primarily through management. Gumede said UWUSA had asked management for access to factories "but we don't ask them to help us recruit .. you can't ask for a recognition agreement if you have no members so we ask for access so we can recruit members as union do in other industries, for example, the National Union of Mine-

- northern Natal -

workers.." Gumede confirmed the incident at Lennings Managanese where workers had been sent by management to meet him but said there had been a "misunderstanding" amongst workers themselves. He said the workers had not known there were (already) shop stewards at the factory, but when he (Gumede) had found out he had told the workers "that we were not there to change the structure from MAWU to UWUSA".

It is conceivable that unless the COSATU affiliates organise all the smaller firms in the region that UWUSA's approaches to those managements might undermine a COSATU presence in those firms. But it is only a possibility. As yet, the consequences of UWUSA's presence in the region has not even been discussed in the local division of the Natal Chamber of Industries (ZNCI), according to the chairman, Barbour, who is also MD of Alusaf.

UWUSA has never approached the ZNCI and Barbour said no employers in the Chamber had raised the matter in meetings although the Chamber had advised them soon after UWUSA's launch "not to get involved in the conflict". Another employer source confirmed the "substantial impact" that unionisation had had on the area. Wage levels in manufacturing in the region were now on a par with wages throughout the country, he said, "which creates problems for the municipalities and the farms". He said UWUSA still seemed to be "getting its act together" and was sceptical about whether the new union would achieve the same levels of organisation as the COSATU affiliates had done, unless some section of the workforce "was so predominantly Inkatha that it acts as an "open sesame" for them. "But I believe that the average worker looks on UWUSA with some scepticism because it hasn't grown up from the shop-floor, but from the top down. It might have turned into a real political blunder for Buthelezi to have created this union."

UWUSA in the community

UWUSA's immediate impact was felt more at the level of the community in Northern Natal than at that of the workplace. With the formation of the new union and the official souring of relations between Inkatha and COSATU, Inkatha-controlled town councils in the region immediately banned all meetings of COSATU affiliates in townships in the region.

In Mandeni, workers have negotiated with the local council to secure venues for meetings, but in eSikhawini, all union meetings

- even report-backs on wage talks are still banned. Gumede, who is a member of the town council said if unions wanted to report back to workers "they should not use the townships as a platform but should use the factories because that is where they are elected". Gumede might have forgotten that he told this writer, shortly after a planned COSATU May Day meeting was banned in eSikhawini, that although UWUSA had not applied for permission to hold meetings in the township he did not expect permission to be denied. (31)

It comes down, in the end, to politics. There is no real political opposition to Inkatha in Natal except (potentially) the trade unions. The United Democratic Front and its allies have no strong presence in most areas in Natal. (32) It comes down, then, to the increasingly acrimonious battle in the area about who the "true" representatives of the people are, a battle that first became apparent during the bus boycott and to which Gumede refers to make his point: "I don't think that unionists are being discriminated against," he said, "but for the sake of security things must be done under some sort of order. If for instance there is a general issue [like the bus fare increases... P.G.] and the members of a union elect representatives, why can't the union then join the town council for negotiation. Because if the unions follow the path of negotiation to use halls in the township, they will get the right to use those halls... But they don't want to follow that. They get a permit from the magistrate for the stadium only to find the stadium is controlled by the council and the council has the right to say no, no we can't allow you to use the stadium. But they want to be clever and they don't want to use the council."

Unionists for their part say they believe they should negotiate with the council in an attempt to regain the right to use workers' residential areas for report-back meetings. A MAWU official said that even though workers were reluctant to provoke full-on confrontation with "official" Inkatha leaders in the townships, "they were not scared to confront the councillors in Mandeni when they refused us the right to use halls there for report-backs on wage talks. And through that we have won the right to use the stadium there and the councillors can't go on mobilising impis because who are those impis going to fight? Other workers?" Unionists report that the Mandeni town hall was filled to capacity for the Kinross memorial service. "It shows that workers have not lost confidence and are mobilising themselves," said the official.

In eSikhawini, COSATU members defied the May Day ban and held their

- northern Natal -

meeting in the face of a strong police presence in the township. Later, a potential clash between "amabutho" returning from the UWUSA rally at Kings Park and COSATU supporters and youth was averted when a truckload of "amabutho" turned around, declining to intervene in a large May Day demonstration involving a substantial portion of the township, said union leaders.

More sinister perhaps, and less easily solved by negotiation, is the spate of violent attacks which COSATU leaders have suffered, particularly in the inland areas of Natal, like Ladysmith and Newcastle. Earlier this year, COSATU compiled a thick document, comprising affidavits of predominantly union leaders who had been assaulted or threatened or whose homes had been attacked. Many of the alleged assailants named in the sworn statements are prominent Inkatha leaders. There is also evidence that in several of the cases, the Kwazulu police knew about the assaults, and in some cases actively participated in the incidents. (33)

Although no UWUSA officials are directly implicated in any of the incidents, there is some evidence that UWUSA supporters were involved. Mandla Cele, for instance, a Municipal Workers Union official who is currently being held under the emergency regulations, said in a sworn statement that two witnesses had seen his house in Madadeni township near Newcastle being set alight by a group of people wearing UWUSA T-shirts on May 9, 1986.

But it would be naive to believe that Inkatha asserts dominance by a reign of terror alone. Many workers are ambivalent about answering questions about their feelings on Inkatha and a significant number of shop-stewards have opted to maintain a diplomatic silence on the issue. But violence is nevertheless an element of the increasingly apparent contradiction between organised workers and Inkatha. And the creation of UWUSA is another, which appears to be making organised labour in the region critical of some of the practises of Inkatha, if not of the organisation itself.

In 1979, when FOSATU was launched in the region, many shop stewards used to come to union meetings in "full Inkatha uniform", according to a union official. Much of the FOSATU leadership was in fact composed of workers who held prominent positions in the local Inkatha hierarchy, he said. Today it is neither surprising, nor necessarily contradictory for workers to come to shop steward meetings sporting Inkatha colours, but it is also clear that the material basis which made an alliance between workers and middle-

class and traditional Inkatha leaders has shifted substantially. In large part this is due to the contradiction between the interests of capitalist development in Kwazulu, supported by the homeland leadership, and the struggles of workers on the shop-floor in those areas. Other things have changed too. National politics, for instance, has left a certain stamp on the trade union movement and distanced it from Inkatha.

But while UWUSA may be a disrupting force for union organisation in the region, it seems it will prove difficult for the new union to substantially undermine the confidence that organised workers have built up in themselves and in their unions. Shop stewards and union officials have set themselves the task of confronting some of the issues which have caused discomfort among organised workers in the region, such as COSATU's disinvestment policy. But there is little sign of a substantial shift in union loyalties among organised workers. One elderly worker summed up his feelings to a union official when asked about UWUSA: "You see I was old when you people came with MAWU and I don't know why you didn't come when I was young. Now, too, this other union, UWUSA, has come with the news that it is going to fight COSATU. My question is this: if it is going to fight this strong COSATU, then when is it going to start fighting the employers?"

Notes

Most of this article has been based on interviews with the protagonists of the COSATU/UWUSA antagonism conducted during February, April, May and October 1986. Among those interviewed were MAWU officials and shop stewards in the region, TGWU officials and shop stewards, a CCAWUSA official and shop steward, a FAWU official, an ITW official in Durban and regional COSATU office-bearers and officials. Also interviewed were UWUSA officials, a representative of an employer body in Richards Bay and a JCI representative. Some of those interviewed did not want their names mentioned. Most of the attributions are mentioned in the main text and not in the footnotes below.

1. See M Morris, Lessons from May Day, Work in Progress 43
2. See interview with Simon Conco in SALB 11.5
3. Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi: speech at UWUSA rally, Kings Park, 1.5.86
4. See also P van Niekerk, "Drawing the battle lines: Inkatha and COSATU", WIP 42: van Niekerk speculated that there was

"nothing to indicate that UWUSA will represent a major threat on the shopfloor to COSATU outside of Northern Natal where its damage potential on the shopfloor and in terms of action against activists could be considerable."

5. G Mare and G Stevens, An appetite for power: Buthelezi's Inkatha and the politics of "loyal resistance", (to be published by Ravan Press, 1987)
6. ibid
7. ibid
8. Apart from the issues which have caused dissension between Inkatha and the unions, Morris (op cit) also points to deep contradictions in organisational style
9. The consumer boycott was a bone of contention between Inkatha and FOSATU in most of Natal. van Niekerk (op cit) describes how MAWU, which had organised a boycott of white shops in Howick to protest against the mass dismissal of BTR-Sarmcol workers, were forced by Inkatha to call it off
10. M Byerley, "The Empangeni/Richards Bay bus boycott", unpublished BSc (Hons) dissertation, UND, 1985
11. ibid
12. ibid, p53
13. Morris (op cit) in his discussion on strategy to counter UWUSA also warns against fighting Inkatha "on its own terms... [by] derogatory references to Zulu ethnicity, to Kwazulu as just another bantustan, personalised attacks on Buthelezi... If COSATU unions forget what brought them their strength and shift the terrain away from the correct handling of bread and butter issues in the factories... they will undoubtedly lose.."
14. Alec Erwin, COSATU education officer, in papers brought before the Natal Supreme Court in support of an application for the release of unionists detained in Northern Natal, August, 1986
15. see M Bennet and G Howe, "Contenders for labour in "KwaNatal": the UWUSA initiative", Indicator 4.1
16. Morris (op cit) describes a similar process at SA Tioxide, a factory organised by the Chemical Workers Industrial Union in Umbogontwini, where shop stewards have held weekly meetings to critically discuss COSATU policy. "This practise has forced UWUSA members to argue their case rather than make emotively ethnic appeals... and they have been unable to convince worker that UWUSA is a viable alternative..."
17. Morris (op cit) also argues that Buthelezi, by moving into the trade union terrain "ironically decreased the potential short-term support he could have demonstrated in his Kings Park rally" as workers who were Inkatha members equated attendance

- at the rally with support for a rival union
18. Interview: Jeffrey Vilane, vice-president, MAWU, October 1986
 19. see below for more detail on Kwazulu labour legislation. See also: C Cooper, "The homelands and trade unionism", SAIRR, 16.7.84; and SAIRR, Race relations survey 1984, Johannesburg, 1985, p321
 20. N Haysom, Indicator 2.4
 21. ibid
 22. Race relations survey 1984, p321
 23. Gerry Mare, interview, November 1986
 24. unpublished interview with Jeffrey Vilane, February 1986
 25. Jerry Ntombela, interview, April 1986, in SALB 11.5
 26. Vilane, interview, October 1986
 27. New Nation 6-19.11.86
 28. Van Niekerk, op cit
 29. interview with Conco, April 1986 in SALB 11.5
 30. interview with NUTW official, November 1986
 31. see P Green, "May Day courage in Northern Natal", SALB 11.6
 32. see van Niekerk (op cit) and Morris (op cit) for more details
 33. COSATU: Incidents of violence, threats of violence and assaults on unionists in Natal, COSATU document, 31.5.86
-

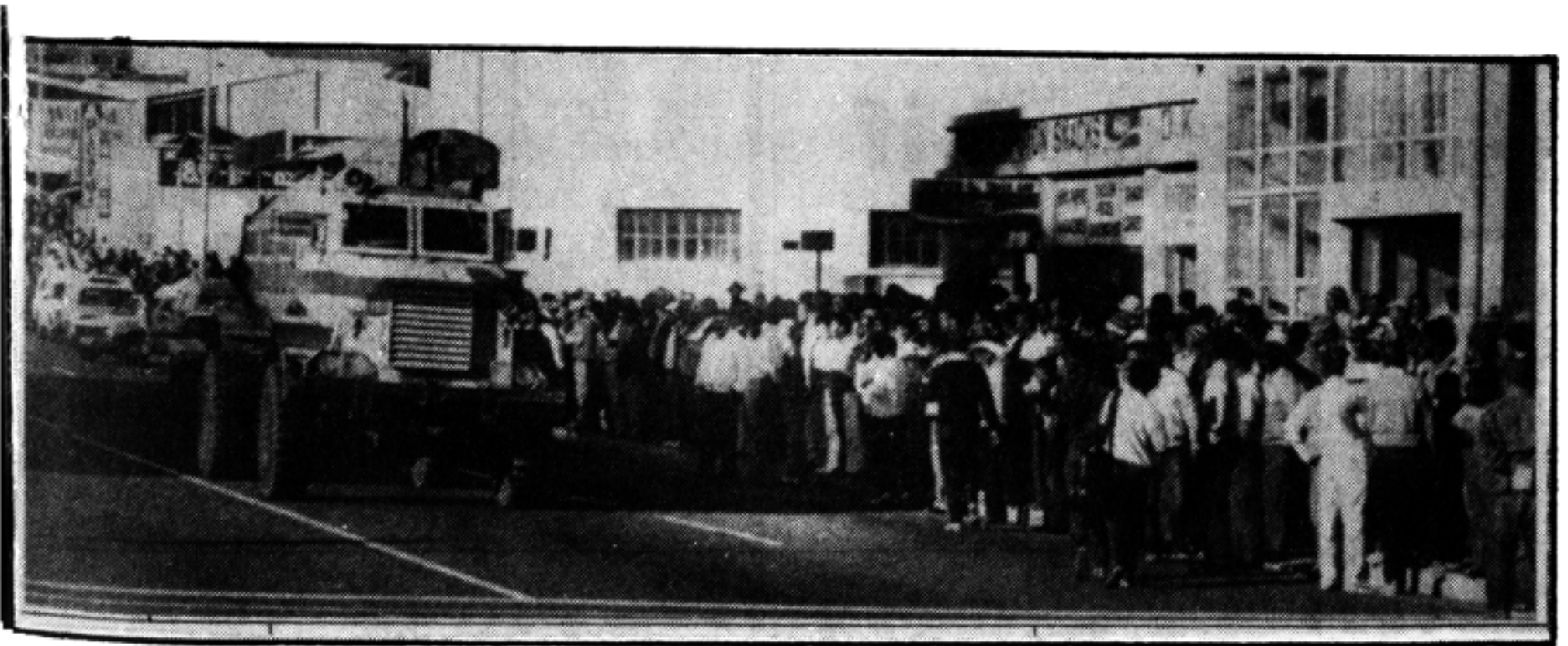


photo: part of a huge crowd that gathered in Kempston Road outside strike-bound GM, 10.11.86 (see overleaf)

The strike at General Motors

Glenn Adler

On October 29 virtually the entire black workforce at General Motors in Port Elizabeth downed tools and began a sit-in after management refused to accept worker demands drawn up in the wake of GM's recent decision to disinvest. Worker action came after weeks of mounting uncertainty following GM's admission on October 16 that it was "reviewing" its operations, and its subsequent announcement that it would sell out to a group of local executives. Incensed by GM's failure to notify or consult with them about the impending sale, and fearing a repeat of the disastrous Ford closures of 1985 workers asked that their pension fund contributions be paid out, for severance pay, and for the right to nominate two members to the new company's board of directors.

The strike, now (at the time of going to press) in its third week with no resolution in sight, is notable for the cooperation shown between long-term antagonists - the National Automobile and Allied Workers Union and the Motor Assembly and Components Workers Union of South Africa - and for the sustained level of worker militancy and solidarity in the face of get-tough tactics by the company and the security forces. But beyond such local concerns, the GM strike sharply defines issues of deep interest to the independent labour movement as a whole: a challenge to the form of GM's disinvestment, and the articulation of demands which could cut into the new company's power to define unilaterally the terms of its investment. Thus auto workers in Port Elizabeth, up against the cutting edge of sanctions, are now developing strategies to cope with the new terrain following the "South Africanisation" of heavy industry.

Background: crisis in the motor industry

The automobile industry has long been a barometer for the health of the economy as a whole. During the 1960s economic boom manufacturing activity and employment expanded greatly when newly-passed local content legislation required companies to use an ever-increasing percentage of locally produced parts in their vehicles. As in other parts of the third world, multi-national automobile manufacturers looked approvingly at the huge potential South

African (if not sub-Saharan) market and the high rate of return on investment. New investment poured into the country as Japanese companies set up production facilities for the first time and as the older players (Ford, GM, Volkswagen) expanded their operations.

Massive numbers of Coloured and African workers found employment in the growing industry, establishing the potential for trade union organisation soon to be taken up among Coloureds by the Western Province Motor Assembly Workers Union in the Cape and the National Union of Motor Assembly and Rubber Workers Union of South Africa in the Eastern Cape and among Africans by the United Automobile Workers Union, a parallel union to NUMARWOSA. These efforts were consolidated and expanded during the 1980 "living wage" struggle in Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage and by the merger of the three unions to form the non-racial National Automobile and Allied Workers Union (NAAWU) in late 1980. Gritty battles in Natal and the Transvaal successfully extended organisation into the newer plants in those regions, so that throughout South Africa workers successfully pushed up minimum wages and gained protection against victimisation and other management abuses.

But by the early 1980's the bloom had left the rose, as the motor industry slumped along with the rest of the South African manufacturing sector. Producers are now pinned by a powerful contradiction. On the one hand they must accept the technological requirements of their foreign-supplied designs, which demand ever more investment in expensive machinery and tooling to produce to ever more refined tolerances. On the other hand, the small South African market does not allow for economies of scale: the manufacturers do not possess the luxury of large volumes over which to spread their investments.

The contradiction is worsened by the depreciating value of the Rand pushing up the cost (in Rand terms) of imported machinery, tooling, and components. It has been estimated that exchange rate problems and inflation contributed to a 68% increase in industrial operating costs between October 1983 and September 1985. Even with massive price increases manufacturers found their profit margins shrinking: the ex-factory margin for small cars, the "lucrative mainstay" of the industry declined from 18% in 1983 to a bare 5% by 1985.(1)

Producers find themselves in the unenviable position of increasing prices in a contracting market. From a historic high of 300,000 units sold in 1981, sales last year barely passed the 200,000 figure, and are expected to slide even further in 1986. Even for white

consumers, who have always been the most important section of the market, new cars have become virtually an unrealizable luxury. Indeed, corporate fleet purchases now make up more than 70% of all new car sales, as individual buyers turn away from the new car market, hoping to find a second-hand bargain. (2) Half of the revenue earned by the motor trade in 1985 came from sales of second-hand cars, up from 37% in 1984, and the ratio of used-car to new-car sales increased from 1.5 to 1 in 1984 to 2.43 to 1 today. (3) In the meantime losses by the big producers have mounted year by year, and are expected to exceed R700 million in 1986. (4) At the simplest level there are too many manufacturers producing too many models at too high a price for too few buyers.

"Rationalisation" is the cure touted by the government as well as by the monetarist-minded economic press: a drastic reduction in the number of models, producers, and ultimately, jobs. In the past few years many manufacturers have dropped out of the market, led by the fast-disappearing Leyland, Alfa-Romeo, Renault, Peugeot, and Ford, which last year merged with Amcar to form the new South African Motor Corporation (SAMCOR), closing its Port Elizabeth assembly operations along the way.

The devastating effect of "rationalisation" can be seen in the employment figures for the industry, as employment declined from a peak of 50,000 jobs in 1982 to 39,000 in 1985. (5) The damage has been vastly more pronounced in Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage, as over the same period employment dropped by nearly 50% from 16,500 to 8,300. (6) Short-time, temporary plant closures and the perpetual threat of retrenchment continue to haunt those lucky enough to have a job.

The recent period of industrial decline presents extremely difficult problems for NAAWU. The loss of membership due to retrenchments and closures caused the union to redouble efforts to recruit new members outside its traditional base in the Eastern Cape, and the downturn has unavoidably forced union leaders to become as skilled in negotiating retrenchment packages as wage increases. But the most significant counter-offensive to the effects of "rationalisation" has been the effort by NAAWU to expand its base beyond the ailing motor industry, through the long-awaited merger with the Metal and Allied Workers Union, and the Motor Industry Combined Workers Union to launch a new national metal-workers union.

Economic crisis and sanctions

In the background to these local troubles looms the overseas sanctions movement. Tougher controls on new investment and the transfer of technology are key features of the sanctions legislation recently passed by the US Congress over President Reagan's veto. Direct investment from the US has been declining even without sanctions, and is down by more than 50% since 1981, as companies shy away from the increasingly unprofitable and unreliable South African economy. (7) For many US corporations the sanctions legislation thus offered a perfect opportunity to cut their losses while appearing to take a moral (and popular) political stand. European companies are not immune to sanctions, as pressure has lately been brought to bear on German firms, especially the big motor producers BMW, Mercedes-Benz, and Volkswagen. (8) A wave of uncertainty rolled through the VW plant in Uitenhage last August when workers learned that the German anti-apartheid movement was discussing possible measures against the local operation.

Many American companies have recently taken the path of least resistance, and are changing the form of their involvement in South Africa to comply with the terms of the new legislation. The general strategy involves selling off their operations to groups of local buyers on terms favourable to both parties. Through a licensing arrangement the local buyers, now the sole owners of the company, receive the right to import technology, designs, and components while the multinational receives periodic license fees and is freed from the costs and headache of running the local operation. Companies such as GM and IBM have sweetened the pot for local buyers, arranging comfortable loans to purchase the company, capital injections to liquidate debt, and offers to buy back the company at market prices at an unspecified future date. The local owners can run their company with less regard for foreign interference, either from the head office or from punitive sanctions legislation or codes of conduct. The multinationals can claim to be disinvesting while maintaining a rather profitable arms-length presence in the South African market, and while retaining the option to return should economic conditions change or sanctions pressure wane. (9)

In the short-term, at least, sanctions can have the unintended consequence of strengthening the very businesses they are meant to undermine. In the motor industry the latest sanctions-inspired shifts merely accelerate a well established trend toward local

- GM strike -

takeovers. Most of the major producers are tied up to one of the large banking/industrial houses: Anglo-American is the majority shareholder in SAMCOR, Nissan is part of the Sanlam stable of companies, and industry leader Toyota is owned by Wesco. Each of the locally-owned companies enjoys important benefits: lucrative fleet sales within their respective corporate empires, easy access to local capital, and freedom from sanctions pressure. The foreign-owned subsidiary, such as Volkswagen or, until recently GM, is now the odd man out.

The trend toward local buy-outs poses many problems for workers, regardless of whether the sale is inspired by sanctions or the ill-health of the industry. Such buy-outs can be accompanied by plant closures, relocation, retrenchments, or other methods of "streamlining" justified by the need to restore the company to profitability. But the most serious threat posed by "South Africanisation" arises from the probable loss of international leverage. more than most unions, NAAWU has benefited greatly from strong international connections, especially to the German metalworkers union, I G Metall, and the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF). These organisations have frequently intervened to assist NAAWU by pressurising the multinational parent company of South African subsidiaries. Such influence can be seen most dramatically in the role of the IMF during the 1980 Volkswagen strike, and more recently, by the influence brought to bear by the United Automobile Workers in the USA, assisting NAAWU's efforts to force GM to pay workers detained under the state of emergency.

The problems at GM

The present condition of GM illustrates the general trends sketched out above. The company has been saddled with the locational disadvantages of producing from the Eastern Cape for a PWV market, with no local partner to provide fleet sales and access to capital, with an antiquated plant and high labour costs. Starting in the mid 1970's with the phasing out of the popular Chevrolet line of vehicles, GM began a marked decline from the position of market leader which it enjoyed for many of its 60 years in South Africa, to its current standing as, at best, an also-ran. The company's market share currently hovers at about 7.9%. (10) In the last two years alone market share declined for both passenger and commercial vehicles, indicating that the company couldn't even hold its position in a declining market. Such market failures have had a profound impact on employment, as the GM black workforce shrunk

from an estimated 4,000 in 1982 to approximately 1,900 today. (11)

For at least the past two years GM has been actively looking for a way out. In early 1985 speculation focused on a possible merger with Nissan, while late last year the motor press carried numerous reports on merger talks between GM and BMW. In January the new Managing Director, Mr Bob White, gave assurances that GM was not considering disinvesting from South Africa or relocating to a merged operation on the Reef. (12) By May there were again hints that the company was reconsidering its position. White confirmed management was looking for a tie-up with a major South African corporation, though GM would not agree to any deal requiring it to leave Port Elizabeth or surrender management control. (13)

GM disinvests

"...this company will be here next week, next month, and next year."

- Bob White, MD, GMSA (16.10.86) (14)

Speculation over the company's future eased over the last few months, as the launch of the new Monza series, in which GM had invested more than R35 million, indicated at least a short-term commitment to remaining in South Africa. Thus few were prepared for the ominous October 15 announcement from the USA by General Motors Corporation (GMC) chairman Roger Smith that the parent company was reviewing its presence in South Africa for political and economic reasons. (15) GM South Africa did little to reduce tensions by refusing to comment on press reports. Following the announcement NAAWU shop stewards requested an urgent meeting with White. When they met on October 16, shop stewards claim that White denied there were any efforts to sell the company, and insisted Smith had been misquoted in the press. Nonetheless, GM spokesmen, both in Detroit and South Africa continued to refer to the "review" as a standard procedure. Notwithstanding the MD's assurances GM workers were becoming increasingly uneasy, especially as the daily press carried reports on high-level negotiations on the future of the company which on their face seemed to contradict the story offered privately by management.

The official announcement by GM of possible changes finally came on October 20, a full 6 days after the statement by Roger Smith. Over that period there had been no other meetings between shop stewards and top management or between GM and full-time officials

- GM strike -

of NAAWU or MACWUSA. The public statement revealed that GMC would be out of South Africa by 1987, as the parent company would sell its shareholding in the local company to a group of GMSA executives. There would be no tie-up with a South African corporation or local financiers. The 3,000 jobs in Port Elizabeth would be safe, and GMC would bring money into South Africa to liquidate GMSA's debts. White told a Johannesburg press conference that the plan for a management buy-out had been decided at a board meeting on October 6, ten days before Smith's shock announcement, and had been speeded up by six weeks to meet the mid-November sanctions deadline. (16) It stands to reason that the buy-out had been on the cards for sometime.

The announcement did little to satisfy workers, who felt the statement left many questions unanswered, including their own future status, the identities of the local executives who would buy the company, and the terms on which the sale would go forward. Indeed, if the MD or other executives had known about the buy-out on October 6 it is unclear why company spokesmen should have waited so long before revealing the truth or why the MD would issue the ambivalent and incomplete statement assuring continuity of "the company... next week, next month, next year." The ineptness with which management revealed its plans quickly destroyed its credibility, leading workers to distrust practically any statement issued by the company.

The second meeting between GM shop stewards and management came on October 21, during which the MD had the opportunity to clear the air about the changes with worker representatives. But shop stewards left the meeting feeling disappointed, saying they learned nothing they hadn't already read in the newspapers. Later that day the NAAWU Branch Executive Committee at GM called a general meeting of the membership for Thursday October 23 to report back on the meeting with management, to discuss the situation at the company and to develop a plan of action.

On October 23 a third round with the Managing Director failed to clarify matters, and the general meeting went ahead as planned. The meeting was hot and rowdy. The hall had originally been booked for 5.00 pm., but an earlier gathering of the Food and Allied Workers Union went over time, so the GM meeting did not begin until 6.30. In the meantime workers waited anxiously. A small number of workers, some who had knocked off work as early as 2.30, visited a nearby bottle store and were well on their way to being intoxicated

Many others were visibly angry at the course of events over the past two weeks. During the meeting speaker after speaker from the floor slated GM management, and as the condemnation grew more fierce, a call to down tools the following day received broad and enthusiastic support. An intervention by shop stewards and full-time officials introduced a measure of discipline into the meeting, and succeeded in modifying the immediate tools-down call. Workers would submit their demands to management: for a pension payout to workers who could then put their money into a provident fund jointly administered by the company and the union; for severance pay; and for the right to elect two worker representatives to the board of directors of the new company. A second meeting would be called the following Tuesday to receive a report-back on the management response and decide on further action. In the meantime union officials would have a chance to arrange local and international support for a possible strike.

GM management responded swiftly and negatively to the union demands. In an October 25 report in the Eastern Province Herald, which drew on a statement to be sent to the union on October 27, the company said it appeared that NAAWU was asking for some kind of "conscience money". (17) In the letter to NAAWU the company accepted "that the announcement may have caused some concern or apprehension... regarding the future viability of the company," but GM was doing everything possible to preserve jobs and ensure continuity of employment. As the conditions of employment would remain unchanged in the new company there were no grounds for making either pension or severance payments. The question of worker representation on the board of directors would have to be taken up with the new company. In an attempt to portray NAAWU members as prime antagonists, the letter went on to say "if among your Union membership, there are employees who are not prepared to support the new company and would like to seek other employment, then GMSA would be prepared, in individual cases, to provide normal retrenchment benefits." To which the letter chillingly added, "we believe there are sufficient unemployed people in Port Elizabeth area who would welcome the opportunity to join the new Company." (18)

The company's total rejection of the demands and the bald threat to hire unemployed workers to replace strikers effectively slammed the door on any resolution short of a strike. On October 28 efforts by the Managing Director to put his case directly to the workers on the shop floor met with little success. The workers had few other options than to decide, at a far more disciplined

- GM strike -

general meeting on October 28, to down tools the following day and to occupy the factory. In a statement issued after the meeting workers "expressed their disgust at the arrogance displayed by General Motors... concerning it's withdrawal from South Africa. At no stage had the Company indicated its willingness to consult, advise or negotiate... At no stage had the Company indicated to the Union who the new owners would be and on what terms and conditions the new company would be constructed." (19)

Workers down tools - GM goes to court

The following day, Wednesday October 29, virtually the entire black workforce of nearly 2,000 reported to the plant at the normal time, refused to perform their usual duties, and gathered instead in the factory canteen. The Industrial Relations Manager soon notified workers that their strike was illegal, not in the best interests of the company or its employees, and that the company had applied for an interdict declaring the strike illegal and requiring all workers to report for duty by Monday November 3 or face dismissal. (20)

Eastern Cape motor companies have seldom, if ever, attempted to obtain a Supreme Court ruling on the legality of a strike. Indeed the last legal strike conducted by NAAWU was at Eveready in 1978; the great battles of 1980 and 1982, and the many skirmishes since, these were all technically illegal, and it appears that none were conducted on the basis of a strike ballot. For workers the prompt action by the company to refer the dispute for legal judgement before any discussions could take place indicated an unwillingness to work toward a negotiated resolution. Earlier the company organised the management buy-out without consulting workers, and now its legal strategy demonstrated its lack of faith in the principle of face-to-face meetings with worker representatives to discuss and resolve problems. The company was attempting to obtain through the courts what other employers had achieved around a bargaining table. For its part NAAWU left itself open to the company's response by not following established procedures for a legal strike.

In his affidavit before the court, the Industrial Relations Manager made numerous allegations which, if anything, increased anger.

First, he seemed to undermine the company's firm public statements regarding the impending management buy-out. At one point in the document he described the uncertainty surrounding the withdrawal, which "might take the form of transfer of the shareholding in

[GMSA] or a transfer of [GMSA's] assets to a new company or some other form." (21) At another point he wrote that "at this stage it is not clear at all whether [GMSA] will cease its business operations or what form the withdrawal of [GMSA's] parent will take." (22) The point is a crucial one, as GM refused to offer severance pay because it claimed the company would continue to operate, but under different owners. Workers were therefore not sure which version to believe, intensifying feelings that they were not being given the full facts.

Second, and in spite of such declared uncertainty, he stated that GMSA "was concerned for the well-being of its employees as well as to put their minds to rest about their future employment prospects, the fate of their pension rights and the like." (23) Workers did not want their minds put at rest, but were eager to have their representatives brought into the discussions regarding the company's future, and to have their pension contributions returned to them before the company they had worked for or its current owners disappeared. The attitude of the company struck many as paternalistic, to say the least.

Third, he claimed that NAAWU and MACWUSA were engaged in instigating, inciting or conducting an unlawful strike. Workers viewed the claim as a slur on the independence of their own organisation, as the strike decision was decided in a democratic and disciplined manner over the course of a week, not foisted on them by a dictatorial leadership. Finally, he asked for the right to dismiss striking workers on an individual basis, should the dispute persist.

Management's hard line convinced many workers that there would be no hope of achieving their demands unless they continued to strike. Thus the early statements by management did little to contribute constructively to a solution, but led instead to increased solidarity among the striking workers. Ultimately Judge Jennett granted the rule nisi, requiring the union to give reasons by November 3 why the strike should not be declared illegal and management given the power to dismiss striking workers.

On the same day, top management met with full-time officials of NAAWU for the first time since the October 15 announcement by Roger Smith. No serious headway was made. Meanwhile workers were organising their factory occupation. Not much is currently known about the in-plant dynamics of the strike, but it seems that workers at the Kempston Road Plant set up a committee system to

- GM strike -

extend and decentralise the formal shop steward structure. Committees were established to consider important issues facing the workers, especially to discuss the proposals before the company and to organise sleeping arrangements, provision of food, and discipline. At the well organised Locomotive Plant, located a few kilometers north-east of Port Elizabeth at Aloes, such structures were in place long before the strike, and were easily adapted to the new situation. Wednesday night an estimated 500 workers occupied the Kempston Road plant, with another 160 at Aloes.

The role of discipline has received considerable comment from the company and in the press. In the second week of the strike perhaps twenty workers were tossed fully clothed into cold showers. The Eastern Province Herald described the incident as the first ugly turn in the strike, directed against workers who had gone home over night. (24) GM highlighted the events in its efforts to have the occupation of the factory ended by court-order, as the company was trying to prevent acts of violence and intimidation against employees who wished to continue working.

For their part, worker leaders claimed that discipline was necessary both to protect plant property and to prevent the possible divisive actions by agents provocateurs. They claim the cold showers were given only to workers who were either drunk or otherwise disrupting meetings. From the experience of the October 23 general meeting it is clear how a few intoxicated members can create serious problems for everyone else. Also, from the beginning of the strike most workers have chosen not to sleep in the factory, so it is unclear why the tactic would be used, as suggested in the press, to force workers to remain overnight, especially as there was no demand by the union that they do so. "We would have had to give showers to a thousand people," one worker commented.

The strike and occupations continued on Thursday and Friday, as discussions between union officials and management ended "inconclusively". (25) Workers finally left the plant on Saturday morning, preparing for a possible change in strategy pending the outcome of the court case on Monday November 3.

At the same time, in Johannesburg, a joint National Executive Council meeting of NAAWU, MAWU, and MICWU, the three unions poised to form the new metalworkers' union, issued a statement supporting the striking GM workers. The unions outlined a set of demands to be put to any company disinvesting from South Africa,

especially those selling out to local managers. Such companies must give sufficient notice to unions and workers, must provide full details of their plans, and must negotiate the terms of their withdrawal. The statement set certain minimum conditions for such negotiations, including the demand that the new company guarantee no retrenchments or redundancies following the withdrawal or sale, and that it recognise and agree to negotiate with representative unions. From the departing company the statement demanded a guarantee of minimum severance pay, that no benefits will be prejudiced by the sale, and that the full earnings of workers be guaranteed for a period of 12 months from the date of notification. The joint statement both built upon the efforts of the GM workers, and extended them to form an initial set of national demands for negotiating the terms of withdrawal of foreign companies. (26)

NAAWU states its case

On Monday November 3 workers returned to the Kempston Road and Aloes plants, but refused to take up their positions. At 9.30 am. the union was scheduled to present its case before Judge Jennett of the Supreme Court, and the workers would decide what to do following the outcome of the case. In an affidavit before the court, Fred Sauls, General Secretary of NAAWU conceded that the strike was technically illegal and that no strike ballot had been taken prior to the tools down.

Instead Sauls shifted the ground from the narrow question of legality to a consideration of the substantive demands made by the workers. "[NAAWU], he said, "does have very real understanding and sympathy with the plight which the strikers find themselves in and which resulted in the unlawful strike..." Referring to the 1985 Ford closures, Sauls claimed that NAAWU had successfully negotiated extensive severance benefits for approximately 4,000 workers who lost their jobs as a result of the merger. But the Ford pension fund, Sauls claimed, was governed by a committee appointed by management which could amend the fund's constitution at will. Sauls insists that the committee amended the constitution so that severance benefits were made payable out of the pension fund, and that the remainder of the fund was not liquidated but was carried over to the new company, SAMCOR; retrenched workers could therefore make no claim on the pension fund to which they contributed, as they were no longer employees of SAMCOR. The strikers fear that "they will not receive pension benefits or that the Pension Funds will be transferred to an unknown entity is [therefore] real and

- GM strike -

understandable." (27)

Workers were not asking for assurances from GMSA that the new company would continue to honor all agreements with workers. Instead they wanted their pension fund money to be paid out to them before ownership was transferred to the local executives. When management refused to negotiate over the issue, and when they failed to give any clear indication of what their intentions were or how GMSA would continue its operations, a strike was the only weapon available to the workers to achieve their demands.

The company, perhaps in a bid to open space for negotiation, asked for the decision of the court to be postponed for ten days. Thus there was no clear judgement arising from the case, even though NAAWU agreed that management had the legal power to dismiss striking workers. Workers at the two plants decided to continue the strike and the sit-in. In a letter to the company the lawyer for NAAWU emphasised that "[GMSA's] persistent failure to disclose firmly what its intentions are, is the sole factor which has lead to the present situation." (28)

On Monday evening in Johannesburg GM held it's long-awaited press conference to announce details of the management buy-out, present the new management team, and introduce the new Monza. Yet again the executives ended up raising more questions than they answered. In contrast to past statements that the deal was being organised without participation by any South African corporation, one of the executives announced that GMSA had sought the help of a merchant bank, though he declined to name the bank. In spite of commitments to carry on the policies of GMSA, the same executive declared that the new company would reconsider GMSA's decision to ban sales of vehicles to the SAP and SADF. "I don't think any new company would start out by limiting its market opportunities," he said. (29) The Eastern Province Herald correspondent repeatedly emphasised the executives' failure to answer questions: "Despite intensive questioning, Mr Prince [the new MD]... declined to disclose any details of the financial negotiations," and Mr Prince "steadfastly declined to disclose any financial details of the transaction." (30)

Not surprisingly, workers continued the sit-in Monday night.

By Tuesday November 4 there were some signs that agreement was near. An afternoon meeting between management and union leaders created some movement for the first time. Management indicated a

willingness to discuss the pension issue, would refer the question of severance pay to General Motors Corporation in the USA, and the question of worker representation on the board of directors would be referred to the new company. The Industrial Relations Manager emphasised that no dismissals would occur nor would there be a lock-out until management had responded to union demands. The strike and sit-in continued for another day.

GM calls in the troops

To many observers it appeared that Wednesday November 5 could bring a resolution to the dispute: if management conceded ground on the pension pay out, strikers might be willing to return to work pending further discussion of the severance pay issue. But events took a completely different turn, and the dispute escalated.

There were two meetings on Wednesday between management and union representatives, both of which ended abruptly. In the first, between shop stewards and executives of the new company called to clear the air about the take-over, the meeting broke up after management began to discuss the strike issues. Shop stewards informed management that such issues could be discussed only by the designated joint union negotiating team, leading to a second meeting later in the day. At that meeting, between representatives of GMSA, including the MD, and the joint negotiating team, GMSA declared that while they were willing to discuss the pension issue, there could be no severance payment as "the assets of GM South Africa, which provide the basis for employment, remain intact, only the ownership is being sold." (31)

Furthermore, the company informed the worker representatives that it was unwilling to conduct any further negotiations while the illegal strike was in progress and while workers were occupying the plant. The MD instructed that workers occupying the plant vacate the premises by 3.45 pm. or face dismissal and eviction. He further requested that the union representatives convey his instruction to the workers. For its part, the union negotiating team insisted that management would have to notify the workers themselves, and asked for one last thing: that GM notify the union before bringing in the police. With that request the meeting came to a sudden end, ten minutes after it began. Sauls later said: "we were suddenly back to where we were last Thursday."

Later that night units of the SAP and SADF entered both plants to

- GM strike -

evict workers, who were asked to turn in their badges upon leaving the factory. The SAP liaison officer, Major Eddie Everson claimed that the eviction force was not exceptionally large, though union officials report there were at least 40 security force vehicles outside the plant on Kempston Road and a number of vehicles inside the gate. Workers in the canteen claimed that the building was surrounded by SAP/SADF personnel. With such overwhelming force ranged against them the workers decided to leave the plant peacefully. 567 workers were dismissed and evicted from the two plants. (32)

The next day, Thursday November 6, the company began the first lock-out of the strike to prevent workers from re-entering the plants and resuming the sit-in. The union negotiators brought the dispute to the Industrial Council, to initiate the procedures for arbitration or referral to the Industrial Court.

On Friday, November 7, NAAWU called another general meeting to discuss further strategy. More than 1,000 workers attended. The original demands were reiterated, and the additional demand was made that the strike would continue until all dismissed workers were reinstated. In a powerful display of unity with his dismissed comrades, one worker handed in his badge and asked others to do the same, saying those who continued to work would be choking his children to death. To shouts of "an injury to one is an injury to all", hundreds of workers began handing in their cards, creating a virtual rain of badges upon the stage. A proposal was put forward requesting workers from both plants to meet at Kempston Road on Monday November 10, to enter the plant, and to continue the strike where they ended on Wednesday when the strikers were evicted. Only two workers voted against the proposal.

Over the weekend management announced that the plant would be closed from Monday. They also indicated that the strike is taking its toll on the new model: GM is losing 60 Monzas a day and is now expected to suspend the launch of the vehicle. (33)

The situation thus remains deadlocked. Worker solidarity appears to be as strong, if not stronger, than at the beginning of the strike, and management has revealed its willingness to use any methods at its disposal to bring the workers to heel, including a massive show of force by the SAP and SADF. It is doubtful whether negotiations will succeed in resolving the dispute, and a long arbitration fight is expected.

Conclusions

At the first level the strike is about money; about the pension fund and severance pay. But at a deeper level the strike is about trust, or more appropriately the lack of trust. Workers do not believe their personal money will be safe, and do not want to bet on the security of their employment in the new firm because they don't know what the future holds. Memory of the Ford closures have something to do with the lack of trust, but the primary problem has been the behaviour of the company itself.

The actual GM statement leaked out in a most mysterious manner. It was then denied by local management. Efforts at clarification left questions unanswered. Announced plans were subsequently modified or retracted: no South African bank was participating, then the company announced the possibility of such a tie-up; GMSA policy would be continued, but later the company seemed to back away from its ban on sales to the SAP and SADF. There are many other examples. Once the strike started the company went to court to have the dispute declared illegal rather than talking with union representatives to negotiate a settlement. When the first chance for a negotiated settlement opened up the company called in police to evict workers and the opportunity was lost.

Workers are not asking for assurances on the future: they want their demands met, and beyond that they want to be involved in decisions that affect their future. They don't want to be told what is in their best interests but want to express their own interests through their own organisation. If the behaviour of GM gives any indication of what the new company is about then the future is indeed dark as such behaviour is a step backward to the period prior to the Wiehahn reforms.

The strike has thus far displayed a level of non-racial and organisational unity which has taken many observers by surprise. NAAWU and MACWUSA have worked closely together during the dispute, and many local UDF organisations from both the Coloured and African areas have joined the General Motors Support Group. The unified action by shopfloor workers, now in its third week, has enabled them to press demands on GM which threaten powerful management prerogatives, not the last of which includes the company's right to determine when and how it makes investment decisions. NAAWU, for example, has struggled for years to achieve worker representation on the company pension fund, and GM has never been keen to



photos: above workers vote to continue the occupation; below strikers hand in their GM badges in solidarity with dismissed comrades.



compromise on the issue. The strike thus represents a powerful effort by workers to roll back the "frontier of control", (34) to gain a measure of influence over fundamental processes which directly affect the wellbeing of workers and their communities. It's not surprising the company has opposed the strike tooth and nail, using methods seldom employed in an industrial dispute in the Eastern Cape motor industry.

In this context, however, NAAWU's failure to pursue a legal strike gave GM the opportunity to mobilise public opinion against the efforts of the union.

The gains which might be won in the dispute have important implications for the independent labour movement as a whole. The step by NAAWU, MAWU and MICWU to raise the demands on a national level puts employers on notice that any future disinvestment move will provoke similar responses from unions. Workers could lose a great deal as a result of some forms of disinvestment, but they could also lose from some forms of South Africanisation: a loss of international leverage, possible retrenchments, closures or other forms of streamlining.

The demands emerging from the GM strike take the first step towards addressing such threats. In doing so they move beyond the COSATU (and former FOSATU) resolutions on disinvestment. In the heat of the current strike workers are for the first time beginning to define what is meant by the general commitment "to ensure that the social wealth of South Africa remains the property of the people of South Africa for the benefit of all..." (35) The stress falls not on the question of support or opposition to foreign investment, but on a discussion of control over investment, towards the participation of workers in determining the character of investment, regardless of its source. (36)

The companies must guarantee that no retrenchments follow from the withdrawal or sale, and that the new owners recognise and agree to negotiate with representative unions. Companies, such as GM, which long argued against disinvestment on the grounds that it would hurt workers are now being put to the test to guarantee that their own withdrawal will have as few negative consequences for those workers as possible.

Corporations, especially those in the motor industry, have long accepted constraints dictated by the South African Government, the

- GM strike -

local content legislation being the foremost example. The emerging demands for worker control are not fundamentally different: they too are attempts to shape the form of corporate activity in the economy, but according to a set of interests traditionally ignored by capital. In the end the unity displayed by workers in disciplined, democratic organisations will be the only guarantee that companies will take account of such interests, regardless of whether the company is owned by foreigners or South Africans. Such unity has up to now been effectively displayed in the current strike by workers at General Motors.

Notes

* I am most grateful for the generous assistance provided by NAAWU and MACWUSA shop stewards at GM, as well as by Fred Sauls, Les Kettledas, and Gloria Barry of NAAWU. Thanks also to Steve Gelb and Martheanne Finnemore.

1. "Survival of the fittest for SA motor industry", Eastern Province Herald 20.10.86
2. "Motor makers perk up", Sunday Times 29.6.86
3. "Used cars take half the trade", Sunday Times 13.7.86, and "Used cars close to original prices as business booms", Sunday Times 6.8.86
4. "Survival of the fittest for SA motor industry", Eastern Province Herald 20.10.86
5. P Green, "PE auto industry - The end of an era", SALB 11.6
6. "49% drop in car plant workers", Eastern Province Herald 14.3.86
7. "Sanctions: brace for a tougher line", Eastern Province Herald 14.11.86
8. "Politics threaten more motor firms", Star 28.8.86
9. The discussion follows Duncan Innes' cogent and timely argument "The more they depart, the more they remain", Weekly Mail 24.10.86
10. "Survival of the fittest for SA motor industry", Eastern Province Herald 20.10.86
11. M Finnemore, "The mobilisation of black workers in the auto industry in the Eastern Cape, 1970-1983", MA thesis, University of Port Elizabeth, 1984, p226
12. "GM in PE to stay - White", Evening Post 23.1.86
13. "R35m GM plan for PE", Evening Post 30.5.86
14. "GM won't talk on SA future", Evening Post 16.10.86
15. "GM's SA operations for review", Evening Post, 15.10.86

16. "PE men to take over GM by 1987", Eastern Province Herald 21.10.86
17. "Union separation payments demand dismissed by GM", Eastern Province Herald 25.10.86
18. Letter, G F Stegmann, Director of Personnel and Public Affairs to L Kettledas, Regional Secretary NAAWU, 27.10.86
19. NAAWU press statement, 29.10.86
20. Inter-office memorandum, General Motors, 29.10.86
21. Affidavit of Robert McIlwaine, in the matter between General Motors South Africa (Pty) Limited and National Automobile and Allied Workes Union and Others, in the Supreme Court of South Africa (South Eastern Cape Local Division), case No: 2857/86 p2
22. Ibid p3
23. Ibid p2
24. "Price hopes for quick solution", Eastern Province Herald, 4.11.86
25. "Talks to end GM strike deadlocked", Eastern Province Herald 31.10.86
26. Press statement from NAAWU, MAWU, and MICWU, 1.11.86
27. Affidavit of Frederick Sauls in the matter between GMSA Pty Ltd and NAAWU and Others in the Supreme Court of South Africa (Eastern Cape Local Division), case No: 2857/86
28. Letter, P C van Staden, Venter & Kie to Messers. Oosthuizen, Hazell and Wilmot, 3.11.86
29. "GM deal - no clarity on finance details", Eastern Province Herald 4.11.86
30. Ibid
31. "GM asks police to remove 500 strikers", Eastern Province Herald 6.11.86
32. "GM sacks 567 strikers at PE plants", Evening Post, 7.11.86
33. "GM losing 60 Monzas a day in strike", Eastern Province Herald 10.11.86
34. E Webster, "A new frontier of control? Case studies in the changing form of job control in South African industrial relations", Carnegie Conference, paper no 111, 1984
35. "GM move welcomed by many", Evening Post 21.10.86
36. COSATU resolutions adopted at inaugural congress, December 1985 and at first Central Executive Committee, February 1986, p13
37. The discussion here follows the line or argument first developed in Stephen Gelb's seminal contribution "Unemployment and the disinvestment debate", SALB 10.6

Hard Labour

G Brown, Hard labour. A pictorial survey of labour relations in South Africa since 1979, I R Data Publications, 1985; R18.95

The author acknowledges that this book is neither comprehensive nor does it provide any new material. It is intended, rather, to "capture the mood and emotions of the time" in pictorial and graphic form. Certainly the material is well presented, much of it is interesting, and in places it is intended to be amusing.

It is this latter point which distinguishes the I R Data (an industrial relations journal put out by Levy and Associates, and with which the author is associated) approach to industrial relations. It is a game acted out by two sets of players, partly for the amusement of I R consultants, whose task it is to manage conflict between recalcitrant managers and bolshie unionists. The key, then, lies in an understanding of the human frailties of the actors involved. Thus personal gossip about trade union figures is the stock in trade of I R Data. By comparison personal details contained in this publication are mild; even so, they do suggest some of the likes and dislikes of the author and his associates.

The life-and-death struggle to establish trade unions in South Africa certainly had its lighter moments, but it was also accompanied by harassment from employers and the state, bannings and detentions, mass dismissals, victimisation, injury and even death. The heroes, the martyrs and the victims were all on one side of the class divide. If it was a game, for the losers - when they were workers - the consequences were devastating. And in this game there is one group that never loses - the I R consultants who pick up their fee regardless of the outcome.

For a publication which comes out of South Africa's foremost I R firm there are some curious omissions, errors and spelling mistakes. Biographical details for Chris Dlamini include his school record but omit the fact that he was president of FOSATU at the time of writing. (p51) Listing the participants in the unity talks in September 1985, South Africa's oldest progressive union, Food and Canning Workers Union, is overlooked, (pp99, 103) and the unions affiliated to the UDF warrant only a footnote. (p103) It is

also some considerable time since the Natal Sugar Industries Employees Union ceased to be listed as an affiliate of FOSATU. (p103)

Traditionally, the sphere of labour/industrial relations has been defined by I R experts to be separate from the sphere of politics. The real world is quite different and clearly the author is still coming to terms with this. The section on unions and politics is simplistic and confused. Gems include:

The grouping of unions which was to become the Federation of South African Trade Unions epitomised the non-racial or multi-racial approach of the early African National Congress and Charterist movement which envisioned a democratic meritocracy independent of racial consideration. (p84)

This section goes on to inform us that it was the black consciousness unions of the Council of Unions of South Africa which were more inclined to become overtly involved in political issues. In fact what the author goes on to describe is much nearer to the kind of "community unionism" associated with unions such as SAAWU (South African and Allied Workers Union).

Right at the beginning the author warns us that this book is written from a management perspective. This is true. But what interests us is the form that this bias takes. Let's take a closer look at the book's comments on the BTR-Sarmcol dispute. (pp51-2) MAWU (Metal and Allied Workers Union), says the author, was active at the Sarmcol plant "for a number of years". In fact the union had tried for 10 years to secure recognition from the company. At the end, the major sticking point was a clause which the union sought to insert giving protection against instant dismissal of workers engaged in a legal strike. Such clauses are being negotiated every day. Moreover, the Industrial Court has recently ruled, in the case of mineworkers at Marievale, that the sacking of workers involved in a legal strike, where those workers had negotiated in good faith, was an unfair labour practice. However, according to the author, this is a "fiercely controversial area of South African labour relations". Also this account of the dispute carefully suggests that Sarmcol only dismissed the entire workforce "after several incidents of violence". Alleged violence by strikers is highlighted, rather than the actual cause of the dispute: the refusal of management to grant basic trade union rights. It may be of interest to point out that the company's advisors include none other than Levy and Associates.

(Jon Lewis, 1986)

Divide and profit Indian workers in Natal

Shamim Marie, Divide and profit: Indian workers in Natal, Worker Resistance and Culture Publications, Durban, 1986, 134pp, R4.50 (R2.00 to trade union members)

The question of "unity in the struggle" has always been one of the most important problems facing political and trade union organisations in South Africa: how to build unity in the face of institutionalised apartheid and conscious attempts by the state and capital to exploit racial and other divisions to increase their own power and profits.

In recent times the, state has increased its attempts to sow disunity and conflict through its support for the notorious vigilante groups in many parts of the country, but organisations also face divisions of a more complex origin, which have found expression in the tragic violence and destruction, for example in Inanda in August 1985 (1), and in Crossroads and KTC in June 1986.

In an article on the relations between Indian and African workers in the February/March issue of SALB, Yunus Carrim noted that:

A fundamental task of the emergent trade union movement in South Africa remains to break down racial barriers and create a wider working class movement both on the shopfloor and in the wider South African society." (2)

Divide and profit is a conscious attempt to make a contribution to the task of building unity within an important section of the organised working class. Its aim is to trace the militant history of Indian and African workers in Natal, and to illustrate the benefits gained by workers when they were able to achieve non-racial shop-floor unity.

The book is divided into three sections. The first section focuses on the experiences of indentured Indian workers from the 1860s to the early part of this century, not only as labourers on the plantations and in the sugar mills, but also as workers in the towns and on the coal mines. Through a number of of vivid case studies, the book describes the harsh living and working conditions, isolation and extreme measures of control experienced by indentured

workers under this "new system of slavery".

The book aims to remind Indian workers of today of their very long tradition of resistance: after early attempts to appeal to the courts met with little success, workers turned to more militant action, as evidenced by the strike on the Newcastle coalfields in 1913, when over 20,000 Indian workers withdrew their labour. Resistance to anti-Indian racism and legislation was also organised by an emerging class of traders and professionals who founded the Natal Indian Congress (NIC), under the leadership of Gandhi. The book returns a number of times to explore the complex and often uneasy relationship between Indian political organisations, and Indian worker organisation up to 1945.

The second section covers a vast period, by looking at the growth of an industrial working class in Natal from the early 1900s, through the two world wars, to the 1960s. It focuses on two major themes: the growth of militant trade union organisation amongst Indian industrial workers, and repeated attempts by employers to use ethnic divisions to try and weaken this organisation. It credits the International Socialist League with the establishment of the first trade unions for Indian workers in 1917, and focuses on the period of consolidation of these unions between 1934 and 1946, the role of Communist Party members in building these unions, and the number of militant strikes characterising this period. It pays tribute, too, to the trade unionists of the 1940s and 1950s, who are remembered for their organisation amongst Indian workers. Interesting oral accounts are used to sketch profiles of leaders such as H A Naidoo, George Ponnien, P M Harry, Billy Nair, Monty Naicker and others.

This section also explores how the different positions occupied by white, Indian and African workers in the division of labour were mirrored in their separate organisational experiences. Often employers exploited these divisions, by using unorganised African workers against more militantly organised Indian workers. There were successful attempts to overcome these divisions, such as the strike by workers of the non-racial Iron and Steel Workers' Union at Falkirk in 1937. But sometimes attempts to build non-racial shop-floor unity failed, such as in the Dunlop strike of the 1940s by workers of the Natal Rubber Workers' Union. This section also deals with the tragic violence of Cato Manor in 1949, and seeks its roots in the poverty and bitter struggle to survive of its African and Indian residents, as well as in the rivalry between African and

- review -

Indian traders - exacerbated by anti-Indian sentiments whipped up by white politicians.

The somewhat uneasy relationship between the NIC and Indian workers gives way after 1945 to a much closer working relationship, after younger radicals assume leadership of NIC. This section traces the involvement of these organisations in the joint campaigns organised by the ANC and Communist Party. But it argues that from the early 1950s onwards, Indian workers are increasingly being victimised for these activities, and their involvement in militant trade unions declined. It details the establishment of SACTU in 1955, but argues that it was not able to stop the decline of Indian worker militancy. Since the repression of SACTU in the early 1960s, many Indian workers are now found in the conservative TUCSA-affiliated unions.

The final section takes the reader through the story of the 1973 strikes, and the resurgence of strong trade unions during the 1970s: "African workers had started to rise up. Indian workers stood by and watched." (p103) Using detailed oral accounts by union organisers, it explores the present problems faced by the emergent unions in building shop-floor unity between African and Indian workers. For the Indian worker-membership of TUCSA affiliated unions, Indian membership of the "strong, fighting unions" of the 1940s has been forgotten. They are further divided than ever before from their African fellow workers by their movement over the past 20 years into more skilled, supervisory and clerical jobs, by the effects of the Group Areas Act and other apartheid institutions, and by continued attempts on the part of management to foster divisions between Indian and African workers.

The book ends by stressing its most important themes: the past tradition of Indian worker militancy, and the need to build non-racial worker unity. It quotes the words of a union organiser:

The situation is not completely unhelpful. In many cases where Indian workers have joined they are strong union members and have helped to organise other Indian workers. What these workers have come to see is that Indian workers can't get any improvements for themselves using the old ways of keeping in the bosses' good books, taking samoosas and biryani for the boss and so on. The Indian workers are in the minority and the only way they can win any real improvements for themselves is by joining with the African workers in the strong fighting unions.

Worker literature

This book makes a valuable contribution to the growing body of "worker literature" in this country, and as such, cannot be reviewed merely in the conventional academic way: in isolation from the way in which it was produced, or its potential for reaching its intended readership.

The book arose directly out of a need expressed by trade unionists in Natal for material dealing with problems of achieving unity between Indian and African workers. The project began in the form of the production of a slide-tape show. In the course of close consultation with unionists, where the slide script was workshoped, the idea was conceived of producing a booklet which could accompany the slide-tape show, or reach unorganised workers. The author, Shamim Marie, also attempted to obtain feedback from shop-stewards and workers on the initial drafts of the book. Through establishing a close working relationship with worker organisations, she has succeeded in producing a book which displays a close sensitivity to the organisational needs of its intended readership.

The book is written in a language which is clear and accessible to its well-defined readership. Through the skillful use of authentic oral accounts, it allows workers and unionists of the past and present to speak of experiences with which the present worker readership can begin to identify. The value of this self-expression is that it gives a voice to those who feel voiceless, and thereby helps to overcome the sense of isolation and powerlessness.

To enhance its readability, the book also makes use of many excellent photographs, clear lay-out and large typeface. The book is relatively long, and this problem is addressed by a useful summary at the end of each section. It includes some useful suggestions of ways in which the book could be used by workers, and at the end, presents a helpful guide to readers on other publications on the subject. This guide might only have been improved by suggestions on where workers would find access to such publications.

Despite an inevitably degree of simplification, there is no reason why worker literature should not have the same historical accuracy and validity as other histories intended for a more academic audience. The historical accuracy of some key sections of the book has been questioned in a review article by Maureen Swan in the Weekly Mail (12-18.9.86). In addition I would argue that this book

- review -

suffers in some parts from a lack of contextualisation, and some inconsistencies and contradictions.

In particular, the role of Indian worker history needs to be more closely linked to the periodisation of worker history in general in South Africa. For example, the period of militant Indian worker organisations could have been contextualised against the background of the significant growth of black worker organisations in the 1930s and 1940s, and the formation of CNETU. The clarity of the book would also have been enhanced by a more careful consideration of the Industrial Conciliation machinery within which Indian trade unions were enmeshed, as the question of how both racial and non-racial trade unions co-existed and interacted during this period is far from clear in the book.

The second section of the book, in particular, covers a very vast period. It is often not clear exactly what period is being referred to, and it would have helped if some of the major phases of capitalist development within this period had been fleshed out more. Some confusion is also created in this section by the way in which it jumps around, both chronologically and thematically: for example, the question of the Trades and Labour Council would have been much more useful if it had been dealt with earlier, rather than in the section dealing with the radicalisation of political organisations, like the NIC, after 1945. It also contains some crude generalisations, for example "no Indian, African or Coloured worker was allowed in a skilled job" (p40 - time period unspecified), or "Most of the unions that formed SACTU were those from the 1930s and 1940s that were formed among Indian workers and had had a close relationship with the political organisations." (p74)

By any standards, the task the book set itself was a very difficult one: to summarise over one hundred years of Indian worker history in Natal. Despite its limitations, Divide and profit represents a valuable addition to a growing body of worker literature, and promises also to serve as a valuable resource in trade union education and organisation.

1. See A Sitas, "Inanda, August 1985", SALB 11.4, Feb-Mar 1986
2. Y Carrim, "Trade unionism in Natal: shopfloor relations between Indian and African workers", SALB 11.4, Feb-Mar 1986

(Linda Cooper, ILRIG, UCT)

Statistics and economic notes for trade unions

INFLATION - THE FORECAST FOR 1986 HAS RISEN FROM 18% TO OVER 20%

	Consumer Price Index (1980=100) September 1986	Annual Rate of Inflation (% increase over 1 year) September 1986
Cape Town	234.8	19.1%
Port Elizabeth	231.0	20.4%
East London	219.7	19.1%
Durban	234.5	16.6%
Pietermaritzburg	234.4	17.1%
Witwatersrand	237.5	20.2%
Vaal Triangle	243.8	20.5%
Pretoria	247.2	22.5%
Klerksdorp	228.9	20.7%
Bloemfontein	221.6	17.0%
OFS Goldfields	244.0	20.0%
Kimberley	227.9	19.3%
 SOUTH AFRICA	 236.7	 19.7%

SOURCE: Central Statistical Services

Inflation continues to rise

The annual rate of inflation has now risen each month since June. The Labour Research Service projection for December is 20.4%. This means that new wages that come into effect in December this year will have to be 20.4% higher than December 1985 if workers' living standards are to be maintained.

There is no prospect of an early drop in the inflation rate. This is unlikely particularly since the economy is now entering a mild upswing which will exert extra pressure on prices.

So it is improbable that the inflation rate will be below 16% next year (the Sanlam forecast). It may possibly exceed 17% (JCI,

- statistics -

Mathison & Hollidge, Sankorp, Old Mutual). Old Mutual expects 20% or more in 1988!

One of the main reasons for the sharply higher inflation rate has been the increase in food prices. The food price index in August was 22% higher than the previous year - the biggest rise in five years. Food prices form a larger part of workers' spending - hence they will be hardest hit. The drought and the sharply higher meat prices will continue to push up food prices in the coming months.

In this dangerous situation, the best the government can offer is the comment of the Minister of Manpower: "There is no solution in sight for South Africa's inflation problem." (Business Day 29.10.86)

Trade unions will have to continue to pitch their minimum demands well above 20% if they are to have any chance of preserving (let alone improving) their members' living standards. Furthermore, short agreements (of not more than 12 months) will be essential so that unions are not locked into inflexible fixed-increment agreements for long periods during which legal strikes will be impossible

(Labour Research Service, P O Box 376, Salt River 7925)

LABOUR RESEARCH SERVICE - Vacant Posts: 1987

The Labour Research Service, which provides research back-up to trade unions on wage bargaining will have further posts for trainee researchers in 1987. Applications are invited from persons who:

- * have obtained matriculation or higher qualifications
- * are numerate
- * are diligent
- * are committed to the progressive trade union movement.

Thorough training in basic labour research methods will be given. Posts may be full-time or part-time. Salaries depend on experience and qualifications. Applications will be considered without regard to race, sex, age or disability. Applications should be made in writing before the November 30.

Labour Research Service, P O Box 376, Salt River, 7925.

SALB Publication Guidelines

The South African Labour Bulletin is a journal which supports the democratic labour movement in South Africa. It is a forum for analysing, debating and recording the aims and activities of this movement. To this end, it requires contributors to the Bulletin to conform with the following publication guidelines.

* Constructive criticism of unions or federations in the democratic labour movement is welcome. However, articles with unwarranted attacks or of a sectarian nature which have a divisive effect on the labour movement will not be published.

* Contributions to the Bulletin must not exceed the following lengths:

analytical articles	8,000 words
debate, reviews, documents, reports	5,000 words
briefings	1,000 words

Articles should be submitted in a final and correct form and in duplicate. Articles are refereed and may be edited. In the event of the editors deciding that other than minor editing changes are required, the article will be referred back to the author.

Briefings should concern topical events and developments of concern to the democratic labour movement. They should be easy to understand and keep footnotes and references to a minimum. Debate, reviews, reports and documents are designed to make more widely available important statements emanating from the labour movement; reviewing new literature or other material of relevance to the movement; making available more in-depth reports and research; and allowing for debate on important contemporary issues.

* Contributions must be written in a language that is clear and understandable.

* All contributions to the Bulletin must be typed and where applicable include proper footnoting and references.

* Except in the case of public documents, all submissions to the Bulletin will be treated in confidence.

* The editors reserve the right to recommend to the author of any submission that it be placed under another category to that under which it was submitted.

* For more details contact the editor.

SUBSCRIPTION FORM

To: SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR BULLETIN

P O Box 31073

Braamfontein 2017

SOUTH AFRICA ph. (011) 339-8133

**NEW Please open a subscription to the Bulletin beginning
with Volume: No:**

RENEWAL

NAME:

ADDRESS:

.

.

.

OCCUPATION:

RATE:

**PLEASE NOTE NEW RATES
RATES FOR EIGHT ISSUES**

	SOUTH AFRICA	OVERSEAS
Workers	R8,00	
Students	R20,00	\$20,00/£15,00
Salaried Individuals	R36,00	\$36,00/£25,00
Institutions	R100,00	\$75,00/£50,00
Companies	R200,00	\$150,00/£100,00 or equivalent

If claiming cheap rates, include
place of study, factory etc.

1946: 70 000 MINERS STRIKE

TWELVE KILLED

1986: VIVA NUM



100 YEARS
OF
EXPLOITATION

NATIONALISE
THE MINES!
UNDER WORKERS CONTROL