THE VIEW FROM SOWETO

[AN] *Racial tensions in South Africa continue to deepen following threats by the country's largest black trade union to call a nationwide strike on Aug. 25 unless President Pieter W. Botha lifts the state of emergency that he imposed July 20 on 36 embattled towns. The union is also demanding that Botha back off from plans to expel migrant laborers from neighboring countries.*

Observers said the strike call by the 250,000-member National Union of Mine Workers could put black workers on a collision course with the white-minority government and seriously damage the nation's fragile economy. According to mine sources, the nation's mines employ about 550,000 black mine workers, of whom 288,000 are from neighboring Lesotho, Mozambique, Botswana, Malawi and Swaziland.

Disputing management charges that miners are happy with their pay, union leader Cyril Ramaphosa said the action was approved by a special congress of 450 voting union delegates. It is estimated that more than half of the country's black miners would honor the strike call, which could affect nearly 30 mines—70% of South Africa's gold mines and 20% of the coal mines. The strike could "virtually bring the mining industry to a halt," Ramaphosa warned.

Botha initially declared the state of emergency after almost 500 people, nearly all black, had died during ten months of township unrest.

The move angered South Africa's allies, who have now recalled their ambassadors from Pretoria. While the U.S. continues to stall on its anti-apartheid legislation (see story, page 7), the United Nations Security Council on July 25 voted 13-0, with the U.S. and Britain abstaining, in favor of a French-sponsored resolution calling on UN members to impose voluntary sanctions on South Africa. France itself has already recalled its envoy from Pretoria and banned new investments in the country.

Giving few details, Botha said last week that he will soon announce measures to change some apartheid laws. He denied, however, that his decision was influenced by growing international pressure on his regime, and vowed to continue with the crackdown on township violence.

With the state of emergency barely two weeks old, nearly 1,500 persons had been detained and the figure was growing by about 200 daily. From Johannesburg, South African journalist **Zwelake Sisulu** *talked with* Africa News *about the latest situation.*

AN: *What sorts of people are being arrested?*

Sisulu: Most detainees are members of the Congress of South African Students, a youth organization affiliated with the anti-apartheid United Democratic Front. At least five of them are white.

AN: *It appears that many are fairly young people.*

Sisulu: Essentially, they are young, and I think one would have to agree that the struggle in the past few months has been spearheaded by high school and university students.

AN: *Does the government appear desperate?*

Sisulu: The government is in dire stress at the moment. Internally, the country has become completely ungovernable. Internationally, it is facing a diplomatic community that is becoming increasingly hostile. So the regime is really caught in between. My own view is that violence will continue. I think in a lot of ways the government's worst fears are going to be confirmed because within the next month we may see violence spill over from black towns into the white areas.

AN: *What is the potential for mass consumer boycotts?*

Sisulu: In the past few months, the focus of the protest movement has been at funerals, where people protest the actions of the security forces. But I think the situation now is at a stage where the people are taking the initiative. They are no longer waiting for something to happen. As a result, we now have the consumer boycott at white outlets in the major cities. In Port Elizabeth, for instance, the boycott has led many white businesses to close down.

AN: *Has the boycott extended to many areas?*

Sisulu: It hasn't reached Johannesburg yet. But I expect it will sooner than later. Since the boycott started in Port Elizabeth, it has now spread to all towns in the eastern Cape. It is moving swiftly toward Johannesburg. I would be very surprised if the consumer actions do not take off in Johannesburg within a month.

AN: *Are there any moves to negotiate a settlement?*

Sisulu: So far, the more radical type of international pressures, such as the withdrawal of the heads of Western diplomatic missions, have had remarkable effects. I think for the first time South Africa realizes that a lot of its allies are going to abandon it if it does not dismantle apartheid and negotiate majority rule. But, of course, diplomatic pressure is viewed by blacks in South Africa as complementary, because the major thrust of the struggle is within South Africa.

AN: *The U.S. House of Representatives has just passed a bill imposing some sanctions on South Africa. How do the various groups in South Africa view this?*

Sisulu: The labor movement, the community and church organizations have been delighted because they have maintained all along that unless and until the U.S. moves in this direction the situation in South Africa will remain stalemated. So, in that sense, it is clear we are beginning to see movement that could influence actions throughout the West.

AN: *A number of African nations have had a long history of economic ties with South Africa. How do you see actions aimed at South Africa affecting them?*

Sisulu: President Botha has threatened to repatriate all workers from neighboring states if sanctions are imposed on Pretoria. As you know, South Africa has a stranglehold on the economic life of these countries. The regime is in a very strong position to punish these nations that are dependent on it for their economic life.

AN: *How has the state of emergency affected news gathering?*

Sisulu: On July 29, Commissioner of Police Johan Coetzee, who in terms of the state of emergency has absolute powers, summoned editors to his Pretoria office and instructed them to tone down their criticism of the government and police activities. Needless to say, this has had the desired effects. Many newspapers are no longer reporting what is happening in the townships. They may only publish the official figures from the police, even if they know better. The movement of journalists is determined by the commissioner of police. So, in essence, we have complete police censorship of the media.

Adopting their own economic sanctions, black consumers in the eastern Cape have begun a boycott of white-owned businesses, stilling many stores which, like this supermarket in Port Elizabeth, depend heavily on sales to South African blacks. /*Africa News*

AN: *On August 1, Victoria Nxenge, a civil rights lawyer and supporter of the UDF, was assassinated near her Durban home. What can you tell us about this?*

Sisulu: In this situation it is virtually impossible for one to put a finger on the culprit. But speculation within the country is that agents of the state are responsible for that action. We have been told that four black men attacked Nxenge as she drove