MINE WORKER PROTEST ON THE WITWATERSRAND : 1901-1912*

by Sean Moroney

The period following the Anglo-Boer War is crucial to the history of labour relations in South Africa. During this period gold mining in the Transvaal was re-established as the most important industrial sector in Southern Africa. This period also saw the consolidation of a monopsonistic labour recruiting system which was to promote extensive labour migrancy throughout the sub-continent. The particular economic and social patterns thus created persist today. Little has been learnt about the people most affected by these social and economic forces, the mass of black unskilled workers, during this and subsequent periods. White worker responses, management's machinations and the State's participation have all been explored to some degree. We know virtually nothing about the processes of proletarianisation experienced by black workers or about their responses to the developing industrial economy.

This neglect has perhaps resulted from a lack of readily available material concerning black workers, in contrast with the relatively well documented activities of management and white workers. These two groups were always assured, as they are at present, of extensive coverage in the contemporary media. Such biases have penetrated South African historiography. The resultant gaps in our history must affect our understanding of present day industrial relations in Southern Africa. The fact that there has been very little evidence of tangible conflict between black workers and management has created the impression of workers as passive participants in the economy. This paper sets out to show that workers, in fact, responded in a variety of effective ways to the manipulative, exploitative and coercive measures adopted by management. These responses and the particular forms they assumed, indicated the formation of a worker rationality encompassing defence, protest and direct confrontation. Usually they did not take the form of strikes, mass walkouts or visible mass organisation. Instead, one needs to identify and interpret a wide range of other

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more subtle, expressions of worker-management conflict.[1] Such expressions developed within, and were thus determined by, a highly repressive economy in which management, in effective alliance with the State, devised and implemented an armoury of measures designed to erode the freedom of mine workers.

Although many of the workers recruited after the Anglo-Boer war would have experienced mine employment before hostilities broke out and caused the closure of the mines, the economic conditions of the rural areas at the start of the century did not make them entirely, or even considerably, dependent on industrial employment for economic survival. As a result, peasants possessed an economic base from which to resist the ravages of the labour recruiting system. The first decade was to see the steady erosion of this base by natural and political forces and the peasant economy was to give way to the predominance of the growing industrial mode. Peasants were to lose control of their means of livelihood and turn increasingly to mine work for subsistence. Their bargaining power in relation to the mine owners who needed their labour was eroded accordingly.

The Randlords emerged from the planning recess afforded by the war with a comprehensive plan to combine in labour recruiting through the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA). The scheme was designed to facilitate the systematic recruitment of cheap labour from Portuguese East Africa, the success of which would ensure depression of wages. It also provided for combined recruiting within British South Africa to eliminate competition for labour and the resultant upward pressure on wages. Recruits were to be assigned to member mines on a quota basis. In addition, a maximum average wage schedule was agreed upon which set wages below their pre-war average level. The motivation for these measures derived, in part, from management's irrational quest to work mines of marginal profitability.

Once management experienced initial resistance from

potential recruits in rural areas, it embarked, through WNLA and its agents, upon a devastating campaign making use of financial and livestock advances in conjunction with an increasingly effective taxation system, the collaboration of chiefs as well as deception and blatant coercion to obtain labour recruits.[2]

In the actual work situation, management developed a range of measures both to keep unwilling recruits in bondage and to extract most work for least pay, food and accommodation. The compound system and all its accompanying institutions of mine 'police', physical violence and social control, became crucial. In collaboration with the State, a sophisticated "pass" system was developed to prevent and and detect "desertion". Laws such as the Masters and Servants Act were effectively used to suppress work stoppages and other forms of worker resistance. On many mines workers were systematically cheated of their wages and forced to stay longer than the periods for which they had contracted.

Despite the fact that worker resistance was progressively weakened, it persisted with considerable effect until the middle of the decade. It is in fact arguable that certain groups of workers during this period had the upper hand in relation to management. The latter, however, through the importation of large quantities of cheap Chinese labour during the period 1904-9, was able to reduce the upward pressure on black wages and destroy much of the basis for black worker bargaining power. Because of the progressive denudation and over-crowding of the rural areas black workers were to remain in a relatively weakened position even after the repatriation of the Chinese workers. Precedents for modes of resistance had however been established.

To summarize, the period under review can be broken into fairly distinct phases. Immediately after the war management made a concerted assault on the freedom of potential workers in order to recruit them not only in sufficiently large numbers but on terms satisfactory to management in the face of the

profitability constraints within which it chose to operate. Significant groups of workers at varying stages of proletarianization persistently resisted the machinations of management. They lost this initiative with the importation of Chinese labour although various forms of resistance were to persist.

It is in the context of these countervailing forces that workers resistance during this period should be examined. The patterns delineated above indicate the importance of seeking the roots of migrant labour resistance in the pre-labour situation, as this was the point at which the prospective worker could exercise his greatest measure of resistance. His refusal to be recruited was his most effective lever against the formidable powers of management. Potential recruits in British South Africa reacted strongly against the WNLA system. They were aware that it totally eliminated their freedom of choice as prospective labourers and that the maximum average wage agreement pegged their pay at less than they could bargain for elsewhere. Grant, Native Labour Commissioner to the Chamber of Mines, in evidence before the Transvaal Labour Commission of 1902, stated emphatically that the WNLA system, through prohibiting 'voluntary' labour, was coercive:

> ".....a native, before he seeks employment, generally asks a few questions, he satisfies himself as to the character of his employer, the nature of the work and the treatment to be expected. Having selected his employer he offers his service, and under these (WNLA) rules, however eager the boy may be to work, he cannot enter except through one prescribed channel, consequently his voluntary action is distinctly interfered with."

Once a worker had contracted through WNLA, he was processed through a degrading medical examination, usually railed as part of a "batch" in a cattle truck to the Reef and assigned to whatever mine required him, according to the quota system. It

was reported that workers no longer considered "themselves to be the free agents they were before the war..." and that a worker abhorred nothing more "than to be compelled to go and work where he does not like to go, even if he is told that he will be fairly paid, that sounds so much like 'being com-andiert'".

Through an extensive oral reportage system potential workers rapidly developed an awareness, not only of the range of employment and wage rates available, but also of the variety of living and working conditions on each of the mines. Once they were able to secure their freedom from the WNLA system, their subsequent choice of employers was highly selective, being based on this knowledge and revealing a developed worker rationality. In an environment where death rates were sometimes one in ten the choice of mine could be a matter of life or death. One black contractor stated that workers considered bad mines to be "those which are not very much inspected and some in which ground is left hanging. The boys, when they are engaged, always ask whether a mine is a good one." There is evidence to show that some groups of workers avoided developing and deep level mines where conditions were known to be difficult and dangerous and management was prone to make immense work demands. Workers also gravitated to the mines where they knew they would find their friends or where they had already been part of an informal network of worker defence. Compound conditions formed a discernable, though somewhat secondary set of criteria.

Workers who wished to enter the Witwatersrand labour market, realising the evils of the WNLA system, would either develop their own routes to the Reef which avoided the WNLA tentacles or would make use of the system to their own advantage. Workers in the Northern Transvaal, for example, were reported to have adopted a definite route to the Reef which avoided the notoriously unscrupulous WNLA agent in the area. Others, in a variety of regions, learnt to "work" the WNLA system, to take advantage of the facilities and transport provided

by labour agents , how to use the complicated pass system and when and how to desert to gain access to other employment opportunities. Many WNLA agents reported during this period that recruits in large numbers were signing on to be transported to the mines and deserting once they neared the Witwatersrand. They would then enter the labour market as free agents, tendering their services where they so desired. Workers, especially those recruited in Northern Transvaal, who wished to rid themselves of obligations to WNLA and enter the Reef labour market independently, used Pretoria as a vital link. Many deserted the WNLA trains at Pretoria and either sought work there, in the military camps or private employ on a relatively permanent basis or used this employment to gain a pass to travel independently to the Reef. Still others, if they could not detrain in Pretoria or if they had travelled along different routes, deserted in Johannesburg and walked to Pretoria to seek a travelling pass to re-enter the Reef without hindrance. The special labour regulations of the Reef Labour districts did not apply in Pretoria and therefore black workers could not be detained for a period of 6 days for the purpose of identifying deserters. There was evidence of Mozambique workers using the same method. The Secretary of the Association of Mine Managers wrote in November,1902:

> "It appears that particularly in the case of North Basothos and Tsongas they are well informed that on arriving in Pretoria, and making a statement that they wish to go to Johannesburg in order to find employment, passports are freely issued to them without question; and they are fully conversant with the fact that by this means they can obtain work in Johannesburg at higher rates of pay.....officials assume that natives applying for passports have just arrived from their homes."

In 1906, statements were obtained from three workers who had adopted this method. They were all similar to the following:

"I deserted from the Robinson Deep on or about 28/10/06 and proceeded to Pretoria on foot. On arriving there I was arrested and when asked by the Pass Officer where I came from, I stated that I had been employed by a Dutch farmer, but had left there and wanted to go to Johannesburg to work on the mines. I was locked up for three days and was then given a travelling pass for which I paid 1/- and went to Johannesburg by train."
(S.N.A. 73/315/07.)

In 1902 the WNLA General Manager reported that in April that year, desertions had increased to 1510 from 899 the previous month. This he attributed to the fact that there was a "demand for natives by private employers and contractors who pay higher rates than the mines." He suggested a remedy of offering a higher rate of wages. However the Chamber of Mines persisted with its policy of depressing wages wherever possible and relying on the combined coercive power of its own and the State's institutions to counteract such worker resistance.

STRATEGIES OF WORKER DEFENCE AND PROTEST IN THE WORK SITUATION

During the period under review, workers "deserted" [3] in large numbers. In the first instance workers deserted, as described above, to seek better work opportunities. This category of deserters can be regarded as "target deserters" who had specific work objectives in mind, perhaps even before they reached the Rand. In the second instance workers would desert when working or compound conditions became unbearable, when they did not receive full pay or when management detained them longer than they had intended. As such it was an active form of protest. This class of desertion I term "defensive". In many cases defensive deserters would also set themselves new work targets.

The "problem" of desertion occupied a substantial part of both management's and the State's energy. It drove the Milner Administration, in collaboration with management, to introduce sophisticated

methods of prevention and detection. As these methods (such as an expensive finger print system) developed, desertion became more difficult but did not reduce correspondingly. Instead, requiring increased determination and planning, it became a more conscious form of worker protest.

Desertion rates would vary from mine to mine, usually corresponding to the variation of conditions. Pritchard, Director of Government Native Labour Bureau, wrote in 1909:

> "...generally speaking, the treatment of Natives on the various mines is largely reflected in their several rates of desertion."
> *(S.N.A. 90/1825/09, Memorandum on Native Labour Supply by Pritchard, 31 March 1909.)*

An analysis of conditions and desertion rates on the different mines supports this view. The Simmer Deep, for example, had poor feeding, meat rations suspended for "inefficients", a large rate of cancelled shifts (21,4% per day), and reports of persistent ill-treatment underground. Its desertion rate during 1908 was 618,4 per 1000. As an example from the other end of the scale, Jumpers Mine had a desertion rate during 1908 of 1,6 per 1000. Inspectors reported that the standard of feeding in this mine was "adequate". that very few cases of ill-treatment were reported, that officials had a "good" attitude towards workers and that few shifts were cancelled.[4]

The procurement of a new pass was essential for a successful desertion, especially if a worker intended to seek new employment. Several instances of pass forgery came to light. The District Controller in Boksburg reported in December 1905 that within 7 months, 1507 workers had deserted from mines in his districts. During the same period, 18 Africans were convicted of forging passes. White forgers also operated on the Rand and sold passes to deserters at £5 a piece.

A further extension of defensive desertion manifested itself in general labour withdrawal by groups

of workers originating from a particular area or tribe or engaged at a particular mine. This form of worker protest is particularly suited to migrant workers who, once they desert, individually or *en masse*, or once their contracts are completed, may refuse to participate in the same labour market until working conditions are improved or home area conditions worsen sufficiently to force them out. This type of action had a strong impact in 1905, when, following the importation of Chinese labour, contract conditions for black workers were made less favourable.[5] Large numbers of black workers from all parts of British South Africa withdrew their labour and management was obliged to improve contract conditions. In 1907, the Chairman of Rand Mines described this form of worker action as follows:

> "The native method of striking is very simple. It must be remembered that he is not a permanent workman. He is always going home, and if he is not satisfied with the conditions of employment, he simply does not come out again. The conditions of South Africa make it perfectly possible for him to do this.."
> *(Mining Industry Commission, Minutes of Evidence,* S. Reyerbach, Chairman of Rand Mines, 13 June 1907, p.97)

J.J. Ware of the Trades and Labour Council made a similar evaluation of black worker action:

> "There is one thing with the Kaffir in which he is different to the white man. If things do not suit him he goes home and stays there, he does not go on strike, that is better than any strike."
> *(Mining Industry Commission, Minutes of Evidence,* 28 October 1907, p. 1425)

This type of worker action did have an impact on WNLA and mine management policies. If it had not been for the importation of Chinese labour, commencing in 1904, it is probable that black workers would have won more significant concessions

from management through this method.

In the work situation most workers tended to assume defensive forms of resistence as they were denied any initiative within the Witwatersrand's repressive environment. For example, they protected themselves from the high demands made on them through minimum work requirements by keeping their level of efficiency as low as possible. Workers were aware of management's tendency to increase the minimum work requirements of contracts wherever possible. Self-imposed work limits were implemented as a reaction.

Taberer, a Native Affairs Department Inspector, told the 1904 Mining Industry Commission:

> "I have had natives tell me that they are afraid to put in two holes because their bosses might make that the (required) task." *(Mining Industry Commission* 1907, p. 1316)

J.H.Johns, a consulting engineer to a mining group, confirmed this type of worker reaction:

> "I once tried it (piecework) in the Ferreira, and persuaded several boys to drill two holes instead of one. They were paid double for their work and we were all pleased, but they suddenly stopped, and when the mine foreman wanted to know why, they said: 'It is all right putting in two holes now, but presently the boss will think that two holes is the day's work.... They saw what we were working up to. They saw as well as some of the white men we have had to deal with, only the native was more honest about it. He stuck to it too." *(Mining Industry Commission 1907* p. 18448-9)

As another defensive measure, workers made use of the legal system to remedy management's coercive measures. Under British administration, workers would appeal to inspectors from the Native Affairs Department as their "protectors" if they felt they had a case against management or individual white

miners. Workers wanting to lay a charge were faced not only with an unfamiliar legal system but also the inaccessibility of the inspectors.[6] No doubt workers feared retribution from management and this must have also reduced the number of charges actually made. However, in one year alone, 1905, 3585 complaints were made at pass offices along the Reef regarding shortfalls in wages. Subsequent cases resulted in workers recovering £10 332 in wages due to them and improperly witheld. Workers also complained although less successfully, about assaults by mine officials and white miners. In 1905 118 cases of "ill-usage" were reported and 50 were settled in favour of the plaintiffs. In the same year 609 workers complained of being detained at the mines beyond the length of their contracts. Only 281 cases were settled in favour of the plaintiffs.[7]

As numerous as these cases may seem, it is probable that they represent only a portion of the actionable abuses to which workers were subjected. This type of worker action would have had only piecemeal results and did not directly lead to any reform within the mines. It may also have had a restraining effect on management. However, the action did reveal an ability for individual resistance which could have formed the basis for group organization and a common worker consciousness.

HOME GROUPS AND THE FORMATION OF PROTO-VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS

It is impossible to argue that the type of consciousness displayed by black workers on the gold mines during this period, was that of a developed working class. Much worker resistance manifested itself in ethnic identity rather than an overall worker consciousness. However, it is important to view the development of ethnic solidarity in an industrial environment as a particular response to that environment, rather than a simple transferral of tribal values. Workers would form groups, usually tribally based, in their compounds to protect themselves from the compound police, possibly other groups, and most of all, from the coercive measures

of management. There is evidence that such groups provided an important measure of security for individual members faced with a daily struggle for survival in the compound and underground.[8]

I have termed these groups proto-voluntary associations. Because of their informal structure and organisation they were difficult to identify by management and were therefore well suited to the mine's systems of control. Management in fact, fostered tribalism in a variety of ways and this unintentionally added cohension to these vital groups of worker solidarity, defence and resistance.

There are a few substantial indications of how these groups operated. Many workers insisted on being assigned to the same mine as their "brothers", usually a group of recruits from a common area and tribe. This was general practice amongst recruits from the Transvaal, Cape Colony, Basutoland and even Portuguese East Africa. In 1903, for example, Angoni Chiefs (PEA) told a WNLA agent that they would only send tribesmen to the Reef if, amongst other conditions, "brothers" were not separated except in fairly large numbers. There is evidence of individual workers who had been separated from their groups, requesting permission to be transferred to the same mine as their respective groups. A number of actual disturbances or work stoppages amongst recruits were reported to have resulted from "home groups" being split up by WNLA. Such disturbances indicated strong determination to remain together with friends in the face of a strange environment.

Cape Colony workers maintained very cohesive groups. Group leaders, often headmen or *indunas*, would represent complaints of the group to management or would write to chiefs or magistrates of their home districts, complaining on behalf of their groups about ill-treatment or bad conditions. This tactic had some definite results as Cape Colony Officials would bring pressure to bear on the mines.

The groups provided valuable security for workers in a variety of ways. For example, workers affected by punitive food stoppages could rely on their

groups for relief. Pritchard, commenting in 1909 on the use of food as a punitive measure against workers, gave an indication of how workers found support from such informal groups:

> "It is well known that natives share their food and it should therefore have been obvious to those in authority that punishment of this nature would fall as heavily on good workers as it would on malingerers and loafers who it was especially desired should suffer by it."
> *(S.N.A. 90/1825/09, Memorandum by Pritchard,* 31 March 1909.)

Many isolated instances of worker action were based on "home group" organisation. In 1902, for example, 192 "Mapoch" tribesmen arrived in Johannesburg and, dissatisfied with their treatment, they refused to work for 10 days until they were persuaded that treatment would improve. In 1907 a group of Pondo tribesmen refused to work underground on the South Randfontein mine because they claimed they had contracted for surface work only. In May 1907 a group of 60 workers from a common tribe (unnamed) refused to work because their shifts were being cancelled. They decided to return home with their chief's brother.

Many of the work stoppages or strikes on the Reef in the early part of the decade appeared to coalesce along ethnic lines. This,Warwick confirms in his account of black industrial protest on the Reef between 1901-2:

> "The ethnicity of those taking part appears to have been an important binding force in the protests, often stemming from the immediate grievances of the workers. At Geldenhuis (22 May 1902) the dispute was fundamentally between the management of the mine and the Pedi work force, the unrest at the Durban Roodepoort Mine (21 July 1902) was apparently confined to workers from Mozambique, and the strikes at the Brakpan Electric Works (11 September 1902) was reported to have been an exclusively Xhosa affair. At Vereeniging (7th

> September 1902) the Sotho workers cited the independence of their people as a symbol of protest....."[9]

It is probable that mass tribal action in the industrial environment, when it did occur, received its main impulse and cohesion via smaller, association-like, home groups. Very often strike leaders would be *Indunas* with traditional links and would have had smaller groups under their individual leadership.

It is difficult to estimate what degree of organisation was achieved by these groups. The sophisticated organisation demonstrated by the Ninevite movement over a similar period, as described by Van Onselen,[10] indicated the potential for such groups. Indications are that some "home groups" did develop into associations with a structure geared towards an industrial environment. In 1907, for example, it was reported that:

> "At Germiston a new Society has been formed, and so as to escape the stigmas of being called Ethiopian, the boys are told that it is not a religious movement but a Benevolent Society, formed to provide a purse for the East Coast Natives working on the Rand, out of which sick boys will be helped, boys dying friendless will be decently buried and boys preaching and teaching in Gazaland will be supported."
> *(Africa's Golden Harvests,* October 1907, p.2)

This society was organised by an evangelist and is described by a missionary. As such, an emphasis is placed on its religious orientation but it is important that it provided benefits to workers that were meaningful within an industrial environment.

Although one can form only a sketchy impression of these groupings through available evidence, it is clear that they were vital to every worker faced with the vicious environment of the Witwatersrand. It seems that labour organisations have failed to realise their importance and to build on such grass roots structures amongst mine workers. Indications are that they persist today and should receive closer attention.

WORK STOPPAGES AND CONFRONTATION

Mass worker action during the first decade of this century was limited in scope and in numbers. Most disturbances were isolated to particular mines and many were mobilised through tribal cohesion. However, the riots and stoppages that did occur indicated the potential that did exist for the articulation of worker grievances and the organisation of effective resistance. Peter Warwick has given a detailed account of the fairly widespread, though piecemeal, instances of black worker protest over the period 1901-2. A substantial proportion of these disturbances were tribally oriented and have been mentioned above. However there is evidence that some confrontations, which usually took the form of work stoppages, demonstrated a definite worker consciousness.

In 1902, for example, workers on the Consolidated Main Reef Mine went on strike because they discovered that their wages were well below those being earned by a contractor's work force engaged in surface construction on the mine. The mine manager complained that:

> "...the contractors, if allowed to go on will obtain all the best boys, any of which are as good at certain work as white men, and at the same time unsettle the Company's boys."
> (S.N.A. General Manager, Cons. Main Reef to General Manager WNLA, 2 April 1902.)

The inspector of labour tried to mediate but the workers refused to stand down and were all arrested.

It was competition for their labour, and the realisation that it existed despite the WNLA system, that most stimulated workers to undertake measures of resistance like desertion as well as articulated wage demands. They also were galvanized into action when management transgressed certain rudimentary standards of treatment, as the following example demonstrates.

On Saturday 28 June 1902, 1000 workers at the Langlaagte Mine broke out of the compound, and marched towards the Village Deep Mine from where they had been transferred. A detachment of police "persuaded" them to return to the Langlaagte Mine. There they stoned the compound manager's office before going back to their quarters. Leaders of the march demanded the dismissal of the compound manager who had treated them with cruelty and had obstructed their free movement out of the compound. They also complained of being detained at the mine longer than their periods of contract. State officials defused the protest, as they did in many such instances, by promising that "the matter would be gone into". It is not clear whether the compound manager was subsequently dismissed. This action seems to indicate that through their experience at the Village Deep Mine, the workers had set certain standards of treatment which their new compound manager did not follow. They reacted forcefully.

Warwick enumerates other instances of management-worker confrontation during the period 1901-2. Other disturbances during the decade, as far as I have ascertained, were not as concentrated as they were over this initial period. Isolated incidents occurred in which workers made limited demands for the improvement of conditions.

A significant strike occurred at the Premier Diamond Mine near Pretoria in 1907. This mine had attracted a labour force of selective workers who were not prepared to sell their labour to the gold mines after conditions worsened in 1905. As a result, it had a high content of Basutoland and Transvaal workers who demonstrated a developed sense of resistance. Although unrelated to the gold mines and the WNLA system, the Premier, because it received many experienced gold mine workers, indicated the type of resistance that was developing amongst more experienced workers and had the potential to become an important force. In 1907 a major clash developed on this mine which, although it was labelled by management as a tribal conflict, appears to have had an important economic base. Basuto workers had attempted to undercut the rates

paid to Transvaal workers for certain prized classes of work. Management had been playing one group off against the other. The inter-tribal fight was reported to have been fierce but the only two deaths that occurred, resulted from police action. I judge the fight to have been staged, as a large number of workers immediately demanded to be sent home, possibly hoping that their uncompleted contracts would be waived in the face of unrest. Various reports indicate that living conditions, as a result of chronic overcrowding had become highly undesirable and that there was a high rate of deaths resulting from disease. A detailed examination of the Premier disturbances of 1907 and also of 1913 is beyond the scope of this paper. They do, however, provide a valuable index of worker consciousness during this period.

By the end of the decade, although Chinese labour had been repatriated and WNLA had been abandoned by some mines in favour of independent recruiting, workers still remained in a weak position as a result of the rapid deterioration of the rural areas and serious rinderpest epidemics. Management rapidly developed the manipulative forces at its disposal. In 1912 the Native Recruiting Corporation was established to enforce once again monoposonistic recruiting inside South Africa.[11] This further forestalled any possible improvement in the bargaining position of black workers. Workers from Portuguese East Africa continued to be recruited in large numbers and through their willingness to work for relatively low wages, also undercut the bargaining power of indigenous labour. The methods of resistance previously adopted by workers became less effective. There is evidence that management consciously excluded "troublesome" workers. Cape Colony recruits were reputed to have been particularly prone to resist management. Labour organisations, such as the I.C.U. that were to develop from the 1920's onwards, mistakenly neglected the power of black mine workers because of the lack of visible organisation displayed in this migrant dominated sector. The preceding analysis shows, however, that potential for organisation did exist. At the earliest stages of proletarianization, workers on the

Transvaal Gold Mines were not passive instruments of management. The period examined was unique in some ways but the patterns of resistance that were established, persisted throughout the century. Workers were quick to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the exploitative system to which they were exposed, and adjusted their actions accordingly. Within the confines of a highly repressive system, workers did make a positive attempt to minimise the effects of management's power. WNLA, for example, had to make some very definite adjustments in policy as a result of worker reaction. This article has shown that workers in a repressive environment turn to a range of alternative methods of varying effectiveness to express their protest and resistance.

FOOTNOTES:

1) Kornhauser *et al* have emphasised the importance of looking beyond strike action for evidence of industrial conflict in modern industrial economies: "...the general object of study is not the labour dispute, the strike or the lock out, but the total range of behaviour and attitudes that express opposition and divergent orientations between industrial owners and managers on the one hand and working people and their organizations on the other." Kornhauser, A. Dubin, R. and Ross, A.H. *Industrial Conflict*, New York: McGraw Hill 1954, p.12 Kerr also describes industrial conflict as expressing itself in a variety of ways which "are as unlimited as the ingenuity of man." Kerr, C, *Labour and Management in Industrial Society*, New York: Doublejay, 1964, p.171.

2) For details of these methods see Moroney,S. *Industrial Conflict in a Labour Repressive Economy: Black Labour on the Transvaal Gold Mines 1901-1912*. Unpublished Honours Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1976, pp.19-31

3) I use the term "desert" which was applied by management to this act, in order to avoid confusion. The word has derogatory overtones. It implies a dereliction of duty. "Withdrawal

of labour" is more accurate but I have used this to apply to more widespread action (see below). The use of "deserter", "desertion", etc. was an important part of management's ideology. Such terms immediately suspended any critical examination of the conditions of employment which caused workers to leave in large numbers and justified the use of every possible pursual and punitive measure.

4) A worker's shift was "cancelled" and therefore, not paid for, if he did not achieve the required amount of work as set by the mine. Those employed in rock drilling, for example, would be required to drill a certain depth. If they did not achieve this in some mines, they would not be accredited with the work achieved below the requirement. This in fact created a situation where management was able to extract significant quantities of work for no pay at all. For more details see Moroney.

5) Management attempted to introduce a minimum contract length of 12 months. Subsequently, as a result of extensive withdrawal, contracts were reduced to 6 months and eventually, 3 months in duration, a reversion to the original situation. See Moroney, *Op Cit* pp. 125-130.

6) Some inspectors were reported to have been unsympathetic to workers and to have worked in close co-operation with compound managers and management generally. If a worker wished to lay a charge through the inspector at a pass office, he would have to apply to the compound manager for a day pass to leave the compound. This would almost certainly be denied if the manager realised the worker's intention. There is evidence that workers consciously obviated this problem by concealing their intent. See Moroney,S. *Op Cit* p. 102.

7) The courts were in fact very lenient towards white miners convicted of assault against blacks, Many were discharged with warnings. Such len-

iency indicated the State's collaborative role according to which acts of violence against workers were covertly condoned. One inspector of the Native Affairs Department complained in 1906 that in a particular assault case in which the defendant was discharged with a warning, the magistrate made remarks during the case which made it "appear that he considers flogging of Natives by their employers as justifiable under certain circumstances."

8) Groups of a similar nature and purpose exist in contemporary mine compound communities. Theology students who were hired as workers on mines during 1976, reported that: "It appears that there are several informal networks operating.....A circle of friends emerges out of a particular ethnic group which in turn extends to those working together." The students also reported that *Isibondas* played an important role as elected leaders within each room and facilitated discussion of common problems. This group is closely analogous to the type of leadership that emerged at the earliest stages of migrancy. See Matsobane, P., and Eggenhuizen, T. (eds) *Another Blanket*, Johannesburg: Agency for Industrial Mission, June 1976, pp 17, 22.

9) Warwick, P., *"Black Industrial Protest on the Witwatersrand 1901-2"*, (Unpublished paper), University of York, 1975 p.7

10) Van Onselen, C., *"South Africa's lumpen proletarian Army: 'Umkosi Was Ntaba' - 'The Regiment of the Hills 1890-1920'"* . Unpublished paper. African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, April 1976.

11) See Johnstone, F.A., *Race, Class and Gold.* Routledge and Kegan Paul. London 1976