

The mines have a lengthy history of tough bargaining, which can only get tougher with the growth of black unionism. Unionised black workers will still be almost exclusively migrants, who are recruited in areas of high unemployment where replacement for strikers are easy to find.

The 1979 white miners' strike left no doubt about the Chamber's willingness to take a tough stance during disputes and the scope for toughness is clearly much greater when employers are dealing with migrant miners who live in compounds on mine property.

It may well be a good many years, therefore, before the nascent black mine unions are in a position to do labour relations battle on anything like equal terms.

Nevertheless, the post-Wiehahn developments in secondary industry have tended to show that reform processes, once begun, take on a logic of their own. To name but one example, refusing a union access to the mines is a good deal easier than cutting off access because it is making demands which employers don't like. It is very doubtful that this would ever happen.

The more the reform process continues, the more difficult it becomes to dismantle it. While it is too early to begin assessing the likely growth of organised worker power on the mines, it does indeed seem that a permanent era of black unionism has begun.

Footnotes

1. See Documents: Mines Policy Guidelines. (Editor's note)
2. See Interview with NUM. (Editor's note)

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