

5 - 6 May Stayaway 1987

In response to the racially exclusive elections for the House of Assembly on the 6 May a stayaway was called, in protest, for the 5th and 6th of May.

In a nationwide survey of the manufacturing and retail industries the Labour Monitoring Group estimated that in these sectors an estimated 500,000 workers observed the stayaway on the 5th and 600,000 on 6th. Despite the fact that these sectors cover only 42% of urban African employment (est. total 2,730,000) the number of man days lost in these two sectors due to the election exceeds the total number of man days lost in strikes in all sectors of the economy for the first quarter of this year. (The Star, 5 June 1987). If we assume that the stayaway was only half as successful in other sectors, but not including mining, then at least another 420,000 workers stayed away. This gives a total of 1,020,000 (per day). According to mine employers a further 30,000 mineworkers stayed away bringing the total number of people observing the stayaway to 1,050,000. The mining figure however constitutes only a partial figure for some mine managements were unavailable for comment. Union sources estimate that 100,000 mineworkers took protest action.

A number of features should be highlighted.

1. This was the most extensive stayaway in South African history. Although May 1 and June 16 last year were more intensely observed they were of shorter duration (1 day each). The November 1984 stayaway was also 2 days long but was confined to the Transvaal.
2. This is the first stayaway in protest against a white general election since the 1958 Congress-Alliance led action. Unlike that stayaway, which failed, this stayaway mobilised large numbers of organised workers, students and community organisations in a nationwide protest. According to the Department of Education and Training all school students on the Witwatersrand stayed away on May 5 (est 500,000, L.M.G.) in addition at least four universities were closed on the 6th.
3. Once again the stayaway was most widely observed in the

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P.E./Uitenhage area (96-99% of Africans) where repression has been the most systematic. Membership of COSATU unions was particularly important in influencing the participation of "coloureds" in the region and in Uitenhage in particular. Membership of COSATU was also important in determining the participation of Africans in the Western Cape region. In Uitenhage "coloured" participation in the stayaway reached 70% on the 6th while the average "coloured" participation in the region was 35%. In general participation of non-Africans in the stayaway in other regions was low or negligible (2% of "coloureds" in Cape Town region).

4. Outside of the Cape Province observation of the stayaway increased by about 10% on the second day i.e. the actual day of the election. Despite conflict with Inkatha supporters the stayaway was observed by 70% of Africans in the Durban region. In the Eastern Cape observation of the stayaway was nearly absolute, and in the Western Cape observation of the stayaway increased almost four-fold on the second day.
5. In the Transvaal the stayaway was less intensively observed (10 - 20% lower) than May 1 and June 16 of 1986. The retail industry was the most severely affected (76% of African Workers on the 6th).

AREA	% 5TH MAY	% 6TH MAY
P.E./Uitenhage	99 (35)	96 (12% PE), (70% Uit.)
Cape Town	12	42
Transvaal	57	70
Natal	60	70

Participation : African Participation in Stayaway for Retail and Manufacturing Industries. ("Coloured" figures in brackets).

5 - 6 May Stayaway in Pietermaritzburg

The Development Studies Research Group (DSRG) at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg undertook a comprehensive survey of the extent of the stayaway in Pietermaritzburg on May 5th and 6th.

70 firms employing 12,138 workers in the industrial and commercial sectors were interviewed.

Some of the salient findings were:

1. 64% of the African workforce stayed away from work on May 6th. The figure was 63% for May 5th.
2. Workers from other racial groups were largely unaffected by the strike.
3. 93% of the firms overall were affected by the stayaway.
4. 3/5 of the firms adopted a 'no work, no pay, no penalty' policy.
3% said they would pay workers who stayed away.
5% said that they would take some form of disciplinary action.
The rest were undecided or would not offer any comment.
5. About 90% of the businesses in the Indian sector of the city were shut on 6th May. The figure on the 5th was 60%.
6. In general the extent of the stayaway across different racial groups and industrial-commercial sectors was much the same on the 5th and 6th of May.