

BY BLACK WORKERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

by Keith Gottschalk and John Smalberger

John Michael Smalberger's tragic death has meant a premature loss to labour historians of a painstaking worker with thorough command of the primary sources, and a loss to his friends of a gentle, and always helpful, personality.

As an economic and social historian, John Smalberger explored diverse themes ranging from the forging of the pass system as a technique of labour control in nineteenth-century Kimberley to the oppression of gay persons in South Africa. This note is intended as both an obituary to him, and to draw the attention of labour historians and other scholars to the location of his personal papers.

Most of his notes, microfilms and photostats of archival material now form the John Smalberger Papers in the Manuscripts division of Jagger Library, at the University of Cape Town. The rest, under the care of Professor George Shepperson, is deposited in the library of the University of Edinburgh.

Major themes in this material of interest to labour history include

- i) the history of copper mining in Namaqualand from the 1850's;
- ii) labour on the Kimberley diamond fields in the nineteenth century;
- iii) early industrial action by black workers during the nineteenth century.

The supply of black labour in the nineteenth century, the Black Flag Rebellion in Kimberley in 1875, and the Griqualand East Rebellion of 1897 were amongst the topics he was gathering information on at the time of his death. Social topics are also to be found amongst his extensive papers.

By way of a memorial to his work and life, and to draw attention to little-known facts on hitherto forgotten industrial action by black workers, this note concludes with a table listing some information on

early strikes from his papers, and a bibliography of his published works.

TABLE 1

EARLIEST KNOWN STRIKES BY BLACK WORKERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

DATE	PLACE	REASON	STRIKERS
March 1854	CT	Wages	Coloured boatmen and stevedores
31 May 1856	PE		African workers in docks
7 Jan 1857	EL		African workers in docks
Oct 1858	Kowie	Food	200 African workers leave work
Jan 1861			Railway workers
1860s-70s		Many strikes by African navvies on railway and other public works construction - see seminar papers by Andrew Perkins.	
23 Jul 1877	Kim	Wages	50 African workers for Mining Boards (ie public works)
Jul 1877	PE	Wages	African workers in harbour
May 1878	EL		Dock workers
Dec 1880	EL		African workers on railway works
Aug 1882	CT		Asian workers in docks
5 Apr 1887	Kim	Anal examinations	African miners
Oct 1896	Jhbg		6000 African miners

Abbreviations:

CT - Cape Town	SOURCE : abstracted from
EL - East London	papers of John Smalberger
Jhb - Johannesburg	(13 Feb 1945 - 20 Jan 1977)
Kim - Kimberley	
PE - Port Elizabeth	

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF PUBLISHED WORKS:

A History of Copper Mining in Namaqualand 1846-1931, Cape Town, Struik, 1975, 143 pp.

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"Alfred Alyward, the continuing Rebel: Early Days on the Diamond Fields", *South African Historical Journal*, 7, (Nov 1975), pp 33-42.

"The role of the Diamond Mining Industry in the Development of the Pass Law System in South Africa" *African Historical Studies*, IX 3, (1976) pp 419-434.

"Mrs Helps' Zulus: Barkly, Southey and the Colonial Office" (forthcoming, 1977).