

THE mineowners paint a distorted picture of the role of the Chamber and the mining industry in South Africa's economy.

The truth of the history of the Chamber will not appear in their fancy advertisements and publications.

It is inherent in the class character of the apartheid society that owners of mines like all privileged bosses will see our real conditions of life through profit tinted spectacles. It is in this context that they view the role played by the Chamber of Mines, the mineowners, and apartheid.

As for black mineworkers, the 100th anniversary of the Chamber of Mines means the commemoration of millions of unliving heroes who have perished under the Chamber to make a tiny white minority of millionaires richer.

The Land Act of 1913 formalised the forcible seizure of land from the African people.

Left landless and poor our people had no alternative but to migrate to the mines to sell their ability to work as an indentured man to pay taxes and support their families.

Millions of blacks have been forced to depend on the meagre wages earned by miners through this notorious policy of colonial land dispossession.

Right from its formation 100 years ago, the Chamber of Mines was meant to facilitate the reaping of our mineral wealth as cheaply as possible.

The combination of a few multi-millionaire corporations under the Chamber of Mines established a well developed machinery of exploitation to realise their economic ambitions.

This machinery was set into motion to squeeze each drop of sweat and blood from the dispossessed blacks of SA to create wealth for bosses of Anglo American, Gemmin, Goldfields, JCI, Rand Mines and Anglo Vaal.

Today 750 000 miners toil for these corporations which virtually control all the major economic resources of our country. In

actual practice not only do millions of dependents of mineworkers depend on the Chamber of Mines but also millions who make their livelihood by working in subsidiary industries.

To facilitate the super-exploitation of black labour the Chamber of Mines acquired a monopoly on legal rights to recruit labour from inside SA and in neighbouring countries.

Through the Native Recruiting Company (NRC) and the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA) hundreds of thousands were recruited to the mines to toil.

This recruiting monopoly ensured that other employers could not compete with the Chamber of Mines for black labour. Without such competition mine workers became victims of rampant exploitation.

It has been a life and death struggle for black mineworkers to abolish this suppression of wages.

Denied freedom to compete in the labour market the miner was tied to his job for a definite period through the contract system.

Thousands of workers were virtually tied to the mines for periods up to one and half years without any physical contact with their families. Tied to one's job through contract and herded into single seep overcrowded compounds, the mineworker became a real prisoner if not a slave.

The harsh conditions of compound life continued to grow as over half a million miners under the Chamber of Mines.

About 4000 men are herded in each compound which is surrounded by a high iron fence or wall topped with barbed wire to prevent anybody getting in or out, even trade union officials and workers' families are often

prevented from entering the mining premises.

Main entrances are fitted with boom gates with heavily armed mine security police on guard day and night.

Many workers are reduced by the system to mere objects that supply labour only to be identified by numbers printed on their plastic bracelets worn on their arms. As if this was not enough special mining identity cards are given to serve as pass books for workers moving in and out of mines.

This vicious system of control extends to the miners' own rooms where mine bosses appointed suborned monitor workers' activities. Informers appointed by bosses watch the whole compound with the help of the paramilitary forces deployed on the mines.

Vast amounts of ammunition is at the disposal of these private armies of the Chamber of Mines, ranging from armoured personnel carriers to hippos, dog squad, rifles, teargas canisters, batons, anti-rats dhalish and horses.

This machinery of repression and coercion is used by the Chamber of Mines to ensure an uninterrupted inflow of super profits created by black mine workers.

Since its foundation, the Chamber of Mines has been committed to the realisation of huge profits at the expense of black mine workers.

This inhuman policy of poverty wages is justified by the Chamber's caricatures who loudly claimed that black mineworkers work on the mines to earn wages so that they can augment what they get from subsistence farming in the Rustenburg and reserves.

The truth is the subsistence economy died a long time ago. Migrant workers are the major source of income of people in the Rustenburg and reserves.

Another false claim made by the Chamber bosses is that mineworkers get free accommodation

and food which constitutes payment in kind. However, single sex, overcrowded compounds and inadequate food are not what workers consider payment in kind.

As early as 1911 white miners were earning eleven times more than their black counterparts.

This wage gap increased until the 70s when whites' wages were 20 times higher than those of blacks.

After one hundred years of very wages for black miners Chamber of Mines is still firmly committed to this starvation policy.

Black miners' wages are among the lowest in the whole South African economy. The average monthly wage of a black miner is R500 while their white counterparts earn R3000 on average, six times more than black workers.

At Vaal Reefs, one of the richest gold mines, the highest paid miner earns R10 375.00 while black mineworkers still earn R316.00 per month.

This year, the Chamber of Mines refused to pay miners a minimum monthly wage of R543, as it claimed it could not afford to pay a living wage.

But in all the major mining in-

dustries of the world, miners earn more than workers in other industries. This is because of the hard and dangerous work miners do underground.

Last year (1988) gold mines made R6 675 m. in profits while the 456 577 black mineworkers who produced this wealth received only half that amount in wages.

It is this state of affairs that black miners are committed to challenging through the National Union of Mineworkers.

Extracts from National Executive Committee Statement

This year the Chamber of Mines is spending thousands of rand on celebrating its centenary. Mineworkers have nothing to celebrate. Instead we look back at 100 years of poverty, racism and exploitation.



The low wages paid to black workers have made mine bosses very rich



A victim of the Great Strike in 1987 - shot by a rubber bullet

100 YEARS POORER

A proud history of struggle by mineworkers against the Chamber

MINEWORKERS have not taken Chamber's repression without fighting back. The history of the Chamber is full of workers heroic struggles against oppression and exploitation.

Such were the historic strikes of 1922, 1946 and 1987. Countless skirmishes have been waged almost every year since 1889. Each time mineworkers go out on a major strike, the Chamber of Mines and their apartheid state declare war on unarmed workers.

However, bitter historical ex-

perience has taught miners that their salvation lies in organisation.

Police brutality has failed to dampen the militancy of the black miners.

It is the miners organisations the Chamber of Mines hate most. In pursuit of untrammeled exploitation of the slave labour, the Chamber remains determined to fight annihilation of this strategic labour force.

A real challenge to the mine bosses came when delegates of people's organisation met on the 3rd August 1941 to set up a working committee to launch a black miners trade union.

Under the leadership of the Communist Party members like T W Thibedi and J B Marks the African Mine Workers Union was formed.

Organised under the African Mine Workers Union, miners demanded a minimum wage of ten shillings (one rand) per day; family housing in place of compounds; long service gratuities and the repeal of the notorious law - War Measure 1425 - which banned any gathering of any sort by more than twenty people anywhere along the 'proclaimed' mining area.

United under AMWU over 50 000 miners went on strike as a

to suppress the legitimate demands of the miners.

The Chamber in collusion with racist state unleashed terror, the miners and their union, the end, five miners lost their lives while 900 were injured.

The Chamber in alliance with State went on to smash the AMWU and weaken the power of miners.

Forty years later under the NUM, the militancy of the black miners re-emerged when 250 000 went on strike to demand higher wages and better working conditions.

The Chamber's response was the same - the use of brute force

to suppress the legitimate demands of the miners.

The combined forces of Chamber and State were set on the miners and their union resulting in the deaths of miners and scores injured.

In the end 50 000 miners were dismissed in an obvious attempt to smash the NUM.

For mineworkers, the word "Chamber" is synonymous with mass retributions, assaults of workers by mine security, banning of union meetings, forcing mineworkers to work in unsafe places, and racial discrimination.

In 100 years the Chamber has

rendered a million miners permanently disabled. Over 65 000 miners have been killed while digging gold and coal for the Chamber bosses. Hundreds of thousands have perished through diseases contracted on the Chamber mines.

In short, the Chamber of Mines will be celebrating the massive accumulation of wealth obtained with the sweat and blood of the unliving heroes of our country - the black mineworkers.

The miners have nothing to celebrate in 100 years of exploitation but have to redouble their efforts in fighting mine repression and exploitation.



JB Marks, president of the African Mine Workers Union, distributing pamphlets outside a compound