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THE 1946 AFRICAN MINE WORKERS' STRIKE IN THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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in response to changes in the structure of production and groups controlling the state. In the early phase of industrialisation in South Africa (circa 1890-1930) the extraction of surplus value rested on the articulation between two modes of production, i.e. between a dominant capitalist mode and a subordinate precapitalist mode, within an overall economic system. In the mythology of South African capitalism, peasant production in the African Reserves and the network of kinship relations within their redistributive economies were deemed to provide both subsistence and welfare function for the families of migrant workers, thus furnishing the bulk of the necessary product for the reproduction of labour power. Freed from the need to provide for the reproduction of labour power in the form of wages, employers could thus fix wages at the subsistence level of the individual worker, thereby facilitating a high level of surplus value appropriation. This system of cheap labour was premised on the workers' access to the means of production (land) in the Reserves. Thus primitive accumulation in South Africa depended not on the separation of labour from the means of production leaving it with no other means of subsistence than the sale of labour power (as in Europe), but rather on the maintenance and transformation of precapitalist relations of production in the Reserves, so producing a particular form of proletarianisation. By historical accident producers in the precapitalist mode were black. They were exploited and oppressed not because of their pigmentation, but because the surplus value created by their labour was required for accumulation in the capitalist mode. The major social contradiction lay thus not between undifferentiated white and black populations, but between labour in the precapitalist mode and capital in the capitalist mode. However this relationship between the modes produced conditions which gradually dissolved the precapitalist relations of production in the Reserves, leading to the development of a single capitalist mode of production. The basis of exploitation thus shifted from the relationship between two modes of production to one within the capitalist mode itself, and the major contradiction shifted to that between labour and capital within the single mode of production.[1]

In response to both the need for cash income (for taxes etc.) and the growth of new markets for produce, particularly that created by the burgeoning mining industry after 1870, during the 19th Century tribal African subsistence producers were transformed into a surplus producing peasantry within the colonial state. In many cases this peasantry out-produced white farmers, competing successfully with them,

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1. This is an oversimplified outline of a theoretical formulation in H. Wolpe, 'Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid', Economy and Society, I, 1972.

and a small group of small-scale African capitalist farmers emerged to comprise a nascent rural bourgeoisie.[1] Given the relatively unrestricted peasant access to land, agricultural production thus provided the peasantry with an attractive and lucrative source of cash income. The slow operation of market forces could not provide the requisite supply of labour for either the mines or white farms, and the machinery of the state had to be used to propel labour into these sectors. The last decade of the 19th and the first of the 20th centuries saw a gathering legislative assault on the independence of the peasantry, culminating in the Land Act of 1913 (significantly passed after the unification of the four provinces). This Act delminted the African Reserves for the first time, restricting them to some 13% of total land area, prohibited African land purchase outside these areas and limited the size of individual holdings within them. By severely restricting access to the means of production the Act had the threefold effect of undermining the economic base and independence of the peasantry (effectively destroying a lucrative source of income and subsistence); controlling the growing differentiation within the Reserves (destroying the nascent bourgeoisie); and freeing Africans in large numbers for labour on white farms and the mines. Yet this Act was not a simple device of legislative dispossession. By retaining the reserves system and (now restricted) individual access to land whilst simultaneously controlling the influx of Africans into urban areas (through legislation and the pass system), it sought to provide and control a supply of cheap labour through the maintenance of pre-capitalist relations of production in the Reserves. Yet by effectively restricting peasant production, it increasingly produced conditions which undermined these relations. By 1920 the once large peasant surpluses had dried up as the productive capacity and ability of the Reserves to support the increasing populations declined. Impoverishment and landlessness accelerated. With almost monotonous regularity, Reports and Commissions after 1920 attested to the 'creation of desert conditions in the Native areas', warned of 'appalling poverty' and raised the spectre of mass starvation.[2]

The Thirties and Forties witnessed very rapid growth in the South African economy and important changes in the structure of production. The almost total dependence on agriculture and mineral exports

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1. See Colin Bundy, 'The Emergence and Decline of a South African Peasantry', African Affairs, LXXI (1972), 369-88.

2. Report of the Native Economic Commission 1930-2 (UG 22/1932), paras 69-73 et passim. All official Reports on the Reserves stress these problems. For fairly detailed evidence, see Report of the Witwatersrand Mine Native Wages Commission (UG 21/1944), paras 114-283. Also Bundy op. cit., 384-7.

was transformed into a high level of industrialisation, and the contribution of manufacturing to National Income first surpassed agriculture in 1930, outstripping mining by 1943.[1] Stimulated first by the rise in the price of gold resulting from the abandonment of the Gold Standard in December 1932 and then by the demands of wartime production, the economy expanded in two unprecedented periods of growth, 1933-9 and 1940-6. In fourteen years National Income almost trebled from £236.9m to £704.2m. The number of manufacturing establishments rose from 6,543 in 1932 to 8,505 in 1939 and by 1946 stood at 9,999. The gross value of their output increased by 140% in the first period of growth and by a further 141% during the war. Within manufacturing a fundamental sectoral shift in the emphasis of production occurred; the industrial group comprising metal products, machinery and transport equipment had established itself as the largest group within the manufacturing sector even before the war, its contribution to total manufacturing output rising from 17.6% to 26.6% 1930-40, whilst that of food, beverages and tobacco fell from 31% to 24%. This was reflected in the increasing capital intensity of industry, the capital to labour ratio rising from £794 per worker in 1932 to £981 in 1939, reaching £1,196 per worker in 1946.

The struggle between the national and metropolitan oriented fractions of the bourgeoisie eased slightly in the period 1933-9. The crisis in South African capitalism induced by the Depression and the 1932 Gold Standard crisis united the Afrikaans-speaking rural and the English-speaking mining, industrial and commercial fractions of the bourgeoisie. With the exception of a small group led by Dr. D. F. Malan in the ruling Nationalist Party, they sank their bitter political differences and joined together under the Premiership of General Hertzog in the United South African National Party (U.P.) in 1934. In the first six years of rapid growth an additional 100,000 whites entered industrial employment, and the 'poor white problem' largely disappeared by 1940.[2] The white labour aristocracy initiated by the Nationalist/Labour Party 'Pact' government of 1924-9 was largely completed and white working-class opposition and pressure on the government substantially relieved. The much feared threat to Afrikaner Nationalism posed by potential class mobilisation was largely removed, freeing a future Nationalist government to consolidate Afrikaner

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1. Union Statistics for Fifty Years (Pretoria 1960), S-3. Unless otherwise noted, the statistics throughout this paper are drawn from this official source. Until 1961, the South African £ = £ Sterling.

2. Report of the Department of Labour ... 1940 (UG 45/1941). At its height, the poor white problem affected more than 1/6 of the white population.

capital provided it defended the position of privilege it had created for white labour.[1]

But what of the effect of this growth on the African population? The urban African population trebled 1921-46. By 1946 almost one in four Africans were in the urban areas. A significant pointer to the permanence of urbanisation was the rapidly increasing ratio of African women to men in the cities, from under 1:5 in 1921 to 1:3 in 1946, whilst the national ratio remained constant.[2] Between 1933 and 1939 an additional 240,000 Africans entered industrial employment. Though corresponding figures for trade and commerce are unavailable, it has been estimated that if taken into account, the increase in urban African employment during this period was in the order of 400,000, almost doubling the size of the urban African labour force.[3] A striking feature of this huge influx of labour is the changing ratio of those employed in mining to manufacturing, construction and electricity, from 316:87 in 1932, 348:187 in 1939 to 328:321 in 1946. Whilst the migrant percentage of the manufacturing labour force in 1946 is not known, it is widely accepted that it was both small and decreasing. By this stage a substantial African proletariat (in the classic sense of those 'freed' from the means of production and forced to sell their labour power in order to subsist) had developed. But mine labour was purely migrant. How did development affect these workers?

This can only be answered by a necessarily brief and crude examination of the effects of development on the precapitalist relations of production in the Reserves on which the cheap labour system rested. The crucial distinction between a peasantry and proletariat is that whilst the former may supply various quantities of labour as a form of rent, they retain possession of the means of production.[4] Here is the source of the peasantry's relative economic independence. If this capacity to put the means of production into operation is reduced or removed, the independence is destroyed, and peasants are forced to sell their labour power in order to subsist even though they may still live (or in the South African case, be compelled by

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1. All contemporary Nationalist publications stress the need to prevent such mobilisation. Special organisations were set up to woo Afrikaner workers into the bosom of the volk, e.g. Die Blankewerkersbeskermingsbond and Die Nasionale Raad van Trustees.

2. Native Laws Commission of Enquiry, 1946-8 (UG 28/1948), para 18-28.

3. D. Hobart Houghton in Vol. II of the Oxford History of South Africa (Oxford, 1971), 34.

4. 'Possession' is used not to connote ownership, but the capacity to put the means of production into operation.

the State to live) on the unproductive land. In such cases it is suggested, rural residents form part of the proletariat if denied possession (in the sense defined) of the means of production and are thus forced to sell their labour power in order to subsist.

The declining productivity and rapid impoverishment of the Reserve areas after the implementation of the Land Act has already been noted. Not only did productive capacity rapidly fall, but landlessness became acute. The Fagan Commission of 1948 identified three broad classes in the Reserves: owners or occupiers of Land; landless who owned no cattle; and landless whose cattle were grazed on common land. In the Ciskei Reserve for example it found 30% of families were landless, and over 60% owned five or fewer cattle, 29% owning none. This broad pattern held true for the other Reserves. In stressing the actue landless problem, an earlier report found that the vast majority of recruits to the mines came from the landless in the Reserves, and that for the bulk of such migrant workers, 'Reserve production is but a myth'.[1] In the period under review, the African labour force on the mines increased by 135,000 or 90%. Almost all of this largest ever increase in migrant labour to the mines occurred 1933-9, when cash wages remained virtually constant, even declining briefly, and real wages fell. When real wages rose relatively rapidly from 1943 to 1950, total African employment on the mines actually fell.[2] The rise in the number of migrants seeking to sell their labour-power cannot therefore be explained in terms of the increasing attractiveness of wage labour. Rather, when subsistence requirements and the fiscal demands of the state can no longer be met through the consumption and sale of commodities produced in the precapitalist mode, wage labour changes from a discretionary to a necessary activity regardless of whether real wages rise, fall or remain constant.[3] The impoverishment of the Reserves so widened the gap between productivity in the capitalist and precapitalist modes that even those with access to the means of production were forced to sell their labour-power in order to subsist. This is dramatically illustrated by the fall in the percentage of Africans classified as peasants in the census returns 1921-51 (Table I).

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1. (UG 28/1948) loc. cit. and (UG 21/1944) op. cit. paras 125, 212, 217, 220.

2. Ibid., Table XXXI pg. 20. See also WRJ Steenkamp, 'Bantu Wages in South Africa' S.A. Journal of Economics, XXX (1962) 96. The ratio of South African to 'foreign' labour remained virtually constant 1933-41, declining only after 1942.

3. See G. Arrighi, 'Labour Supplies in Historical Perspective: A Study of the Proletarianization of the African Peasantry in Rhodesia' Journal of Development Studies, VI (1970), 197-234.

Table I[1]

Census Year	Total African population over age 15 (a)	Total Classified as Peasants (b)	(b) as a percentage of (a)
1921	4,697,813	2,382,277	50
1936	4,727,815	2,433,028	51
1946	4,795,744	832,748	17
1951	5,218,407	447,653	8

This fall is partially explained by a significant reclassification. Women played a crucial role in the system of peasant production. After 1946, all African women, except those who explicitly labelled themselves peasants or farmers, were reclassified as dependants (i.e. economically inactive). No longer were they regarded as peasant producers, but as people dependent for subsistance on cash income from the sale of labour-power - an implicit governmental recognition that the basis of cheap labour had been eroded. Whilst the reclassification does partially account for the decline in the size of the peasantry (the number of African women classified as peasants declining from 1.3m in 1921 to under 10,000 in 1951) it only accounts for the fall between 1936 and 1946 (when the reclassification occurred), but not 1946-51. Similarly the real rise in the number of economically active Africans is concealed by the administrative withdrawal of over 1 million women from this category. Effectively deprived of possession of the means of production, by 1946 the peasantry had been fairly thoroughly proletarianised. However, the influx control measures of the state maintained the sale of labour-power in a migrant form for many.

The period of rapid development 1933-46 did not produce an African bourgeoisie.[2] Rather a relatively small trading petty bourgeoisie emerged in the rural areas, dealing almost exclusively in the food trade, together with a new petty bourgeoisie of professional, administrative and clerical workers. Together these comprised 0.2%

1. Like all unnoted statistics in this paper, calculated from Union Statistics for Fifty Years (pg A-33). The rise 1921-36 reflects state policy to return unemployed Africans to the Reserves during the Depression.

2. In his An African Bourgeoisie: Race, Class and Politics in South Africa (New Haven, 1965), Leo Kuper erroneously equates the bourgeoisie (those who own the means of production and employ labour for profit) with fractions of the petty bourgeoisie (either employers who themselves provide part of the manual labour, or professional, administrative and other 'non-productive' workers - sometimes called 'the middle class'). On this point see N. Poulantzas, 'on Social Classes', New Left Review, 78 (1973), 37-9. Whilst the African petty bourgeoisie may have been an aspirant bourgeoisie, their position vis-à-vis the South African bourgeoisie and the state differed from the usual clientelist relationship.

of adult Africans in 1921, 0.9% in 1926 and 1.2% or a total of 62,246 individuals in 1946.[1] The exploitation of the African proletariat produced no material benefit for the African petty bourgeoisie, but was in fact the direct cause of their political oppression. The labour policies of the state which differentiated between skilled and unskilled on racial grounds closed off avenues of mobility to this class and in effect lumped them together with the proletariat as politically rightless and economically exploitable. They too earned less than similarly skilled whites and formed a peripheral source of surplus value extraction.

Thus by 1946 primitive accumulation, 'the process which takes away from the labourer his possession of the means of production'[2] was far advanced. Whereas the process rested on the use of state machinery to maintain precapitalist relations of production in the Reserves, the development of the economy and the inherently contradictory nature of this policy led to their dissolution, and the peasantry were proletarianised, i.e. incorporated into capitalist relations of production. The path of capitalist development in South Africa generated both rural impoverishment and intense urban poverty as the decreasing amount of necessary product provided by Reserve production was not replaced by significantly higher wages in the capitalist mode.[3] Capitalist development thus generated conflict not only over wages, but all facets of urban and rural life. This structurally induced conflict centered on cheap labour, bringing into question the structure of the system of exploitation. These conflicts came to a head in the period 1942-6, when the problem of political control over urban Africans became acute, culminating in the 1946 strike with the use of massive repression to stifle the challenge. All classes had then to develop new responses to this conflict. After the 'Hertzog Bills' of 1936 - disenfranchising Africans in the Cape in return for seven (white) parliamentary representatives and an advisory Native Representative Council and slightly extending the area of the Reserves - African protest and mobilisation in the period under review were almost exclusively within the capitalist mode of production the source of structural conflict.[4] The central

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1. Union Statistics ... Loc. cit. Includes: traders; professional, technical and related workers; managers, administrators and officials; and clerical and related workers.

2. K. Marx, Capital, Vol. I (London, 1970), 714. Italics added.

3. Steenkamp, loc. cit. The post-1941 rise in industrial wages is explained below.

4. This is not to dismiss peasant opposition. However 1936-48, the primary thrust of African opposition was proletarian. The important peasant revolts of the Fifties occurred after a new alignment of class forces had gained power and attempted to modify the system of exploitation.

question about African opposition after 1936 revolved around the relationship between the African petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat, as manifested in their respective organisations.

This is a complex relationship which I have examined elsewhere.[1] Very briefly, the leading African political organisation, the African National Congress (ANC or Congress), rejected radical leadership at the outset of the Thirties, cut its links with African trade unions and functioned almost exclusively as a disorganised organ of petty bourgeois protest during this decade. The failure of the ANC and the All African Convention opposition to the 'Hertzog Bills' finally brought home the need for organised mass opposition. During the war, the ANC concentrated on reforming and rebuilding its organisational structure.[2]

More worrying to the government as the Department of Labour Reports after 1936 make clear, was the steady growth of African trade unionism in the Thirties and its mushrooming during the war. Though without official recognition and subject to a wide range of legal and other restraints, by September 1945 the Council of Non-European Trade Unions claimed a national membership of 158,000 in 119 unions, embracing more than 40% of the 390,000 Africans employed in commerce and manufacturing, and CNETU did not account for all African trade union membership. In both the Cape and Natal, African unions were largely under the umbrella of parallel white unions, and many Africans were members of either mixed or Coloured Unions.[3] Whilst accurate figures are impossible to obtain as official statistics exclude membership of non-registered, i.e. African trade unions, through the figures given in various sources,[4] it is safe to conclude that by 1945 at least 40% of Africans employed in commerce or private industry were unionised, if not as fully paid up members, at least as intermittent subscribers.

The growth of African trade unions 1930-45 saw a corresponding growth in militancy. The number of 'non-whites' on strike first exceeded

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1. D. O'Meara, Class and Nationalism in African Resistance: Secondary Industrialisation and the Development of a Mass Movement in South Africa 1930-50. M.A. dissertation, University of Sussex, 1973.

2. On the ANC 1912-52 see P. Walshe's history, The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa (London, 1970) and H. J. & R. E. Simons, Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950 (Harmondsworth, 1969).

3. The Industrial Legislation Commission claimed CNETU's figures were 'inflated' without disputing its very large membership in 1945 (UG 62/1951), para 1534. Also para 1468; Muriel Horrell, South African Trade Unionism (Johannesburg, 1961), 69; and H. G. Ringrose, 'Trade Unions in Natal' S.A. Journal of Economics, XVIII, 3 (1950), 271 and 283.

4. Ibid., plus H. J. & R E. Simons, op. cit. passim and E. Roux, Time Longer than Rope (Madison, 1964) passim.

that of whites in the late Twenties.[1] This trend was temporarily reversed during the Depression, but with the exception of 1940, from 1933-46 the number of non-white strikers consistently and often spectacularly exceeded that of whites.[2] The increase in militancy during the war is noticeable. In the ten year period 1930-9 inclusive, a total of 26,254 non-whites struck work for an average of 2.7 mandays for a total of 71,078 mandays. In the six years 1940-5 inclusive, the corresponding figures rose to 52,394 strikers, an average loss of 4.2 per striker for a total of 220,205 mandays. In 1942, a rash of strikes in CNETU's campaign for a weekly minimum wage of 40/- led directly to further state action against African unions. War Measure 145 of December 1942 outlawed strikes by Africans with severe sanctions. Disputes were to be submitted for arbitration. Within ten days of its promulgation, striking Africans were prosecuted. Despite 'firm instructions' to prosecute 'wherever possible', in the two years between its promulgation and December 1944, Africans were involved in some sixty illegal strikes. Although the unions were strongly warned to restrain their members, the Department of Labour Report for 1945 complained that 'Natives seem to be ignoring War Measure 145'.[3] Before the promulgation of the Measure the Wage Board was not obliged to consider a Union's complaints. The Measure thus gave the first (and only) partial recognition to African unions and its machinery was extensively used. The year 1942/3 saw a spectacular increase in the number of Africans for whom the Wage Board made determinations - from 1,084 to 67,632.[4] As these unions virtually monopolised representations under War Measure 145 this partially illustrates their instrumentality in improving the wages and conditions of their members.

The real earnings of Africans in private industry increased by 9.8% in the eight year period 1930/1-1939/40. In the next six years,

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1. Official Statistics on industrial disputes do not differentiate between Africans, Coloured and Asian.

2. These strikes were difficult to sustain however. Unskilled African labour could be rapidly replaced, and unions operated under severe financial restraints. Unless demands were met quickly, strikers were usually compelled to return to work or the Reserves. Thus while total manday loss in 'non-white' strikes consistently exceeds whites, the average per striker is lower.

3. Dept. of Labour - Summarized Report 1944, para 12; Race Relations News, VII, 1, pg. 2; and (UG9/1947) 19.

4. Report of the Department of Labour ... 1957 (UG 29/1958), 36. Previously African unions had applied successfully to the Board in only three instances.

1939/40-1945/6, they rose 51.8%.[1] Like the present increase in African earnings, this large rapid rise is not solely attributable to the increasing National Income during the period, otherwise a correspondingly higher increase in the first eight year period could be expected. Protected by the racial policies of the state there was little obligation on employers to raise wages with increased profits. Indeed South African economic history indicates that all significant wage increases resulted from organised worker pressure. The growth of African trade unionism certainly altered the power position of African Workers, giving them a weapon, which, as the strikes indicate, they were not loath to use, and a number of these resulted directly in wage increases.[2] African unions thus played a key, though often difficult to determine, role in the rise in African industrial earnings during this period.

Unlike the earlier Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU), the African trade unions of the Thirties and Forties were organised on an industrial basis and designed to pursue higher wages and improved working conditions for their members. This change from the 'big unionism' of the ICU was significant.[3] It implied a recognition of the proletarian role and its utilisation to confront the system of exploitation at its source within the capitalist mode of production. The rapid growth of trade unionism reflected the growing consciousness of the African proletariat - a recognition of the need for independent class action; that the conglomeration of peasantry, chiefs, proletariat and petty bourgeoisie in the ICU prevented the single minded pursuit of workers' interests. Without the overt 'political' character of the ICU, these unions were objectively 'political' in a more fundamental sense. In South Africa the pursuit of higher wages and improved working conditions for Africans was not just a demand for a share in the fruits of growth, but a direct challenge to the pattern of that growth based on the racial division of labour as the instrument of rapid capital accumulation. The 1922 General Strike had shown that enfranchised white labour would resist dilution of its privileged position

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1. A. M. K. M. Spandau, Income Distribution and Economic Growth in South Africa, unpublished Ph.D., University of South Africa 1971, Vol. I, Table 47(b). Spandau's figures are based on Steenkamp, loc. cit., but begin earlier. Stimulated by the wartime shortage of skilled labour, the racial earnings gap temporarily narrowed 1942-5 for the first and only time.

2. Race Relations Journal IX (1942), 116.

3. Though with an officially estimated membership of 146,000 in 1927 (Official Yearbook No. 11 1928/9 - this figure is probably an overestimation) the ICU was a disorganised amorphous, largely rural, mass protest movement rather than a trade union in the accepted sense. Lacking organised roots amongst workers, confused over its aims and battered by ideological and personal leadership splits, it disintegrated 1928-30.

and a system of cheap labour could only be maintained with its active connivance, a condition of which was protection from competition from black labour. Hence the job and wage colour bars in which race differentiated skilled from unskilled and which effectively closed avenues of mobility to educated Africans. In its acceptance of the liberal myth of slow African advance within the framework of the existing system and its concern for the conditions of individual participation and the removal of barriers to social mobility, the ANC failed to recognise that the alignment of class forces in South African capitalism frustrated these aims. The unions on the other hand effectively questioned the system of exploitation based on a racially defined cheap labour force. The significance of their growth lies not only in their contribution to the material welfare of their members and challenge to the system of exploitation, but also in their role in forging and capitalising on a growing proletarian consciousness, and its effect on an African national consciousness, illustrated most clearly by the African miners' strike.

The Gold Mining Industry and the African Mine Workers' Union (AMWU)

The two largest groups of African workers, mine and farm labourers, remained unorganised in the growth of trade unionism in the Thirties. The Communist Party (C.P.) had tried to establish a mine workers' union, but had been unable to solve the problems of organising migrant workers. Recognising it could not launch such a union on its own, the Party changed tactics in April 1941. Prodded by two African C.P. members, Gaur Radebe and Edwin Mofutsanyana, respectively Secretary for Mines and Employment in the Transvaal ANC and Minister of Labour in the ANC National Executive (known as the Cabinet), the Transvaal ANC convened a Conference in August 1941 to discuss the formation of an African mineworkers' union. The 80 delegates from 41 organisations unanimously resolved to organise workers both on the mines and before recruitment in the Reserves. A Committee of fifteen was elected to raise funds and 'build an African mine workers' union', with J. B. Marks as President, and James Majoro, a leading member of the Witwatersrand Native Mine Clerks Association, as Vice-President.[1] This latter connection was important. Proclamation 110 of 1942 excluded 'mine labourers' from the statutory cost of living allowance payable to all industrial employees. The Chamber of Mines ruled that its 1,935 African clerks fell within this category and refused them the allowance. Angered by the refusal, the Native Mine Clerks Association affiliated to the AMWU. The Chamber's compounds were closed to AMWU

1. Guardian 5.6.41 & Race Relations News III, 9 (1941), 1.

officials from the union's inception, and it was largely through individual contacts between members of the Clerks' Association and the working miners that the union slowly grew, claiming 25,000 members in 1944.[1] From the beginning the union pressed wage demands against a deaf Chamber. After a series of stoppages in February 1943 and representations from the AMWU and the African Gas and Power Workers' Union, the government appointed a commission to investigate the wages and conditions of African miners. The AMWU evidence in effect called for an end to cheap migrant labour. It contained five basic demands: regular wage increases; payment of a cost of living allowance; statutory wage minima and a Wage Board enquiry; the 'total abolition of the compound system, the tribal division of the workforce and all restrictions on freedom of movement; and finally, recognition of the AMWU.'[2]

The report of the Lansdown Commission[3] is a fascinating document. Delving into all aspects of African labour on the Gold Mines, it examines in great detail the arguments of the Chamber of Mines, which stressed the industry's dependence on cheap migrant labour, claimed wages were 'perfectly adequate' in view of remuneration in kind and Reserve production, and declared the industry was not in a position to raise wages without effectively shortening its life which would have disastrous results for the national economy.[4] The report illuminates the structure of the gold mining industry which is worth examining.

Gold mining is crucial to the South African economy. Developments affecting it have always influenced the delicate political relationship between the national and metropolitan fractions of the bourgeoisie. Not only was it the largest single industry accounting for the great bulk of the 16.2% which all mining contributed to National Income in 1943, declaring dividends of £15.6m (of which 54% were declared in South Africa), but also contributed massively to state revenue - some £27.3m in 1943. Though the total value of manufacturing output exceeded that of all mining in 1943, foreign exchange earned by Gold exports (approximately 60% of total) largely paid for the imported 50% of all raw materials used in industry. The needs and demands of the Chamber thus ranked very high in the government's priorities in framing policy.

The profitability constraints and structure of the gold mining

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1. H. J. & R. E. Simons, op. cit., 570.

2. Inkululeko No. 35 10.7.43.

3. Report of the Witwatersrand Mine Native Wages Commission on the Remuneration and Conditions of Employment of Natives on the Witwatersrand Gold Mines ... 1943 (UG 21/1944).

4. Ibid., para 99.

industry were critical factors in the development of the racial pattern of power and privilege in South Africa. Whilst the Witwatersrand reefs are the largest ever discovered, they are very deep, dispersed, and of low yield ore. The realisation of profits required immense capital expenditure, which, coupled with the fixed price of gold and the inability to pass increased costs on to consumers meant these had to be kept low. Of the two major cost items, stores were subject to market fluctuation and thus labour became the focus of cost minimisation. The Mine owners had grouped together to protect their interests in the Chamber of Mines in 1889. Through a standard average maximum wage system, a recruiting monopsony in the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association and the Native Recruiting Corporation, and servile labour measures (most obviously the compound system), the Chamber eliminated competition over wages, enabling consistently low levels to be maintained almost indefinitely. The basic underground cash wage for African miners was 2/6d per shift in 1890, 1/8d in 1935, and 2/- in 1942. These low wages were justified by the Reserve subsistence argument.[1]

In August 1943, 308,374 Africans were on the Witwatersrand Gold Mines, 'approximately 84% of the full complement of natives that could be profitably employed',[2] working a six day week. The average wage was 2/1d for surface workers and 2/3d for underground workers. The Chamber operated on 'average daily maximum wage system', which, 'under penalty', no mine could exceed. In this way piece work earnings were limited and 'unfair competition' av ided. In 1943, 76% of all African workers earned less than the average maximum wage of 2/3d per shift. Increases were not automatic, and only granted after considering a recommendation from the individual African's white ganger, and no overtime rates, sick or leave pay were granted. These meagre earnings were subject to deductions for boots, matresses and other items totalling 15% of total earnings.[3]

In its investigation of the wage structure of the industry, the Commission examined the supplementary income from the Reserves on which the Chamber's arguments against increases rested. This section of the report offers stark evidence of the decline of productivity, impoverish

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1. F. A. Johnstone, 'Class Conflict and Colour Bars in the South African Goldmining Industry 1910-26', Institute of Commonwealth Studies Collected Seminar Papers No. 10, The Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th & 20th Centuries (1970) 112-26. Also Lansdown Report, op. cit., Table XXXI.

2. Ibid., para 65. 98% were 'tribal Natives', i.e. migrants. The fall in African mine labour in 1942 reflects the enlistment of over 100,000 Africans from South Africa and the High Commission territories for military service. Hereafter the 'foreign' labour ratio rose rapidly.

3. Ibid., para 80-2 and Table IV; para 87-8 and 238.

ment, landlessness, severe malnutrition and health problems in the Reserves - a 'cause for grave concern' - concluding that for the majority of migrants, 'Reserve production is but a myth'. Firstly it investigated changes in patterns of employment caused by impoverishment. The composition of the workforce showed a rise in first-time recruits as re-recruitment from South Africa declined. Of the labour recruited from the Free State in 1943, 42.7% were new recruits, with high and increasing percentages for the Transvaal Natal and Zululand as well. The commission found that 'due to the deterioration of the Reserves' the average stay in the Reserves between contracts for re-recruits was not the '12 months of idleness' claimed by the Chamber, but had declined from 8.1 months in 1931 to 7.6 months in 1942. Whereas in 1931, 56% of all re-recruits returned to the mines within a year, by 1943 this had risen to 64%, more than half of whom returned within five months. By the end of the seventh month, over 50% of recruits had returned to the mines, compared with the ninth month in 1931.[1] Whilst suggesting that at least the bulk of recruits from the Transkei and Ciskei (i.e. 40% of the total labour force in 1936) were landless, the Commission calculated a series of budgets for a family of five with access to land, incorporating wages earned on the mines and cash income from, and the value of own produce consumed in the Reserves. These indicate that even a worker permanently employed on the mines, whose family had access to land and in a good year, would suffer a shortfall between income and expenditure which had rocketed since 1939 from £1.13.8d to £10.4.4d for a surface worker and from £0.0.2d to £9.4.10d for an underground worker. With the exception of clerks and indunas (less than 2% of the work force), all African miners were obliged to return to the Reserves on completion of their 14 month contract, and the actual shortfalls were thus much larger. Table II shows the extent of these over two years for various lengths of stay in the Reserves and their rise in just four years.

These findings explicitly gave the lie to the Chamber's pious claim that their 'perfectly adequate' wages, together with Reserve production, kept a miner's family for his 14 month contract, paid for a further 12 months of 'idleness', 'leaving a large margin to purchase stock and improve his standard of living'. For the 41.2% of African miners earning 2/- per shift or less, a stay of more than five months in the Reserves meant a shortfall between income and expenditure over a two year period greater than their annual cash wage. For the further 24% earning 2/1d-2/3d per shift, this occurred after a seven month absence from the mines. Yet workers earning more than the minimum wage were only employed at the increased rate if they returned to

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1. Ibid., para 201 and 203 and Appendix 'I'.

the mines within six months.[1]

Table II[2]

No. of months spent in Reserves over a 24 month period	Shortfall between Income and Expenditure			
	1939		1943	
	Surface Worker	Underground Worker	Surface Worker	Underground Worker
(i.e. hypothetical full-time employment)	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.
0	3. 7. 4.	.0. 0. 4.	20. 8. 8.	18. 9. 8.
6 (mines 18)	16.12. 0.	14. 1. 9.	34. 1. 2.	32.11.11.
8 (mines 16)	21.18. 0.	19.13. 4.	39.11. 2.	38. 5. 2.
10(mines 14)	27. 4. 1.	25. 5. 0.	45. 1. 2.	43.18. 5.

The Commission's genteel horror at conditions on the mines highlights the destruction of precapitalist relations of production in the Reserves, with a labour force 'freed' from the means of production and forced to sell its labour power in order to subsist in appalling poverty. Though there is no direct evidence on this point, the fall in both re-recruiting from, and the proportion of the workforce originating in South Africa (52.2% in 1936 to 39.3% in 1946), coupled with the Chamber's persistent complaint that higher wages in private industry were depleting its workforce, would suggest that ex-mine employees were selling their labour-power at higher rates in manufacturing, joining the permanent urban proletariat.[3]

The Commission's recommendations aimed at improving the position of the lowest paid miners. Given the profitability constraints of the industry it recommended the continuation of the migrant labour system, yet at wages providing 'a proper livelihood', and the industry should gear itself for a 'full' industrial wage for the landless. The full recommendations were: a flat cost of living allowance of 3d per shift; a boot allowance and free, or cost price, repair service; new per shift wage minima of 2/2d for surface and 2/5d for underground workers (over 86% of surface and 80% of underground workers earned less), and payment of an overtime rate with leave pay for long service employees. This would increase the average annual earnings of surface workers by £10.4.0d and underground workers by £11.14.7d, virtually wiping out the

1. Chamber quotes, ibid., pg. 110. The 'period of grace' was 8 months for Mocambiqueans and 12 for 'Tropicals'.

2. Compiled ibid., Tables XXVII-XXXX.

3. See for example Transvaal Chamber of Mines (TCM), Fifty-Eighth Annual Report. Year 1947, 64.

shortfalls and adding £2.6m to the annual wage bill. It was argued that the Chamber, whose members had declared a combined estimated working profit of nearly £38m for 1943 and paid out dividends of over £15.3m together with £27.7m to the state, could well afford the extra cost. Finally, whilst declaring itself in favour of 'some form of collective bargaining' for Africans, the Report concluded that African miners '... have not yet reached the stage of development which would enable them safely and usefully to employ trade unionism as a means of promoting their advancement', and that 'the public interests would definitely negative' recognition of the AMWU.[1]

Neither the Chamber nor the government fully accepted these recommendations. Overtime and Sunday pay was granted, and 'in lieu of all other recommendations', surface pay was increased by 4d per shift and underground wages by 5d. Contrary to recommendation, the cost was borne by the taxpayer, through the refund of the bulk of the Gold Realisation Charge to pay for the increases.[2]

The Report was considered at the annual AMWU conference in August 1944. This meeting spanned the spectrum of African politics. Attended by 700 delegates from every mine, 1300 rank and file members, the President-General of the ANC, at least one NRC member and a number of prominent trade unionists, it also received a telegram of support from the Paramount Chief of Pondoland. Angry delegates called for a strike, but were dissuaded by an executive anxious not to harm the war effort. A compromise resolution described the Lansdown recommendations as 'hopelessly inadequate and unsatisfactory', but urged their full implementation as a step in the right direction, demanded a Wage Board enquiry, and called on the labour movement to protest against the 'continuous attempts of mining management to victimise and intimidate active members of the African Mine Workers' Union'.[3]

Both the Chamber and the government attempted to stifle the AMWU. Giving evidence to the sedition trial following the 1946 strike, the Compound manager of the New Kleinfontein Mine admitted Africans 'were not allowed to organise', and that it was Chamber policy, followed on all mines, 'to get rid of' anybody trying to organise workers.[4] At the

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1. Lansdown Report, op. cit., para 211-2, and 287-317, 320-3, 466-7. Italics added.

2. TCM, Fifty-Fifth Annual Report. Year 1944, pg 25.

3. Inkululeko, No. 60, 26.8.1944.

4. Quoted in 'Report of the Trial of Communist Leaders in South Africa', Freedom (Double No. 1 & 2) April 1947, 15. For Chamber policy on African Trade Unionism see its, Tribal Natives and Trade Unionism. (Johannesburg, November 1946).

same trial, Senator Basner claimed the Council had insinuated a spy into the AMWU Council. Despite harrassment, the union grew steadily, claiming 25,000 members in 1944. In August of that year, following representations from the Chamber, War Measure 1425 was promulgated, prohibiting gatherings of more than 20 persons on proclaimed mining ground. This was later acknowledged by the AMWU president to be the beginning of its undoing. With the Compounds now out of bounds to its officials, meeting had now to be held clandestinely at night under the mine dumps. The enrolment of new members and collection of subscriptions became increasingly difficult, income dropping from £120 to £30 per month, and the columns of Inkululeko regularly reported the arrest of AMWU officials for contravening the ban on large meetings. A mass emergency conference of March 1945 demanded the repeal of the Measure and the retrospective enforcement of the Lansdown recommendations. In June an AMWU delegation met the Acting Prime Minister and other Cabinet Ministers, unsuccessfully pressing these claims and a demand for a general wage increase.[1]

The situation gradually escalated. South Africa suffered severe food shortages in 1945. Rations were cut on all mines in July, and canned beef substituted for fresh meat. The AMWU President wrote that the miners' grievances were further aggravated by 'the quality and quantity of food they get' and described the formation of workers' committees demanding better food. At Crown Mines, 5,000 workers refused to accept food from the mine kitchen. In March 1946 a food riot developed in which one man was killed and forty injured when police broke up a protest outside the kitchen at the Modderfontein East Mine, and 2,000 miners at New Kleinfontein attended a protest meeting on the food situation.[2]

Clearly an explosion was coming. The 2,000 delegates to the April 1946 AMWU conference drew up a statement demanding: a minimum daily wage of 10/-; family housing; 2 weeks paid annual leave; a £100 gratuity after 15 years' service; payment of repatriation fares; and repeal of War Measure 1425. Again an implicit demand for the stabilisation of the work force and an end to migratory labour. Numerous letters to the Chamber went unanswered. Senator Basner tried without success to get the Chamber to negotiate with the AMWU. Similar attempts by all seven African parliamentary representatives to interview the Prime Minister and Minister of Labour were unavailing. In June the annual conference of the Transvaal Council of Non-European Trade Unions

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1. Marks quoted in H. J. & R. E. Simons, op. cit., 572; M. Benson, Struggle for a Birthright (Harmondsworth 1966), 98; Inkululeko, No. 72, 10.3.1945 and No. 78, 9.6.1945.

2. Ibid., No. 91, 28.1.46; No. 81, 28.7.45; and No. 93, 11.3.46.

unanimously pledged full support to the AMWU in the event of a strike. The situation reached its climax in August. According to a police witness, at a special open air conference on Sunday 4th a resolution to strike was moved from the floor and unanimously adopted by the 1,000 delegates. Another police witness testified that Marks and other speakers 'emphatically' warned against the use of violence by the strikers.[1]

The strike began on the morning of August 12th. Estimates of the number of participants vary. The C.P. paper Inkululeko jubilantly put the figure at 100,000, while the Johannesburg Star and Die Transvaler reported only 50,000. Official labour statistics speak very precisely of 62,091 strikers and the only Chamber of Mines reference to the strike puts the figure at 76,000 of the Reef's 308,000 miners.[2] Likewise there is some discrepancy in reports of the number of mines affected. Working from the notes of participants, the Simons claim that 12 mines were brought to a standstill and production partially paralysed on 9 others. Reports in the Star and Transvaler conflict. After the strike, both claimed that only 17 of the 45 mines on the Reef were affected, with a total stoppage on 5 and a further 12 either partially closed or affected. Yet their daily report names 19 mines, 9 totally stopped and with production partially stopped or affected on a further 10. Monthly production fell between July and August on 31 of the 45 mines, with total monthly production down by 169,800 tons to the lowest level since 1937.[3] Unfortunately details of the national origins of the strikers are unavailable, though given the decline of the Reserves, I should speculate that they would reveal a disproportionate number of South Africans.

Official reaction was swift and violent. To the Head Council of his ruling United Party, Prime Minister Smuts declared himself 'not unduly concerned'. The strike was the result of agitation, not of legitimate grievances, and 'appropriate action' was being taken. This action consisted of paralysing the leadership whilst police attacked miners with rifles and clubs. 'It can now be revealed' confided the Star after the strike, that 1,600 police were put on special duty as reinforcements were rushed to the Rand and the compounds sealed off

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1. Guardian, 25.4.46, Inkululeko, No. 97, First Issue June 1946 and Freedom, op. cit., pg 30 & 10.

2. Inkululeko, No. 99, August 1946; Die Transvaler, 13.8.46; The Star, 12.8.46; Dept. of Labour Report 1946 (UG 62/1948); TCM Fifty-Seventh Annual Report, pg 26.

3. H. J. & R. E. Simons, op. cit., pg 575; The Star and Die Transvaler 16.8.46 and 12.8-17.8.46; TCM, 'Monthly Analysis of Gold Production in the Transvaal', July and August 1946, Annual Report 1946 op. cit. 113.

under armed guard. An emergency meeting of the Transvaal Council of Trade Unions held on the 13th issued a call for a General Strike in 48 hours. The ANC President-General and the Transvaal and Natal Indian Passive Resistance Councils pledged full support. Police burst into this meeting, arrested J. B. Marks, President of the AMWU and Chairman of CNETU, and raided AMWU offices. On the same day, police fired on strikers at the Sub-Nigel mine, reporting six killed by rifle fire and a further six trampled to death in the ensuing panic. The next day, miners staging a sit-down strike underground were baton charged and driven up 'stope by stope, level by level' to the surface and back into the compound where they could be fully controlled. Groups from the West Springs, City Deep and Simmer and Jack Mines marching towards Johannesburg to see the Chief Native Commissioner were 'dispersed' by the police. Much was made of this march, the Press claiming a profusion of 'weapons' indicated an intention to 'attack' the city. Yet at the subsequent sedition trial, the prosecution could establish no motive other than the desire to recover passes lodged with the Commissioner and return to the Reserves. Police witnesses agreed under cross examination that at no time did the officer in charge ask the miners why they were going to Johannesburg, and until charged by the police, the crowd had been 'good humoured' and 'peaceful'. On the 14th, the hitherto conservative Native Representative Council (NRC), after a series of unprecedented verbal attacks on government policy, unanimously resolved to suspend sittings of their 'toy telephone' in angry and vehement protest at the government's refusal to discuss the strike. A CNETU mass meeting to discuss a General Strike was banned by the Chief Magistrate of Johannesburg, and 600 police sent to break it up before it even started. The Chairman of the Strike Committee, James Phillips, was arrested together with other prominent black trade unionists and radicals of all races. By Friday 16th, 88 people had appeared in court charged under the Riotous Assemblies and Native Labour Regulation Acts. At a meeting of the arrest-depleted CNETU strike committee on the 17th, two prominent African trade unionists, Gana Makabeni and Daniel Koza, proposed its dissolution, withdrawing when defeated. The committee adjourned without taking any further decisions and did not meet again. Isolated in that most effective instrument of social control, the compounds, battered by brutal police attacks, cut off from its leadership and disheartened by the lack of visible support, the strike collapsed. The last of the strikers returned to work on the 17th. Though the number of casualties was never made known, at least 12 Africans were reported killed and over 1,200 injured. The Chamber of Mines never reported fully on the strike, its 1946 annual report containing six curt lines of statement, and the government refused to appoint a commission of inquiry.[1]

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1. Details from: Inkululeko No. 99; The Star and Die Transvaler, 12.8.46-17.8.46; Freedom loc. cit. and Vol. V, 5, October-November 1946.

Aftermath of the Strike

In terms of its objectives the strike was a dismal failure, unable to be sustained by the tenuous AMWU organisation in the face of massive state repression. Not until 1949 was a further increase of 3d per shift granted, a far cry from a 10/- minimum wage, and still short of the recommendations of the 1944 Landsdown Report. Yet the significance and results of the strike far transcend its failure. This largest strike in South African history (in terms of participants though not mandays lost) was undertaken by migrant workers. It was those very workers on whose backs the edifice of the cheap labour system rested, these still supposedly peasant migrants, whose action in the industrial sector spotlighted the erosion of the economic base of cheap labour and the shift in the basis of exploitation to relations of production within the capitalist mode of production itself. Recognising their proletarian role, they delivered a challenge to the system of exploitation far stronger than any hitherto offered by the political organisations of the African petty bourgeoisie. The structural conflict of the period 1930-45 culminated in the strike, which threw the problem of control into sharp relief, accentuating the growing debate over the future patterns of control. The violence of the state's response not only indicated the degree to which it felt threatened, but foreshadowed the extreme repression after 1948. Only the War provided an equal catalyst in the politics of the Forties, and the Strike prompted a vigorous response from all classes. There are also obvious parallels between this and the 1922 General Strike of white workers. Both were revolts against a wage policy of the Chamber of Mines which a Smuts government supported. In both, Smuts came down on the side of the mine owners with ruthless force, and was thrown out of office at the following general elections as a result of the contradictions highlighted by the strike.

By reflecting the structural changes since 1930, the strike immediately prompted desperate efforts by the U.P. government to defuse strident African demands for change. Casting around for alternatives, Smuts offered to enlarge the Native Representative Council to fifty elected members, give it executive powers, including taxation, and extend partial recognition to the African trade unions. Whilst there was general recognition within the U.P. of the need to adjust the system of exploitation to the structural changes, there were substantial personal differences within the Party as to the desired extent of change (immediately after the strike Smuts's had seen the need for modifications whilst his liberal deputy, Jan Hofmeyer, had stood on his dignity, apparently regarding the strike and NRC suspension as insults to his good intentions). Moreover, given the class basis of the United Party, important splits occurred between fractions of the bourgeoisie over

future policy. Smuts was faced with irreconcilables: the African demand for change; the response of key fractions of the bourgeoisie within his own Party; and that of the electorate at large.

The mineowners responded vigorously to the structural changes and the perceived threat to their interests, stating their position on a number of issues very clearly. Accession to the strikers' demands or even a movement towards them would have undermined the cheap labour system with only two possible results - a fall in mining profits or a reduction in white wages. At a special meeting two months after the strike convened to consider 'the rising tide of working costs which is threatening the industry and its future development', the Chamber claimed that a daily wage of 10/- would close 35 of the 45 existing mines, producing mass unemployment. This was followed by an unprecedented flood of public relations material setting out the Chamber's position on African trade unionism (violently opposed), Gold mining taxes (far too heavy - the Chamber was reluctant 'to pay for' further industrialisation), migrant labour (beneficial for all parties concerned) and general 'Native policy', as the Chamber flexed its considerable political muscle. In its evidence to the Fagan Commission, the Chamber argued that a switch from migratory to stabilised labour could only be offset by a drop in white earnings, forbidden by law, and which would meet the 'strenuous and bitter' opposition of the organised white working class.[1]

Similarly, the strike forced businessmen in manufacturing and commerce into a re-examination of the system of exploitation, highlighting the tensions within the ruling class which had been building up since the end of the war. The fall in the Reserve contribution to the subsistence necessary for the reproduction of labour put pressure on wages, presenting capital with the problem of falls in profit levels. The structural conflicts generated were distinctly unhealthy for business. By 1945, for non-Afrikaner secondary industry, the process of primitive accumulation appeared to have reached a stage where direct state coercion and control of labour was no longer necessary. The huge expansion and increasing capital intensity of industry during the war accelerated the need for both skilled labour and higher productivity. Industry was prepared to invest in both, and the migrant system with its attendant social and political costs appeared inconducive to both. After the strike a move towards the creation of a stable, urban labour force

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1. TCM, 'Proceedings at the Special Meeting Held in Johannesburg, Friday 25th October 1946'; Tribal Natives and Trade Unionism, op. cit.; Gold Mining Taxation, P.R.D. Series No. 1, 1945; The Native Workers on the Witwatersrand Gold Mines, P.R.D. Series No. 7, 1947; Native Laws Commission of Enquiry: Statements of Evidence submitted by the Gold Producers' Committee (Johannesburg, April 1947).

crowded and impoverished, and that the bulk of the African population had been permanently and irreversibly urbanised. The foundation of Native policy, the 'Stallard Formula' which stipulated that Africans should leave urban areas when they 'ceased to minister' to the needs of Whites, was declared 'an untenable proposition'. The Report concluded in italics that 'legal provisions or an administrative policy calculated to perpetuate migratory labour and put obstacles in the way of its stabilisation are wrong and have a detrimental effect. The policy should be one for facilitating and encouraging stabilisation. On the other hand, however, migratory labour cannot be prohibited by law or terminated by administrative action'.[1]

Thus the strike highlighted the tensions in the ruling class and the policy choices open to the state, reflected most clearly in the Fagan Report. The manufacturing and commercial bourgeoisie wanted a stabilised labour force - to be financed largely by higher taxation of the new Free State Gold Fields - whilst unless they could do the politically impossible and reduce white wages, the mine owners wanted the migrant system of cheap labour to continue, and mining taxation reduced. Both groups were represented politically in the United Party, initially established in 1934 to unite warring factions of the bourgeoisie, and the party was torn both ways. Whereas in both the General elections it had previously won it had been able to mobilise support on overriding issues, the crisis of capitalism in 1938 and the war in 1943, not only had it been largely deserted by the rural bourgeoisie on the war issue in 1939, but was now split on key issues of national policy, and in trying to have it both ways, fell between two stools. On the other hand, by 1948 the once bitterly divided Herenigde (re-united) Nationalist Party had no such problems and a very clear policy.

The structural changes highlighted by the strike put further pressure on the government. After the war, the African influx into skilled positions was slowed by a number of factors, the first of which was large-scale, government-sponsored immigration to South Africa. Whereas the annual total had never previously exceeded 8,000, there was a net immigration of 20,922 whites in 1947, rising to 28,097 in 1948. More important was the reabsorption of 250,000 Servicemen into the economy after the War. War Measures 16 of 1940 and 38 of 1941 provided that men who left civil occupations to render military service were to be reabsorbed into these at the end of the war and could not be dismissed for at least six months. By the end of 1945, 45,020 whites and 7,316 Coloured had been reabsorbed under these measures.

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1. Report of the Native Laws Commission of Enquiry 1946-8 (UG 28/1948), paras 18-26 and 61.

This not only slowed the movement of Africans into skilled roles, but created tensions between both black and white workers and the predominantly Afrikaans-speaking white working class and the state. Industrial unrest amongst white workers rocketed after the war as they felt their carefully carved out niche of privilege, based on a rigid racial differentiation between skilled and unskilled, threatened. The number on strike rose from 1,521 in 1945 to 11,539 in 1946 and 22,264 the following year. The corresponding manday loss rocketed from 6,039 to 58,554 to a staggering 694,937 in 1947. This huge latter figure is explained by a massive stoppage of white building workers in protest at the government's training scheme for African bricklayers.[1] The Nationalist Party capitalised on this discontent over labour policy and the distribution of surplus. Not only had the Party-sponsored Reform Movement captured control over the Mineworkers' Union in 1947, but the Blankewerkersbeskermingsbond (literally the white workers' protection society) made considerable headway amongst other unions, and the nine working class constituencies captured by the N.P. for the first time in 1948, were sufficient to put it in power.

Similarly, the two other Afrikaans-speaking groups, farmers and petty bourgeoisie, reacted against these developments. The Afrikaner reaction is explained by the relative deprivation of Afrikaans-speakers. Although comprising over 60% of the white population, in 1946 Afrikaans-speakers made up 88% of unskilled white workers and 86% of farmers, but only 36% of professional and technical workers and less than 25% of administrative and executive workers. The total share of Afrikaans-speakers in income from the private sector of the economy was only 24.8% in 1948/9, and only 9.6% if agriculture is excluded. In 1939 only 1,200 of the 8,505 industrial establishments were owned by Afrikaners, producing an even smaller proportion of total output. If the period 1933-48 was one of pure bourgeois power (the Labour Party having destroyed its class basis in the Pact government), it was primarily the English-speaking industrial bourgeoisie which benefitted.

The total value of agricultural production increased 82% 1932-9 and 192% 1940-50, yet this is far short of the corresponding 140% and 246% increases in the value of manufacturing output.[2] The prosperity of the agricultural sector rested on active state intervention to secure labour and spread surplus. The network of labour controls, state marketing boards, the extensive system of state credit and universally

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1. Department of Labour Reports 1945 (UG 9/1947) 8 and 1947 (UG 38/1949)20-1.

2. S. Van Wyk, Die Afrikaner in die Beroepsleve van die Stad (Pretoria 1968) 207-10; STATS 15.12.68; B. Bunting, The Rise of the South African Reich (Harmondsworth, 1969), 378; and Union Statistics ... S-3.

huge subsidies together with the educational programmes and research projects were all vital to its continued solvency. Given the low productivity of South African agriculture, farmers were unable to compete with the higher urban wages secured by Africans during the war, which, if coupled with the threatened erosion of the migrant labour system and relaxation of labour controls would severely have affected their supply of labour.

The apparent decision of the Smuts government to relax labour controls likewise threatened infant Afrikaner industrial and commercial capital, conceived early in the century and delivered by the midwifery of the Ekonomies Volkskongres (peoples' economic congress) amidst much fanfare in 1939, where a coherent strategy for the growth of an exclusively Afrikaner capital was developed.[1] For the aspirant capitalists in the professional groups which dominated the leadership of the N.P., the necessary capital for it to emerge as a fully fledged bourgeoisie depended on the high levels of surplus value appropriation provided by the cheap labour system and they resisted any move towards a stabilised higher wage force.[2] For this group control of the state machinery meant access to crucial resources, allowing it to enter capitalist competition at the stage of finance capital, and in effect, filter its ownership of the means of production downwards.

The official organ of the Transvaal N.P. described the strike as 'a direct result' and 'yet another of the fruits of' the government's racial and labour policies. The N.P. election platform concentrated on mobilising these three Afrikaans-speaking classes through both intense manipulation of cultural symbols, and more importantly, an hysterical, racist emphasis on 'the colour question', which subsumed the fears of all three. Much was made of the ambivalence of U.P. racial policy. N.P. propaganda stressed its own dependence on both the rural bourgeoisie and and workers, emphasising its determination to expand the capitalist class and reduce the dominance of mining in the economy.[3] The victory of the Nationalist/Afrikaner Party in 1948 must

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1. E. P. du Plessis, 'n Volk Staan Op (Pretoria 1964). The use of the term 'Afrikaner capital' is not to introduce 'ethnic' analysis, but points to a fraction of the bourgeoisie (in 1946 largely an aspirant bourgeoisie) which self-consciously maintained a cultural exclusivity both as a strategy of accumulation and to undermine the metropolitan bourgeoisie.

2. This is not to argue they favoured an unaltered retention of migrant labour in the face of the dissolution of its economic base, but that labour controls etc. were to be extended to maintain a high rate of accumulation. Apartheid is best explained as the attempt by these classes to retain a system of cheap labour in a different form. See Wolpe, op. cit.

3. Die Transvaler, 13.8.1946, on the strike, and 21.4.48 for the NP election manifesto written by Dr. Malan, entitled 'Waarheen Suid Afrika: Die Allesoorheesende Kleurevraagstuk sal die Toekoms Bepaal' (The all embracing colour question will determine the future: Whither South Africa?).

be seen as the reaction of these three classes - Afrikaans-speaking workers, farmers and petty bourgeoisie - to developments in the social formation highlighted by the strike, focussing on labour policy and the distribution of surplus between classes. Following the withdrawal of Hertzog from the U.P. on the war issue in 1939, these three classes had increasingly switched their support to Malan's Nationalists. In the 1943 General Election, despite its opposition to the war, the N.P. increased its share of seats from 27 to 43, all at the expense of the U.P., and in 1948, on a minority vote, the N.P./A.P. coalition won a majority of 5 in the House of Assembly. The rural bourgeoisie were once again the largest group in a governing class alliance. Yet the Party was led by Professional men, the aspirant capitalists of the Reddingsdaadbond. One of the more dramatic features of South Africa's post-'48 growth has been the rise of Afrikaner capital under this group and the growing strains in the class alliance.

The effect of the strike and its ruthless suppression on African political groupings was as dramatic, and the direction of African opposition changed fundamentally. The patient expression of grievances by an elite in dignified and constitutional councils gave way to mass action and passive resistance. The unanimous decision of the Native Representative Council (NRC) to suspend its sittings, together with its unprecedented list of demands - abolition of the pass laws, recognition of African trade unions, repeal of the Urban Areas Act and direct African representation at all levels - gave an immediate indication of the changing nature of African opposition, and caught the government totally unawares. Comprised of the Union's most 'respectable' Africans, the NRC represented primarily the chiefs and petty bourgeoisie, precisely those groups which, concerned with the conditions for <u>individual</u> participation had insisted on working for reform from within the system and refused to countenance direct action. The language of the debate, the extent of the demands and the suspension itself were all unprecedented steps - a symbolic rejection of dependence by that group which for so long had accepted government promises. A second immediate result of the strike was the trial of 53 trade union, ANC and CP officials for aiding and abetting an illegal strike, followed immediately by the trial of the entire Central Executive Committee of the CP on sedition charges arising out of the strike, eventually quashed in 1948. These trials were important in forging links between the largely white CP leadership and previously hostile members of Congress, producing a broad set of leadership contacts which were vital in the non-racial Congress alliance movement in the fifties.

Just as in white politics, the aftermath of the strike saw the merging of most elements of African opposition into a class alliance articulating a radical nationalist ideology. The strike and the state's

response illustrated the futility of the constitutional protest pursued for so long by the ANC, together with the considerable physical dangers of trade union membership. Whilst it was followed by the development of the ANC into a mass nationalist movement, the purely class organisation and mobilisation of the African proletariat which peaked in 1945/6 began to decline as proletarian discontent was channeled increasingly into political opposition in the ANC. In 1950, the Industrial Legislation Commission reported that 66 African unions had recently become defunct and total paid up African membership of trade unions had fallen to just over 38,000.[1]

The development of this class alliance reflected both the structural changes and the changing interests of the component classes vis-à-vis the state, highlighted by the strike. During the period under review, the peasantry was proletarianised under the particular form of exploitation maintained by the state. Growing African trade unionism in the war, culminating in the mine strike, brought this proletariat into direct confrontation with the repressive machinery of the state which facilitated its exploitation. However, it was the changing interests of the African petty bourgeoisie vis-à-vis the state which made the class alliance possible. Prior to 1936, the existence of the non-racial qualified franchise in the Cape placed this class in an ambiguous position. Not only was it a visible goal to which elements of this class outside the Cape could and did strive, but it offered an avenue of access to state power and meant that the petty bourgeoisie were not as oppressed as the proletariat. Whereas before the abolition of the Cape franchise in 1936 the political organisations of the petty bourgeoisie concentrated on attempts to widen their avenue of mobility, this was now closed, and they were lumped together with the proletariat as part of a supposedly undifferentiated, exploitable supply of labour. With both their positions now ordered solely in terms of the racial division of labour and pattern of power, the partial conflict of interest was largely erased and a political alliance between these classes a possibility. This did not develop overnight, however. It was delayed by the freak conditions during the war with hints that the racial division of labour may be dissolved from above. Whilst the political alignments and strengths of the various white classes made this impossible, this only really became apparent after the mine strike, when the movement towards an alliance began in earnest.

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1. (UG 62/1951) para 1491-1500. There are many reasons for this decline. The strike and the debacle of CNETU's 'general strike' broke the Council's back. Many of its leaders were prosecuted and moved into the political arena. The African trade union movement did not really pick up again till the emergence of the non-racial South African Congress of Trade Unions in the Fifties. See Horrell, op. cit.

For much of the period under review there was little contact or co-operation between the African trade union movement and the ANC. They remained organisationally distinct, each with its separate interests, membership and leadership. The war saw the slow convergence of interest and the beginning of co-operation between their respective leaderships. The first breach in the rigid class bifurcation of African opposition since the Twenties occurred with the organisation of the AMWU in 1941, the ANC's first tentative plunge into the deeper waters of labour organisation. Yet there were also conflicts, particularly over C.P. influence in the unions - and it was only after the 1946 strike that class divisions began to blur and a common leadership develop. With the virtual collapse of the trade union movement after 1946, prominent African trade unionists moved into important ANC leadership positions.

The transformation of the ANC from the political organ of the African petty bourgeoisie into the political movement of a class alliance did not simply occur mechanistically as an enlightened leadership immediately perceived where its class interest lay. Rather it was preceded by critical changes and much conflict within Congress itself. During the war the ANC had been moving away from its narrow base of the Thirties. There were however numerous constraints. Congress was subject to a wide, complex range of ideological pressures. The predominant Christian vision of non-racial justice together with the perception of the United States as the great model of racial interdependence led to a conservatism which clashed with the eclectic radicalism produced by a fusion of Garveyism with the influence of the C.P. The I.C.U., the Joint Council movement and the All African Convention all added to the matrix of influences on the movement. Its coherence and credibility was reduced by many personal and tribal rivalries. Founded in 1912, and still controlled by its founders in the Thirties, a degree of generational conflict developed which culminated in the effective takeover of Congress by its militant Youth League in 1949. Centered in the Transvaal, the League's members had lived all their lives under the oppressive shadow of a single, national Native policy, uninfluenced by the liberal 'Cape Tradition'. This absence of the influence of the Cape Tradition was crucial, as it was CYL members who first articulated the need for a class alliance (though in very different terms from that which actually emerged). The League was the first section in the mainstream of Congress for whom the ideal of liberation lay in the future with new, African inspired initiatives, rather than a return to a previous condition under white direction. As the influence of the CYL slowly moved the petty bourgeois politicians in the ANC into a more militant posture, the ideological and strategic emphasis shifted from the conditions for individual participation in the system to the liberation of the masses. The miners' strike and the government's reaction was the vital catalyst in changing the attitudes of the established ANC and NRC leadership. The size of the national executive was enlarged

in 1946 and for the first time since 1930, and a number of C.P. members were elected to it. Under the dual influence of the CYL and C.P. members, the ANC Leadership began to accept the need for direct action in the form of passive resistance. Likewise in the period immediately after the strike, foundations were laid for co-operation between the various oppressed groups in a broad political struggle. In March 1947 the leaders of the ANC and the Transvaal and Natal Indian Congresses signed the Xuma-Naicker-Dadoo Pact, a six point agreement to work together for a universal franchise and the abolition of all forms of discrimination.

The election of the Malan government in May 1948 accelerated the radicalisation process. At the 1949 National Congress, Dr. Xuma was defeated for the Presidency by the CYL candidate Dr. Moroka, and Congress adopted the 'Program of Action'. The basis of ANC policy during the Fifties, the Program emphasised the right to self-determination under the banner of African Nationalism, rejecting any form of white leadership. Through the boycott of all discriminatory institutions and the tactical use of civil disobedience, strikes and non co-operation, mass support was to be generated. The Program was implemented in the Defiance campaign of 1952, timed to coincide with the tercentenary celebrations of white settlement. This campaign in which 8,577 volunteers offered themselves for arrest sharply increased Congress membership which rose from an estimated 4,000 in 1949 to 7,000 just before the Defiance Campaign and then rocketed to nearly 100,000 with many times that number politically aware supporters.[1]

Thus the period which began with a split in African opposition along class lines ended with a growing alliance between these forces. Despite the petty bourgeois nature of the ANC, its turn to the proletariat was inevitable. The CYL called for mass action and by 1946 the masses were no longer the peasantry in the Reserves but the urban proletariat. Lacking a strong bourgeois dynamic, Congress had to develop a popular base or collapse, and given the social effects of twenty years of development, this was essentially proletarian in character. The process of proletarianisation was accompanied by the growth of an increasingly militant proletarian opposition which effectively questioned the structure of the system of exploitation culminating in the '46 strike - the severest challenge the system had received. The violence of the state's response indicated that neither the ANC's constitutionalism nor the 'economic' opposition of the trade unions could confront it successfully on their own, pointing to the need for a united political movement. Thereafter proletarian opposition was channeled into the ANC which was itself transformed by its new class bases and emerged from the Forties with a character very different from that with which it entered the decade. The trade union move-

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1. Walshe, op. cit., 402-3.

ment generated a class consciousness into which Congress could drop its roots, finally giving itself a secure political base, and which reacted in turn on the growing national consciousness propagated by the Youth League, raising it to a higher pitch. The 'African Nationalism' and the goals expressed in the Freedom Charter were very different from the anti-socialist, individualist 'Africanism' of the original CNL manifesto and early policy statements. Not only were they considerably more radical, displaying an enhanced concern with the material position of the proletariat, but showed an increasing awareness of the role of the capitalist mode of production in itself producing and reproducing the system of exploitation. Yet by the time the ANC emerged at the head of a non-racial mass movement in the Fifties, the state was in the hands of another class alliance born out of the structural changes and determined to maintain a high rate of capital accumulation in order to consolidate Afrikaner capital, and suppress or shift the contradictions in the system of exploitation through repression. Fully aware of the dangers of united African political and economic mobilisation, this group acted ruthlessly to suppress them. The Fifties saw many legislative attacks on these organisations. Congress leaders were restricted and trade union officials removed from office. Finally on 8th April 1960 the ANC was declared an unlawful organisation and forced underground. Ill-prepared for the sudden shift from a highly visible legal movement to a clandestine organisation, it suffered many defeats during the following decade and now operates largely as an exile movement.