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HISTORY WORKSHOP

THE WITWATERSRAND: LABOUR, TOWNSHIPS AND PATTERNS OF PROTEST

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1. A History of the Strike

On 16 February 1920 two Zulu miners named Mobu and Vilikati were arrested on the Cason section of East Rand Proprietary Mines for moving from room to room, and urging fellow workers to strike for higher pay. The following day the vast bulk of the Cason compound struck - 2500 out of 2800 men - demanding the release of the two arrested miners, an increase in wages to stave off famine in the reserves, and a number of other ancillary concessions(1). With that the 1920 black mineworkers strike is conventionally thought to have begun. From Cason the virus spread quickly to other mines on the East Rand. The following day the Comet and Hercules sections of the E.R.P.M. joined their colleagues at Cason, and on the 19 February the mine was brought to a complete standstill, when the Angelo compound finally decided to follow suit. 6221 of E.R.P.M.'s 8222 black workers were now on strike, and similar rumblings were felt all over the Rand. On the 18th, 3000 of Nourse Deep and Nourse West workers downed jackhammers and shovels in Johannesburg East, to be followed on the 19th by the entire 5000 complement of City Deep Mine. On the same day the strike also spread to Johannesburg West, Johannesburg Central, Roodepoort and Germiston East, which meant that twelve compounds were affected, and over 30 000 workers had decided to strike. On Friday the 23rd, the fourth day of the stike, the picture was even more bleak, at least as seen from the precincts of the Chamber of Mines. Two new mines struck briefly in.

Johannesburg East, and the movement grew firmer in each of the mines already involved, so that, at the end of the day, a record 37 000 miners had been listed as absent from work.

However, on Saturday 21 February the movement seemed to hang in the balance. Only two new mines struck, while those in Germiston East decided to return to work. With Sunday a rest day the weekend was widely regarded as the make or break point. As The Star correspondent reported, " it was expected [that the weekend would lead to] a definite step one way or the other: either the majority would return to work or more mines would be affected and the strike extended" ( ). In fact neither of these things happened. Many of the East Rand mineworkers ended their strike, including the E.R.P.M., where the strike had originally broken out, but the stoppage now swept through the west of the Reef, bringing out 46 000 miners on Monday 23 February, the highest figure for any day of the strike. On 24 February the strike was very nearly as solid, with around 38 000 out, mainly west of the town, and it was only on the 26th and 27th that the situation was brought under control, with strike numbers dropping to 10 000 and then 5 000, and with only two Randfontein mines being ultimately involved. By Saturday 28 February, when the strike finally ended some 71 000 workers had taken part in the stoppage, with over 30 000 being out on six consecutive days - and a further 25 651 on Wednesday the 25th.

The strike was clearly an event of major significance. Of a total of thirty-five mines, twenty-one had been affected, and not far off a half the black work force had participated at some stage ( ). Compared with the 1946 black mine-workers strike, which has been interpreted as a kind of watershed event, it lasted longer, involved more workers both absolutely and in proportion to the work force as a whole, and induced a far more total paralysis of a far greater numb of mines. Yet even that tells only a small part of the story, which marks out the strike and the period of working class agitation which it in a sense capped, as a point of major structural change in the political economy as a whole. To tell this we need to consider two separate areas: the mining industry on the Witwatersrand from 1913 to 1922, and the mushrooming of local industrial capital within the same area, and the concomitant rise of a more thoroughly proletarianised urban black working class.

If we start with the mines, the 1920 strike neither flared up suddenly or unexpectedly when the Cason compound struck, nor did black miners slump back into helpless passivity once it had passed. Rather, the strike was the climax of a period of unrest, and which together with simultaneous urban agitation amongst the black working class, forced far reaching changes in the class alliances underpinning the state. In this context the first date of importance we need consider is June 1913. Until then black miners had, with a few insignificant exceptions ( ), responded to grievances over pay and conditions by employing a range

of defensive devices, of which desertion was by far the most common ( ). In 1913, under pressure of declining productivity in the reserves, and with the example of the striking white miners to signpost the way, something like 9 000 black miners struck over a period of three days. The strike was quickly put down by the authorities, but it left an enduring impression on the consciousness of black workers on the Rand, as well as on the minds of management and the state. The immediate consequence was the appointment of a Commission of Enquiry (the Native Grievances Enquiry) to investigate black mineworkers' grievances, and to recommend measures for their amelioration or control. The Commission duly reported, and recommended a wide range of reforms, which the industry by and large put into effect. Collective action had thus been successful in forcing the hand of both capital and state, where the efforts of more enlightened administrators and managers had been frustrated for more than a decade ( ). Nor were the gains won that insignificant or small. Improved rations, improved medical facilities and working conditions, improved accomodation all were forthcoming, as was a decision to pay hammer boys for anything over six inches drilled, rather than demanding a minimum thirty inches a shift, and giving 'loafer tickets' and no payment for anything less ( ).

Nevertheless, as Johnson observes, this left untouched the central problem of black miners, which was their continuing ultra-subordinate structural position ( ). Indeed, under the twin impact of the collapse of reserve agriculture and

of the runaway inflation which accompanied the war, this grew even worse. Discontent may have been briefly headed off by the reforms we have just mentioned, but by the end of 1915 unrest again began to mount. On 20 December 1915 there was a strike at Van Ryn Deep Mines, and this was followed in late January and early February of the following year by strikes in the Government Areas South and New Modderfontein Mines ( ). This quick succession of disturbances prompted the sub-inspector of police at Benoni to pen a rather panicy report. "Since the trouble at Van Ryn Deep Gold Mine Compound", he wrote,

> the trouble has been spreading from one compound to another, the natives have started holding meetings, resort to picketing and are in fact organising in the same manner as the miners did in the 1913 and 1914 strikes. I take a most serious view of the matter which is held by several General Managers... and I am convinced that, in the event of any further Industrial disturbance, the Government will not be able to count on the loyalty of the natives as they have done in the past.

"The situation would be very grave indeed", he went on, prophetically, " should the natives decide to leave the Compound ". ( )

The sub-inspector however was perhaps stronger on prophecy than immediate accuracy. As the Acting Director f Native Labour pointed out, the disaffection at New Modderfontein was amongst a section of 300 Pondo, out of a complement of 1 300 labourers from the Cape and 3600 on the mine as a whole, and the same sectional character seems to have applied to the strikes on the other two mines. At Government Areas

South, for example, the stoppage was organised by Xhosa alone, who made no mention of wages in the course of their demands and who seem to have been primarily activated by a desire to get the compound manager the sack. What was more it was the opinion of the Inspector of the Native Affairs Department in Benoni that

> it was organised by two or three natives: one of whom had been promised a police billet by his recruiter and was not appointed when he got to the mine, the other not getting a billet in the Time Office he had asked for.
> ( )

all of which reflects interestingly on the opinion gradually gaining ground in the industry that it was the lack of upward mobility in the industry which was contributing materially to the strikes.

Nevertheless, as inflation bit deeper, the situation Loftus had feared gradually came to pass. In 1917 in particular the price of goods soared, leading to a boycott of mine stores the next year ( ). Here two separate sources of grievance converged. Firstly, a steep hike in consumer prices which the stores had implemented eight months before; and secondly, the generally higher level of prices reigning in these establishments, which usually had a de facto monopoly of African custom from their mines, as compared to those prevailing in neighbouring towns. The store owners protested that these prices merely reflected their heavy expenses, and the rate of inflation since the start of the war, and two separate Commissions largely bore them out ( ). Nevertheless, it is clear that at least some of them were

guilty of a variety of malpractices, ranging from the absence of fixed prices to the manipulation of debt ( ). Whatever the precise merits of the case, the boycott quickly spread, and soon developed into an organised and disciplined campaign. Starting at Van Ryn Estates on around February 10, it spread within forty-eight hours along the entire eastern Rand - Kleinfontein, Modderfontein, Modder, Geduld, Springs, Government Areas, Brakpan and Knights Deep was each affected, and a couple of days later the Cason compound followed suit. On Monday the 14th a fresh element emerged as pickets were posted from each of these mines. " Their organisation is perfect" the Rand Daily Mail declared, " What happens at one point is known throughout the circuit very soon afterwards". However, the authorities were also presented with the opening they desired. " Possible Tribal Troubles", the same newspaper's headline proclaimed, and mounted police were soon moved to the scene to break the pickets up ( ).

Police action and the promise of a Commission of Enquiry brought the movement to a halt, but it is to here that the 1920 black mineworker's strike can ultimately be traced. As Fenias Plaatjes of Randfontein Block told the Moffat Commission late in 1918, " This [i.e. wages] is an old grievance: it goes back to last year ". The immediate aftermath, however, was that agitation was stilled, and it was not until the middle of the year that the movement was revived. This time it was linked to properly urban discontent. In May Johannesburg

white power workers struck and forced the City Council to concede a 25% rise. Fired by their example, and by the steady decline in real wages which had taken place during the war, the so-called bucket-boys (night soil workers) downed pails, demanding a rise of sixpence a day. Here the fortunes of the two movements predictably diverged. The offending workers were arrested under the Master and Servants Act, and sentenced by Magistrate McFie to two months labour without pay on the jobs they had previously performed. This differential treatment, and the callous form in which the sentence was pronounced (McFie said they would be watched by armed guard and shot if they tried to run away) incensed the Witwatersrand's black urban population, and led to a further radicalisation of much of its petty bourgeoisie. Angry meetings were held all over the Witwatersrand, with the Transvaal Native Congress and the Industrial Workers Association taking the lead, out of which it was finally decided on 19th June to demand an across the board increase of one shilling per day. The clear implication was that a general strike would be called if government and employers failed to comply, but, for reasons which will be discussed later in the paper , the Congress leadership stopped back from the brink. The working classes by contrast were less easily deterred, and on July 1 many of them struck, including substantial numbers from Crown Mines, and both Robinson and Ferreira Deep.

The strikers were driven down the shafts by the city's mounted police, and in the face of fixed bayonets, resistance quickly ceased. Yet it was plain for all to see that

the movement had been only temporarily curbed, as was confirmed in August and September, when most of Witbank's collieries struck ( ). A brief respite was now afforded by the influenza epidemic which raged throughout the country in the winter of that year. In September and October, the Witwatersrand was struck and the black workers on the mines were particularly hard hit. Out of a total labour force of 157 614 black workers in October 1918, no less than 52 789 were hospitalised in the space of these two months, of which 1 082 had died by October 31, with over 1000 more being still under care ( ). As bodies recovered so did agitation, prompting the Native Recruiting Corporation to try another tack. In March 1919 they summoned the chiefs and headmen of the Union, in a barely concealed attempt to damp the movement down ( ). The ostensible reason was a letter that had been written by the Transvaal Native Congress appealing on behalf of the Witwatersrand miners for an increase in pay. But aside from getting the chiefs to repudiate any claims that Congress might put forward to represent workers on the mines, they also used them to tour round the compounds and quiet the movement down. If the chiefs' report back is anything to go by, they enjoyed a measure of success, for while indicating that there were grievances over pay among workers, they also assured the Native Recruiting Corporation general manager that, " they [the workers] do not intend to associate themselves with any strikes". Indeed the Acting Director of Native Labour was sufficiently elated at the outcome of their trip to suggest that th might even exercise their influence on the parent South African

Native National Congress to ensure that its more militant branches were kept under control ( ).

Nevertheless, in more sober mood both realised that such devices could only postpone the evil day, and there is considerable evidence to suggest that this feeling was shared by much of the mining industry. A note of anxiety and alarm for example runs through much of the evidence submitted to the Low Grades Mine Commission, in July 1919.
The usual prescription offered in these hearings was the extension of 'piece' rates to other categories of work , and the opening up of certain semi-skilled jobs previously reserved for whites ( ). Yet under pressure of the growing militancy of black workers (for example, the Pass Campaign), even the Chamber had to accept that it would shortly have to grant a rise in basic rates. To begin with it announced on December 16 that all underground workers who had worked 180 shifts continuously should be granted a bonus of five shillings a month, and that if such workers re-engaged within a space of four months, they should enjoy the same rates of pay and bonus they previously earned ( ). These changes were to take effect on January 1, and on February 9 further improvements were announced. Mine managers were now permitted to raise their average rates for underground workers from two shillings to two shillings and threepence a shift, while the maximum average on surface was to be lifted to two shillings a shift.
In addition, the amount of money available for bonuses was increased by a factor of three-fifths ( ). The workers on the mines had at last won a round.

So far it has been intended to show that the 1920 black mineworkers strike was the culmination of a lengthy period of agitation and struggle. It now remains to point out that its effects were more pervasive than indicated in my earlier thumb-nail sketch. The Chamber, it seems, had left its offer too late, and left too much to the discretion of the mine managers concerned. Some gave the rises and others did not, and this added to the militant spirit that was already being shown. Much of this was manifest before the strike 'formally' broke out, and involved large numbers of workers who were never 'officially' on strike. In December and January, for example, a series of incidents took place in mines that were not subsequently involved in the strike. On November 6 1919, 500 miners marched on Johannesburg from Rose Deep in Germiston East, to protest about their food, and this was followed at the beginning of the next month by New Modderfontein's boycott of mine stores ( ). On January 5 1920 the trouble spread to Knights Central where workers actually downed tools in pursuit of higher pay. The situation was defused by the Native Recruiting Corporation General Manager, Taberer, who conceded two-pence a shift extra to the miners on strike ( ). It was in the midst of all this that the general increase was given (or at least the principle was conceded), but in spite or because of this the trouble rumbled on. On January 26 a new stores-boycott broke out on Witwatersrand Deep, which seemed to be translating itself into a general refusal to work until wage increases were given. From here the trouble spread through Boksburg and Benoni. In

Benoni the New Modder, Van Ryn East, Geduld and Welgedacht mines were affected (none of which subsequently participated in the strike), while in Modder Deep an actual strike appears to have been suppressed. In Boksburg, Simmer and Jack initiated similar action on February 12, which soon degenerated into a clash between the police and 1 000 armed Xhosa on the mine ( ). Elsewhere Rose Deep began a boycott on February 13, and Glen Deep followed their example three days after that ( ). Finally, on Wolhuter Gold Mine, Transvaal workers refused to pay their Transvaal tax, and the same movement spread to Municipal workers in Johannesburg itself ( ).

From this it should be obvious that a far wider movement of resistance was being mounted than is conveyed by the bare statistics of the strike (and certainly a more broadly based resistance than that of 1946). Moreover, during the strike period itself more mines were to be affected than emerges from subsequent accounts. On 20 February for example a stores boycott was reported from Government Areas South, and disturbance spread the same day to New Kleinfontein and Government Areas North. More serious was the imminent strike at Crown Mines on February 28. " Practically all" its 12 200 labourers were apparently " coming out", until detachments of the South African Mounted Rifles administered what the Star called " some gentle persuasion", and forced them back to work ( ). The same tactics of coercion were increasingly used across the Rand. On 24 February the situation at the Springs and Geduld mines was officially described as

"critical", and "calm" was only restored once the "ringleaders" had been seized ( ). Similarly, on Wednesday 25, the West Rand Consolidated was about to go on strike until the South African Mounted Rifles entered, arrested ringleaders, and drove them to their rooms ( ). Thus a more accurate picture of the strike period itself would be that the greater proportion of the industry's workers participated, and that there was scarcely a mine that emerged completely untouched.

2. Causes

The principal reason touched on in the foregoing discussion in accounting for the strike has been the rapid inflation that took place in the course of the war. I have yet to examine the reports of the Cost of Living Commission, but it is clear from the evidence to the Native Strike Enquiry (the Moffatt Commission), and many other sources, that during this period the price of basic commodities soared. One finds continual references, for example, to the cost of blankets rising from fifteen shillings to two pounds, and to increases of similar proportions on trousers and coats ( ). Other prices seem to have risen at roughly the same rate. At his address to the South African Native National Congress on 24 May 1920, the Transvaal leader, Maghato, reported that the pre-1914 pound was now worth 13/7d, with the prices of "mealies and kaffir-corn" being up some 300%, and it is likely he took the figures he cited from reports of the Witwatersrand Cost of Living Commission( ). In the same vein, the local

committee of the Cost of Living Commission in East London reported that the cost of " native necessities" had gone up 161%, which translated into wages meant that surviving on 2/6d a day in 1914 would cost 6/6d in 1920 ( ).

Wages on the mines and in the towns did not remotely keep up with these rises, but discontent was to some extent muzzled by the argument that this was one of the sacrifices demanded by the war ( ). However, when the Armistice was signed and prices still shot up , this whole pent-up reservoir of frustration quickly broke its banks ( ). That Transvaal miners identified this rise in prices as their principal source of discontent is made clear by their evidence to the Moffat Commission, where they continually refer to the price of clothes and food going up ( ). The Chamber replied, as did Moffat, that the burden of inflation fell on the industry itself, since they provided the workers with the basic necessities of life( ). This argument was spurious on a variety of counts ( ). Firstly, the rations given on the mines provided for little more than the meanest level of existence, and had to be supplemented, especially by those workers who spent longer periods on the Rand ( ). Secondly, one crucial item of equipment was not provided by the mines, and this was boots. The miner was thus placed in the invidious position of replacing this item of equipment three to four times a year, or suffering the kinds of injuries to feet that came from falling rock (and indeed Dr. Orenstein reported to the Low Grades Mines Commission that a full 65% of underground 'boys' suffered from seriously cut feet ( )).

Thirdly, the Chamber's position ignored the circumstances of the labourer at home, where his family was often forced to purchase food to survive. Thus the experiences of the Crown Mines worker 'Richard', who appeared before the Moffat Commission, may not have been untypical, when he testified that his first two months wages were swallowed up by debt, and that the second two months had gone to pay for boots and clothes ( ).

This reference to debt brings us to the second part of our explanation of the strike, although this does not seem to have been at the forefront of the miners' self-perception. As a number of studies have now shown, the decade before the strike saw a process of structural underdevelopment, aggravated by a series of natural epidemics and disasters, undermine the economies of the reserves throughout southern Africa. In the Transkei, for example, the process of capitalist penetration was finally compounded by the East Coast Fever epidemic of 1912, which left thousands of families impoverished and led to an annual exodus of around 60 000 labourers to the Rand ( ). Increasingly these workers had also to remit part of their earnings for their families to survive, and this was particularly true of periods of epidemic or drought, and so were exposed for the first time to the vagaries of inflation. Southern Mozambique, the other major source of labour for the mines, bears witness to a similar tale. 1912 and 1913 were years of serious drought, and this was followed in 1915 by the heaviest rains for twenty years. In 1917 again torrential rains destroyed the crops, and a series of epidemic diseases

swept the country in the following two years ( ). Nor were such calamities any stranger to South Africa at this time. During the war the country suffered from a series of crop failures, with flood alternating with drought in a deadly succession. Chief Silemela of Engcobo for example, told the Moffat Commission that in 1916 and 1917 the crops were spoiled by water, and other witnesses confirmed the story of a succession of bad years ( ). In 1918 moreover, just after the Moffat Commission sat, the influenza epidemic raged through town and countryside alike. Mortality was enormous, and productivity fell as ploughing operations were crippled in many of the reserves( ). Finally, 1919-1920 was the most disastrous year of all, with one of the most savage droughts for years affecting virtually every area of the Union, and tens of thousands of labourers flooding out for work ( ). It was this rural situation that provided the context for the 1920 strike - a rural situation which bears witness to the accentuating contradiction between capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production, which contra O'Meara and Wolpe seem to have crystallised out, not in the 1930s and 1940s, but in the First World War worker militancy on the Rand ( ).

A third factor accounting for the 1920 strike may have been a product of this growing contradiction and the more permanent displacement of labour into the capitalist sector. This was the desire for upward mobility within the mining industry, and a growing resentment against the job colour bar. Direct and indirect evidence supports this idea.

Firstly, between 1914 and 1918 one sees a growing proportion of voluntary as opposed to recruited labour coming to the mines. The changing proportions being as follows:

	Recruited	Voluntary	
1914	67.5%	32.5%	
1915	70.7%	29.3%	
1916	57.2%	42.8%	(excluding
1917	53.1%	46.9%	Portuguese East
1918 (1st ½)	48.3%	51.7%	Africa)
1918 (2nd ½)	41.6%	58.3%	

The implication of this is that growing numbers wished to choose the job they performed in the mining economy, and were actively seeking to secure the ones that paid best. This greater committment, as it were, to the capitalist sector, and the mounting hostility it engendered to the job colour bar, is reflected in much of the evidence to the Low Grades Mine Commission, where the image of the European miner sitting on his box and reading his paper while his African assistant does all the work, repeatedly occurs ( ). A further element exacerbating this feeling were the disruptions directly attributable to the war, for as a result of this a large number of skilled miners had left for the front, to be replaced allegedly by unskilled Afrikaners direct from the farms ( ). Thus at the very moment that Africans were feeling themselves increasingly obstructed by the job colour bar, they were having to train the very people who were blocking their path.

The fourth factor in our analysis overlaps with the last. As a result of the growing contradiction between capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production, as well as the growth of national capital in the course of the war, there arose a much larger permanently urbanised black working class on the Rand. Its rapid expansion provoked a crisis for the state, for it was unable to accomodate sufficiently quickly the needs of this class. I had hoped in the course of the paper to consider the phenomenon at length, but unfortunately neither time nor space now permits. Suffice it to say that these circumstances combined with inflation, which raced ahead during the war, to produce a highly inflammable situation on the Rand, and almost permanent unrest from 1918 on. A particular consequence of these developments, for reasons I cannot properly enter into here, was a polarised African petty bourgeoisie. Some, like Saul Msane and Isiah Bud-Mbelle - the older generation - tended to cling to the habits of respectful representation and appeal to the Crown. Others, however, took a more radical turn under the pressure of African working class agitation, and just possibly the influence of the International Socialist League. This radicalised section of the African petty bourgeoisie soon espoused the techniques of confrontation and strike, and contributed much to the volatile conditions on the Rand. All this inevitably had its effect on the mines. An appreciable proportion of the work force resided in towns; for example, the thousand or so African residents of Vrededorp largely worked on the mines, and radical impulses

flowed back and forth.( ) Thus Vrededorp was the scene of the Transvaal Native Congresses' most militant meetings, while the Zulu miners Vilikati and Mobu who we met in the Cason compound at the beginning of the paper, had allegedly just returned from such a meeting before urging their fellow workers to strike ( ).

3. Patterns of participation and repression.

To follow.

4. Repercussions

The surge of working class resistance, of which February 1920 was the peak led to a searching re-appraisal of the system by employers and by the state. Measures of co-option and coercion were developed or refined, and there followed a flurry of administrative and legislative activity not seen again until the Second World War. The Native Urban Areas Bill was drafted, and subsequently legislated into law, Pass Laws Committees sat, and a major effort was made to grapple with the problem of the African working class. At the same time various initiatives were taken to co-opt the radicalised African petty bourgeoisie. The Joint Council movement was founded in 1921, while the Chamber of Mines newspaper, Umteteli wa Bantu was unveiled the previous year. As its editor explained in August 1924,

> Rather more than four years ago Umteteli first appeared to educate white and black and to point out their respective and their common duties. At that time much of the Native press was bitterly anti-white in policy... the need for a mediator was felt by a number of far seeing natives, men prominent among their people and gravely concerned for their people's welfare, and it was due to their representations that this paper was launched. We are charged to preach racial amity, to foster a spirit of give and take, to promote the will to co-operate, to emphasise the obligations of black and white to themselves and to each other, and generally to create an atmosphere in which peace and goodwill might thrive.
>
> ( )

Still more urgent was the need to settle the black work

force on the mines. Wage rises had been given just before(and in the course of) the 1920 strike, but these were just about the limit that the Chamber could concede without jeapardising the future of large numbers of more marginal mines ( ). In October 1920 a Dietry Committee was set up, and laid down new minimum regulations for the rations black miners should receive, but even this proved beyond the resources of the more precariously place concerns, and by early 1921 they were petitioning for the new standards to be suspended until they could put their case( ). All the same, the prospect of further agitation was not far from anyone's mind. " As you are aware", wrote police inspector Fulford from Boksburg a week after the strike,

> The cause of this strike was purely industrial, due to increased cost of living and not without real grievances by those concerned, which call for full consideration as early as possible. If some steps are not taken, it will be playing into the hands of the native agitators and so called National Congress which will undoubtedly bring about another strike, probably much better organised than this which may have most serious results.
>
> ( )

The Native Recruiting Corporation commented in more or less similar vein. As it wrote in a Board of Management memorandum,

> The native strike is now over and the natives have returned to work. it must not be assumed that all the labourers have returned in a contented frame of mind because so few time expired natives have given notice to their employers to terminate their priod of service which

> would probably not have been the case if it had not been for the acute shortage of food in the native territories. It is now essential that every effort should be made to arrive at some means whereby the present conditions of labour amongst natives employed on the mines can be ameliorated ...[should this not be done] there is no doubt that strikes amongst natives will recur and each successive strike will be better organised than the last, bringing about not only serious disorganisation to the Mining Industry but to the whole industrial life of South Africa. The different tribes will become more and more in sympathy with one another, with a growing disregard of loyalty to their respective tribal chiefs and a fusion of common interests under the guidance of the educated classes of natives irrespective of tribe or place of origin will result.

( )

The solution the Native Recruiting Corporation memorandum suggested was the same as that re-iterated time and time again in the evidence of the Low Grade Mine Commission ( ). " To suggest the total abolition of the colour bar at the present time", it argued," would be futile and in fact if the Mining Regulations were altered as to leave no colour bar on paper, public opinion amongst the white industrial classes would remain a more complete barrier than that enforced by any regulations". Nevertheless, it was vital that an effort should still be made to persuade white employees to give up certain classes of work, despite the fact that this would cause the displacement of a number of white workers, for

> If the semi-skilled class of native

> labourers referred to can be allowed to even partially obtain their justifiable aspirations for advancement in industrial life the danger of recurrent strikes with their attendant losses and disorganisation may be largely prevented. The semi skilled native justly treated should prove a useful asset to the industry in assisting to guide the mass of unskilled labourers employed.

The solution therefore was the further fractionalisation of the working class; the buying off of potential leadership elements in the hope that this would stifle any wider revolt.

If this did play as significant a part in the Chamber's thinking in late 1920/1921 as it had in 1919 (and this I have found difficult to establish without acess to Chamber of Mines files), then a substantially different perspective is placed on the 1922 mineworkers strike. Instead of being a response merely to a cost cutting exercise, designed to save the low grade mines in the face of the falling premium on gold, it becomes at least in part a defence against a move by mining capital to buy off another section of the working class. The two explanations of course are not in any way exclusive, but the latter does at least place the African working class more in the centre of the stage, and attributes to its struggle a far more significant role. Furthermore, if a change of hegemony takes place around 1923 (or the beginning of such change as others would prefer to say) then the 1920 strike assumes a doubly vital role, for it can be argued that faced with a crisis of accumulation occasioned by black working class, mining

capital was forced to disrupt the class alliance by which it had previously controlled the state, and made available to national capital a new supportive white working class ( ).

However, two further problems must be confronted before the hypothesis can be established in even this tentative form. The first is why average black wages had fallen back by 1925 to very nearly their pre-1920 levels; and the second is why black miners do not appear to have been allowed to share in the benefits of the new technology that was introduced at this time - such as improved jackhammers and harder steel - but had their tasks redefined so that they earned little more than before ( ). The answer here seems to be in two factors which had underlain black militancy before. Firstly, rapid deflation set in in 1921/22, which doused down much of the militancy of the black working class, and made it less important for mining capital to fractionalise or fragment( ). Secondly, from the end of 1921 one gets accounts of mounting unemployment due to the stagnation of other sectors of the economy (including the complete cessation of diamond mining), and growing distress in the reserves ( ). Between them these two factors, that is, rising real wages in the towns and growing unemployment in the reserves, led to the displacement of agitation to the farms and to the reserves, which paved the way for the I.C.U. in its more populist, rural based millenarian form. The urban petty bourgeoisie had in the meantime been completely bought off. On the one hand they received the semblance of

consultation and minor irritants were removed. On the other, the working class agitation which had previously driven them forward had all but vanished, and they were left to sink into the cosy complacency of the 1920s A.H.C.